

Delivering the Vision – Going Local

- 1.1 In 2010, the Council recognised that a number of drivers were pushing councils to work more closely with local communities and this was a key theme in the Stronger Together strategic approach adopted by Cabinet on 9th March 2011 and subsequently endorsed by the Council. The “Local First” theme within the report recognised the need to work alongside communities to understand and prioritise needs, create capacity and broker local solutions. At the same time, the Localism Act 2011 brought a greater focus to local decision-making and the role of parish councils.
- 1.2 This led on to the creation of a Localities function designed specifically to pump-prime work to enable the Council to have meaningful and purposeful conversations to inform place-based service strategies and bring decision making closer to local people.
- 1.3 Since 2011, the on-going financial constraints placed on the Council and the requirement to reduce its on-going operating costs has put increased pressure on place-based front-line services. The decision in 2014, to remove the Council’s subsidy of recreation and golf centres brought sustainability and protection for these important services and decisions now need to be made to ensure sustainable operating models are in place for other community-based services, including libraries, and locally provided universal services such as grounds maintenance and cleaning which are seen as key by local communities.
- 1.4 Recognising the increasing proportion of Council expenditure having to be directed to support vulnerable people within the Borough, the forecast level of Budget available to fund these services is expected to be substantially less than that invested today by 2020-21. This reports sets out the Council’s ambition to secure sustainable service solutions for these key local services within much smaller funding envelopes as set out in table below.

Financial Trends

	Annual Expenditure			Reduction 2016 - 2020
	2007-08	2015-16	2020-21	
Grounds and Street Cleaning Services	£5.3m	£5.5m	<£1.5m	>£4m
Leisure, Community Assets (including libraries) and Culture	£14.1m	£3.9m	<£1.5m	>£2m

- 1.5 The Vision for Swindon adopted by Council on 24th September 2015 sets out the ambition for Swindon: The Place (Council Minute 33, 2015/16 refers). Within the financial and policy context for the organisation, it is difficult to see how the Borough can become a more attractive place to live without identifying new funding sources or delivery models for local services.

Community Assets

- 1.6 With over 70 community-based assets across the Borough, the Community Assets Change Programme is reviewing the purpose of the services operated within them to develop co-location opportunities by working with communities and local organisations to ensure local access to services is sustainable and in line with local demand.
- 1.7 Our community-based assets include 15 Libraries, 28 Community Centres, 8 Youth Centres, 4 Children's Locality Centres and community hire facilities such as scout and guide huts. Services or support are also accessed from facilities owned or operated by other groups or partners including Police, Health, town and parish councils and special interest groups such as charities.
- 1.8 The Council's 2008-2010 Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan identified a key theme of partnership, co-location and shared services which recognises that 26 of the 28 community centres in the Borough have already been leased to groups and volunteers who are running local assets and services. To continue this journey, a next step would be to refine this model and build on its success to reinforce and promote community resilience by developing a transformed community-based assets model.
- 1.9 This report proposes an emerging model for community-based assets, developed around co-locating services and working with communities and local organisations to enable access to them and using Library provision as a catalyst to this development. Under this model the Council would no longer directly operate some community buildings and services, enabling them to be led by community need and demand, increasing their sustainability and the benefits for local people through the co-location and integration of services.
- 1.10 In order to inform the detailed strategy, the Council has commenced high-level engagement with ward councillors and local organisations and groups to start to explore potential future operating models. This has included exploring locally driven service co-location solutions in Liden and Penhill and conversations have also started in Highworth, Moredon, Toothill and Wroughton around the range of assets in those areas.
- 1.11 Recognising that Libraries is the largest and most significant Council service operated from community-based assets and that the Council has one in most areas of the Borough, it is recommended that a refreshed Library service strategy is developed to act as a catalyst for a new approach to community assets. To enable this, a needs assessment has commenced and the findings from this and continuing work in the six areas listed above will be used to inform the development of a Borough-wide strategy to be considered by Cabinet in February 2016. In addition, it is expected that specific proposals will be developed by that date for the six areas listed above with a targeted reduction in subsidy of the assets and services operating within these areas of £300k - £500k. Both the overall Library strategy and the specific proposals would then form the basis for a formal consultation process.
- 1.12 The draft budget proposals assume a £300k saving from this work in 2016-17 with a target to try to increase this to £500k by February 2016. Over the period to 2020, a further reduction in funding of around £1.5m is assumed.

