

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 14th December 2015

Author:	Cabinet Member for Corporate, Customer and Digital Services
Wards:	All
Locality Affected:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report sets out details of the portfolio for the Cabinet Member for Corporate, Customer and Digital Services.
- 1.2 A key purpose of the Scrutiny committee function is to hold the Cabinet to account and ensure that Council priorities and performance are being delivered. The Scrutiny Committee partly fulfils this requirement through the use of question and answer sessions with the Cabinet Member for Corporate, Customer and Digital Services.
- 1.3 The purpose of the Question and Answer session is to ensure that the Cabinet Member provides the Scrutiny Committee with performance information relative to their portfolio responsibilities. It also requires the Cabinet Member to provide budget information for their portfolio responsibilities and provides an opportunity for the Scrutiny Committee to ask questions on the portfolio responsibilities.
- 1.4 The remit of the Committee includes the review, scrutiny, and development of policy recommendations and the monitoring of performance of corporate priorities including One Swindon and the Corporate Strategy.

2. Recommendations

Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Take note of the report by the Cabinet Member for Corporate, Customer and Digital Services.
- 2.2 Put appropriate questions to the Cabinet Member for Corporate, Customer and Digital Services.
- 2.3 Decide if any further action is required.

3. Detail

- 3.1 The Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Corporate, Customer and Digital Services is Councillor Mary Martin. The Portfolio responsibilities for this Cabinet position are as follows:

- 3.1.1 Member Development

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- 3.1.2 Customer Services, including the One Stop Shop
- 3.1.3 Health and Safety
- 3.1.4 Digital by Design
- 3.1.5 IT Strategy and delivery
- 3.1.6 The Customer Experience
- 3.1.7 Operational Buildings
- 3.1.8 Swindon Traded Services
- 3.1.9 Schools ICT
- 3.1.10 Superfast Broadband
- 3.1.11 Leisure (residual services e.g. Highworth, County Ground etc.)
- 3.1.12 Public Power Solutions Ltd (PPS)

What have you done well?

- 3.2 **Customer Services** – We have seen good levels of performance in both the Contact Centre and One Stop Shop, with targets being met most of the time. Customer footfall has reduced over the past year, bought on by a large shift to on-line transactions and the upturn in the economy, leading to less demand for Council Tax and Housing Benefit enquiries.
- 3.3 We have implemented a new Scan and Go service, allowing customers who are bringing in documentation to prove their address and employment details to be served swiftly. This has led to an 16% overall reduction in wait times
- 3.4 The Members' Hotline is working well, providing a clear access route for Councillors and MPs to report issues and log enquiries of which 1575 have been received and processed since 1st May 2015.
- 3.5 **ICT** –as part of the ongoing management there was an urgent need to upgrade from Windows7 to ensure software was supported and security patches could continue to be applied. This has been successfully completed by Capita.
- 3.6 Following Cabinet's decision in June 2014 to bring a large part of the Capita Strategic Partnership back to the Council, work has continued to investigate the most suitable arrangements to secure an effective, fit for purpose ICT service at a significantly lower operating cost. Key to this has been a major project to migrate the Council's ageing server estate to the Capita Private Cloud (CPC), which is nearing completion.

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- 3.7 Following a review of options for the future delivery of ICT services, Cabinet agreed in October 2015 to authorise the negotiation of the return of significant parts of the Capita ICT service to the Council's direct control. This would exclude the hosting of most infrastructure, which would remain in the CPC. It is felt that this will best secure the objective of a flexible, resilient service at an affordable price, around £1m lower per year than the current contract.
- 3.8 Commercial negotiations are nearing conclusion alongside detailed work to effect a TUPE transfer of Capita staff to the Council by the end of January 2016 and recruitment has started for staff to fulfil functions currently undertaken by Capita staff at their other sites, most notably the Helpdesk which is located at Derby.
- 3.9 **SBC Website** – A new Council website was launched in October 015, which was developed primarily by an in-house team from Communications and ICT. The Website has a more modern look and feel and has been designed to adapt to a wide variety of devices and screen sizes. Currently the new website offers similar services and information as the previous one, but with a much improved look and feel significantly enhancing the user experience. The new website provides a necessary platform to enable work to progress on a “digital by default” approach to customer services.
- 3.10 **Superfast Broadband** - The procurement process for superfast broadband was very successful in providing an affordable solution, which exceeds our required outcomes of 95% superfast coverage across the Borough.
- 3.11 The benefits of the solution will ensure that most residents within the scope of the project will have access to quality broadband which will help them to become more digitally connected. Residents will have more flexibility to work from home effectively and to take advantage of streaming entertainment services. Local businesses in rural areas will have access to effective broadband to help them remain competitive.
- 3.12 In launching the superfast broadband project, we have created a project website www.superfastswindon.com that has enabled residents to understand the scope of the project, technology being deployed, if they can take advantage of the new service and to register for updates.
- 3.13 The Superfast Swindon website has been useful in registering resident's contact details and encouraging a small group of residents to volunteer to become Broadband Champions for their community.
- 3.14 Community engagement events across the Borough to share details of the project have been well received in rural communities.
- 3.15 **Health and Safety** - The Council has successfully maintained accreditation against the International Standards 18001 and 14001 for Health, Safety and Environment Management. The Health and Safety function have worked directly
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with Council Services to fulfil successfully the Council's Corporate Social responsibilities to their employees and the public of Swindon.

- 3.16 **Leisure Residual Services** – With most of the Council's recreation and golf facilities having transferred to commercial operators last year through the Leisure and Culture Change Programme, there are only a small number of residual sites that have been subject to further work over the past year.
- 3.17 Highworth Recreation Centre (the "Rec"), is a local asset for the Highworth area. It is owned in part by Swindon Borough Council, Highworth Town Council, and the Highworth Recreation Trust. The complications of this ownership led to exclusion from the 2014 transfer and the Trust has been to market to find an operator in the knowledge that funding from SBC will cease as of 31st March 2016, a decision taken by Cabinet in June 2014 .
- 3.18 Progress is being made towards the lease of the Rec to the Trust and thereon to a new operator with officers from Finance, Legal, Procurement and Leisure supporting the Trust during their procurement process. Expressions of Interest have now been received by potential operators in anticipation of the next stage of seeking formal tenders for submission to the Trust on 7th December 2015, while will be evaluated by January. The report to Cabinet on 9th December 2015 noted this programme including formal staff consultation in January, due diligence, lease agreements and mobilisation towards a transfer on 1st April 2016. Prior to this, officers will continue to support the Trust and have held update meetings for the staff at the Rec, advising on the programme and answering HR queries.
- 3.19 The County Ground athletics facility remained a Borough facility following the transfer of the principal Leisure Centres on 1st November 2014. Following a period of negotiations, the running of the athletics facility was handed over to the Harriers Athletics Club on the 7th September 2015. This is through a tenancy at will agreement pending a formal lease. Officers are now working on a feasibility study to consider options for the whole site that includes cricket, public open space, grass pitches, bowls and the athletic facility. With aid from Localities, work will focus on combining and sharing facilities, improving infrastructure and looking for new ways of managing the assets.
- 3.20 Similarly, Moredon Recreation ground is a retained Borough asset although the pitch and putt facility was decommissioned as part of the Change Programme in 2014. Officers are now working on a feasibility study to bring in new partners to increase use, provide new and improved existing facilities across the site. This is seen as an important sports hub, a view supported by national sporting bodies that are looking to invest in the site. Plans will be drawn up to harness such funding and produce a viable asset that again looks for partner management of the future facilities.

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- 3.21 **PPS** - The Council has established Public Power Solutions, a wholly owned company, to pursue a range of commercial opportunities in the fields of waste processing and renewable energy. The Cabinet Member for Corporate, Customer and Digital Services serves as one of a number of Council representatives on the Board of Public Power Solutions (PPS) Ltd. Oversight of the Company's financial performance is through a Shareholder Panel, chaired by the Leader of the Council. In addition, all Council Members are invited at least annually to attend open sessions hosted by the company's Executive Management Team, at which questions can be raised around the Company's operations.
- 3.22 **Operational Buildings** – Given the close relationship between operational buildings and strategic property, information on operational buildings will be included in the Scrutiny report for the Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Skills.