Children Centres

- 1.13 Swindon's children centres were reshaped in 2014 to offer a more targeted service in areas of deprivation through fewer centres. There is now a single provider in 4Children for the five remaining children centres (at Parks, Penhill and Pinehurst, Gorsehill, Moredon and Drove) with a contract cost of £1.028m. Two family centres are funded until March 2017 at a further cost of £291k. The family centres at Butterflies and West Swindon Family Centre are not affected by these proposals
- 1.14 The community asset programme is focused on making better use of assets through increased usage by a wider range of services to increase the network of activities and support available in communities. There are a wide range of community assets available in the areas of existing children centres which could be excellent venues to house locally led parent groups and provide space for many of the parents who currently attend sessions in children centres. Many groups could have the opportunity to continue the sessions they enjoy without making use of registered children centres that were set up to provide support for vulnerable children and families. It is envisaged that groups could be promoted through My Care My Support, which would have a local search facility built into the website and would be organised and run by local communities. Health visitors and baby clinics could also be run from the network of community buildings.
- 1.15 In addition, there is rising demand for building space for child care for children aged two to four years old and the location of children centre buildings on school sites would make ideal child care facilities. The combination of a wider range of community building being available to meet the needs of most families and the requirement for additional childcare facilities has led the Council to review the requirement for children centres.
- 1.16 They were established to reach the most vulnerable children through targeted support, outreach and an improved focus on one to one support for families. Commissioners have also worked closely with centres and funded training in family centres to introduce evidenced based parenting programmes such as 'Baby Steps' and 'Parents under Pressure'. Both of these programmes were first funded and introduced by the NSPCC in Swindon and are part of a national evaluation to demonstrate impact.
- 1.17 Despite the increased focus and challenge from commissioners not all remaining Children centres have improved their performance and there is evidence that the most vulnerable children in those areas are not accessing the support of a centre-based service. Performance data gathered from 4Children shows that the percentage of the most vulnerable children ranges from 34% in Moredon, 29% in Parks & Walcot to 19% in Penhill & Pinehurst based on data 30.9.2015
- 1.18 In order to measure the effectiveness of children centres, data has been collected to demonstrate whether the previous reduction in universal children centres had resulted in an increase in demand for children's social care services. Overall, the de-registration in March 2015 has not led to an increase in demand for children's social care.
- 1.19 When comparing contacts for children under five years' old, the number of social care referrals, children in need and children on child protection plans for

catchment areas where children centres have closed do not show any significant changes in trend. Social care activity for this group has remained consistent with the catchment areas of children centres that have remained open and those that have rebranded as family centres. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that since the closure of the children centres in March 2015, referral rates for children under five years old have stayed in line with overall referral rates suggesting there has been no obvious impact from the closures.

- 1.20 As result of all of the factors above, it is recommended that the Council should commence consultation with parents, carers and stakeholders to end the children centre contracts early and invest 50% of the budget into an in-house family support service within the Council's Early Help Team to be based at the children centre sure start building in Penhill. It is proposed that the consultation would take place over 6 weeks from 10th December 2015 until 20th January 2016, which would accord with the budget consultation. This service would be focused on the most vulnerable children in Swindon targeting those under two years' old but also offering whole family support to families with school age children. Minimum funding levels would be guaranteed for at least three years.
- 1.21 In addition the remaining children centre buildings based in Moredon, at Drove, Pinehurst and Goddard Park and Gorse Hill primary schools would be offered to child care service providers for children aged between two and four years old with a requirement to provide parent and child sessions for 0 – 2 year olds.
- 1.22 The new service would focus on the most vulnerable children and work with the whole family from before birth until the age of 18. It would use evidenced-based individual and family based group work across Swindon from a base in the Sure Start Centre in Penhill. The service would receive its referrals from health visitors who identify vulnerable families before their children are born and from social workers.
- 1.23 This shift to a targeted early help service is required given the higher number of school aged children seeking support from children's social care. Furthermore, a targeted whole family approach is based on the evidence from the Council's Families First team that whole family working is most effective rather than focusing on one child in the family.
- 1.24 The service would be designed following the completion of the consultation and approval of the proposed way forward by Cabinet. Early modelling suggests that a service designed within a reduced budget would be sufficient for a manager, assistant manager and eleven family support workers and deliver £600k of on-going annual savings. The aim would be to work with up to 1,000 vulnerable children and families in a targeted way across the new service, health visiting, and family nurse partnership.

Work with Existing Parish Councils

- 1.25 Building on its strategy to take services closer to local communities, at its meeting on 22nd October 2014, Cabinet agreed that joint work should continue with those parish and town councils where both Borough Council and parish Councillors have a mutual desire to explore the transfer of certain specific service responsibilities from the Borough to parish councils (Cabinet Minute 41(5), 2014/2015 refers). Following this decision, four parish councils took over

responsibility for some grounds maintenance and cleaning services on a trial basis in their areas from 1st April 2015.