What would you do differently?

- 3.23 **Customer Services** – the service still operates in quite a traditional way, making customers queue at reception and then again for an appointment. Using technology we are planning to move to a new model where our team become Information Guides; greet people as they enter, then use tablet devices to assist with general information or signpost customers to a self-serve PC. We will also look to implement on line bookings and self-check in for appointments.
- 3.24 **ICT** – The major project to move the Council's infrastructure into the Capita Private Cloud was necessary given the age of the previous servers and the software versions being used. This situation was due to a lengthy period of under-investment in infrastructure, following the initial upgrade to hardware and software at the early stage of the Capita contract. Looking ahead, it will be important for the Council to keep a close check on its key software and hardware through improved asset management arrangements that will avoid this situation arising in the future.
- 3.25 **Information Asset Management** – the security, management and clear ownership of data. Leading organisations have policies and processes to protect and manage the full life cycle of data that are ingrained in every department and employee. This is an area the Council has recently starting to develop. While the technology aspects sit within ICT, the change will affect the entire organisation.
- 3.26 **Health and Safety** – Safety management at the Waterside Depot is one of our greatest challenges. There has been good engagement with the operational teams but there could perhaps have been a greater emphasis on considering how best to utilise the site as a whole. While this would not have resolved the

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fundamental challenges of the site, it could perhaps have helped remove some of the current pressure on available space.

What are the challenges facing the portfolio

- 3.27 **Customer Services / Website** - Implementing a new service model in Customer Services will mean big changes for Customers and Staff. We will be reducing face-to-face options and moving as many people and services as possible on-line. It is known that many customers who use the One Stop Shop are vulnerable and require support with very complex enquiries. Changes in service will need to ensure that these customers are still well supported.
- 3.28 Making best use of the new Website for customer interactions will necessitate a significantly higher level of integration between front and back-office systems and services than currently exists. This will require a detailed and structured programme approach to ensure that, over time, all significant transactions are able to be carried out electronically by individuals who wish to take this approach. In the context of the many other challenges the Council is facing, identifying the capacity within service areas as well as the necessary technical support will be a key challenge.
- 3.29 **ICT** – Working with Capita to complete the migration of systems and data to new server environments remains a key focus and challenge. This involves accommodating significant periods of down time – often as long as 3 days – as well as undertaking a high level of user testing to ensure that the migration has been successfully achieved.
- 3.30 At the same time, we need to prepare for a successful transition of ICT services from Capita to the Council. This involves developing and implementing a complex programme of activity to help ensure systems continue to be available during and beyond the transition period. The process of capturing data about all current software and hardware into a comprehensive asset register has started but will take some time to complete. Thereafter, a process of reviewing and rationalising the use of software will be undertaken to ensure duplication is minimised and the smallest number of applications possible for an organisation of Swindon's complexity is being used.
- 3.31 **Superfast Broadband** – In taking the decision to appoint UKBN, Cabinet was mindful of the preference for a fibre solution that large numbers of residents in North Swindon would be likely to express. While this was recognised, on balance it was felt that the additional coverage and lower cost of the UKBN proposal offered better value for Swindon as a whole. Since then, reaction has been mixed, with rural communities generally welcoming the opportunity to benefit from superfast technology and vocal objections remaining to the UKBN solution in other areas. In many cases, these objections have been based on a misunderstanding of the technology to be used and the eventual cost to

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residents. Clarification of the core facts and the benefits is planned to be addressed as the project continues in order that all residents can make informed decisions.

3.32 The largest challenge facing the project is for UKBN to secure relevant mast sites and gain Planning Permission to build their network. Planning Applications have been submitted for almost all of the proposed locations outside of the Northern Sector, where work is continuing to identify sites that will provide the best possible level of coverage, whilst remaining in alignment with Planning Regulations.

3.33 **Health and Safety** The challenge ahead is to ensure the health and safety of employees and the public are at the forefront of change programmes and considered in a pragmatic way to support change.

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 direct financial or procurement implications arising from this report.

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 from this report. Any further implications will be identified when a topic is reviewed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and in any recommendations made by it.

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.

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

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under review by the Overview 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