- 1.26 The decision to take on these services by the parish councils was driven by a desire to enhance the services provided locally by the Borough Council beyond that affordable within available budgets. Following the service transfers, feedback in the four pilot areas was very positive orientated around:-
 - 1.26.1 Enabling greater local choice and prioritisation around service levels;
 - 1.26.2 Protecting valued universal services that are being eroded through funding reductions across the Borough;
 - 1.26.3 Enabling the attractiveness of the Borough to be maintained with residents noticing increased levels of grass cutting, cleaning and pruning;
 - 1.26.4 Protecting and creating local jobs; and
 - 1.26.5 Creating a sense of pride in local communities resulting in increased levels of volunteering.
- 1.27 The four pilot schemes have led the Council to consider replicating this more sustainable service-delivery model in other areas of the Borough. Recognising the reducing envelope of funding available within the Borough Council budget to provide services that parish councils also have the powers to provide, has shaped a strategy to devolve more services to parish councils.
- 1.28 On 12th November 2015, Full Council agreed to undertake a community governance review and that this would enable the Council to test whether there is a community desire to create additional parishes to enable local choice over the scale of service provision within different parts of the Borough. At present, two-thirds of households in the Borough are located in unparished areas and therefore, there are no parish councils in place that could choose to protect, supplement and / or enhance Borough Council services available to nearly two-thirds of households in the Borough.
- 1.29 National and local strategies are focused on creating cohesive, attractive and economically vibrant local communities and an important aspect to approaching sustainable communities is allowing local people a say in the way their neighbourhoods are managed. One of the characteristics of a sustainable community is the desire for a community to be well run with effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership and the community governance review will test this both in respect of reviewing the boundaries of existing parishes and also considering whether new ones should be created.
- 1.30 Parish, town and community councils vary enormously in size, activities and circumstances, representing populations ranging from less than 100 (small rural hamlets) to up to 70,000 (large shire towns – Weston-Super-Mare Town Council being the largest). Of the existing parishes with the Borough, five have over 2,500 households, seven less than 500 and four medium-sized ones with between 500 and 2,500 households.
- 1.31 Parish councils have tax raising powers which means that new income streams can be raised to fund these important services and to deliver them to a desired standard. Most are virtually 100% funded by a parish precept which is a sum of

money collected from council tax payers. Although vitally important to the appearance of the Borough and highly valued by residents, the proportion of the Council's budget spent on them is only 4%. This means that by raising a small amount of extra income from council tax payers through parish precepts, a sustainable service delivery model can be secured that is prioritised and delivery locally, and protected from future erosion in years ahead. Once the cost of services is embedded within the parish precept, the services are effectively protected as parishes are virtually 100% funded through council tax and therefore, with modest inflationary increases, the services would be fully funded thereafter.

- 1.32 Following the October 2014 Cabinet decision, the Council has been engaging with most of the 16 existing parish councils across the Borough around potential service transfers. Many are considering taking over and enhancing services from 1st April 2016 that will replace services currently being provided by the Borough Council.
- 1.33 In order to support the service transfers and ensure that the new delivery models are successful and sustainable, the Borough Council has put in place transitional support for the parish councils. Financial support is taking the form of pump-priming funding over a three year period based on the savings achieved by the Borough Council in 2016-17 tapering down over a three year period. Alongside this, professional support is being offered to the parish councils to both ensure they understand the technicalities of the services taken over and have the business support to manage them in future.
- 1.34 The type of services transferring to each parish council and the nature of the service delivery model being put in place varies from one area to another to recognise local priorities. The services include a selection of grounds maintenance, street cleaning, graffiti removal, fly tipping and posting removal, litter bin emptying, footpath maintenance and play area maintenance and inspection services.
- 1.35 The Council's draft Budget proposals assume a £300k saving from this work in 2016-17 with a target to try to increase this to £500k by February 2016. By this date, the current parishes will have finalised their service strategies and budgets for 2016-17 allowing details to be shared with the Borough Council in time to be included in the final Budget report.
- 1.36 As part of some potential service transfers, it is expected that a small number of low value assets are transferred to the parish councils and Cabinet is asked to approve that these transfers are agreed in accordance with terms negotiated by the Director of Resources and the necessary documentation completed by the Director of Law and Democratic Services.
- 1.37 The current annual budgeted contribution for operational running costs of the Highworth Recreation Centre from Swindon Borough Council is £105k. In addition, the Highworth Town Council currently contribute £50k per annum.
- 1.38 On 25th June 2014, Cabinet authorised officers to open discussions with the Highworth Town Council, the Recreation Trust and the leisure preferred bidder regarding the potential transfer of the Highworth Recreation Centre at a later date, due to the current joint ownership arrangements and legal status of the Trust, noting that in the event a transfer cannot be agreed financial support

(including all associated Council central overheads) from the Council to the Centre would cease from 31st March 2016.

- 1.39 During 2015, the Recreation Trust received legal advice which recommended a management contract solution, rather than a full asset transfer, would minimise the risk of not receiving the necessary Charity Commission consent within the project timescales. Following discussions, the operator of the Council's other recreation centres, Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) confirmed they did not wish to enter into a transfer of the Highworth Recreation Centre under similar lease arrangements as the other leisure centres. Both of these outcomes combined, led to the conclusion that a management contract with zero on-going subsidy would be the best sustainable solution for the Centre.
- 1.40 Governance of the Highworth Recreation Centre is by means of a Management Board with representation from Swindon Borough Council, the Highworth Recreation Trust 2012 who both have an interest in the building and the Highworth Town Council who own the car park.
- 1.41 Following legal advice, the Management Board agreed that the Trust lead the commercial process, on behalf of Swindon Borough Council and the Highworth Town Council, to achieve the outcome for a sustainable future provision for the Centre, assisted by officers from Swindon Borough Council and an externally appointed industry specialist.
- 1.42 Amongst other activities, the Trust have organised supplier open days to generate interest from the market and prepared a specification, based on Sport England best practice, as well as a timetable for interested parties to work within. During 2015, there have been meetings of the Management Board where the Trust has provided updates and feedback. Final tenders against a specification are currently being prepared by operators.
- 1.43 The table below sets out the approximate timescales between the Cabinet meeting and the proposed transfer date.

Highworth Recreation Centre Timetable

Activity	Date
Final tenders received from bidders	7 th December, 2015
Cabinet decision to confirm next steps to enable the Trust to appoint a preferred bidder, subject to agreed criteria	9 th December, 2015
Clarification and evaluation of bids received by the Trust and the industry specialist leading to the Trust's recommendation of a preferred bidder	January, 2016
Formal staff consultation process	January to March 2016
SBC due diligence undertaken relating to the preferred bidder.	January 2016
Mobilisation plan delivered, leases and business transfer agreement signed	January to March 2016
Facilities and staff transfer	1 st April, 2016

Locality Fund

- 1.44 In the context of the “Going Local” strategies described above, Cabinet has considered the future of the current Locality Fund, which was introduced in 2012 to devolve to ward members decision making powers around Streetsmart hours, local Highways projects and Community Grants through the Localities governance structure.
- 1.45 Previous evaluations of the fund have found that members had mixed views about the fund, some welcoming the opportunity to initiate local projects, others reporting that the resource allocation was too small to make a significant difference. The public Locality meetings, required statutorily for decision making purposes, have also had mixed success as a way of enabling greater resident participation and engagement.
- 1.46 In its meeting of 18 March 2015, Cabinet approved a shift in emphasis for the Localities team to focus its resources on programmes for mobilising community action around Council priorities, as these programmes have more direct and targeted effect on increasing community capacity and resilience than the Locality Fund. The draft budget for 2016/17 takes this a step further and includes a proposal to cease the Locality Fund from 1 April 2016.
- 1.47 In practical terms, this means:
 - 1.47.1 No new work under the Locality Fund will be decided through the Localities governance structure from 1 April 2016
 - 1.47.2 Highways projects already approved and committed through the Locality Fund by 31 March 2016 will continue to be delivered as part of the Highways work programme.
 - 1.47.3 Localities Highways funding that is unallocated by 31 March 2016 will return to Highways capital programme.
 - 1.47.4 Local Streetsmart casework will be handled direct through the Members Hotline and Streetsmart hours will no longer be available to ward members.
 - 1.47.5 A review of Community Grants will take place to determine the best arrangements for ensuring that community grants support community action that contributes more directly to the Council’s Vision, Priorities and Pledges and the develop of community capacity and resilience.
 - 1.47.6 Ward members will be no longer required to hold public meetings for the purposes of Locality Fund decision making. Ward members can determine how they wish to engage and work with residents locally.
 - 1.47.7 Localities team resources will be focused wholly on community action programmes, volunteering initiatives and local resident engagement that supports the delivery of the Council’s Vision, Priorities and Pledges.