

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MONDAY, 11 JANUARY 2016

PRESENT:- Councillors Robert Wright (Chair), John Ballman, Richard Hurley, Colin Lovell, Gemma McCracken, Des Moffatt, Kevin Parry, Stan Pajak, Vera Tomlinson, Oliver Donachie, Maureen Penny, Carol Shelley and Chris Watts

Councillors David Renard (Leader of the Council), Brian Mattock (Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Adult Health and Social Care) and Steve Weisinger

43. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting. No declarations were made.

44. Public Question Time

No public questions were received during the meeting.

45. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th December 2015, be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

46. Budget Setting Process - 2016-17

The Committee received a report of the Director of Law and Democratic Services, providing members with the opportunity to better understand the strategic context and framing for the direction of travel of the organisation to deliver the Vision for Swindon over the next four years. This was within the expected financial context, and the particular processes the Council had adopted to ensure a balanced budget for 2016-17 and a sustainable financial position moving forward.

At the Chair's request the Committee also had copies of the Budget Diversity Impact Assessments (DIA's), which were circulated at the meeting. Members raised concerns about the lack of time to adequately digest the information contained in the DIA's, but agreed to proceed with this part of the meeting as they accepted that written responses could be given where the answers were not readily available.

The Chair welcomed David Renard, Leader of the Council and Chair of Cabinet, and the Board Director Resources to the meeting who responded to the following observations and questions from the Scrutiny Committee:

- The effect on the Council of using the New Homes Bonus as a source of base budget funding
- The level of New Homes Bonus to be used for base budget funding in 2016/17

- The future use and ownership issues of community assets for example Sure Start children's centres and the need to inform ward councillors of any alterations to leases.
- The consultation exercise undertaken in relation to those vulnerable groups that utilised children's centres and the need to scrutinise the outcomes.
- The role of inflation within the forecast funding position for the Council between 2016 and 2020.
- The support being offered to vulnerable families who find it difficult to access support and funding.
- The percentage of vulnerable families with children not using existing children's centres.
- The commitment to deliver highway projects already approved and committed through the Localities Fund by 31st March 2016 and the return of unallocated Localities Highway Fund to the Highways Capital Programme by 31st March 2016.
- Questions about the new approach and arrangements for Community Grants.
- Support for an increase of a further 2% in Council tax to fund shortfalls in social care budgets.
- The need to identify alternative options for increasing and decreasing proposed Council tax levels.
- The need to maximise capital receipts from the disposal of Council assets and securing revenue income streams through taking a more pro-active role in local development initiatives.
- Concerns in relation to the predicted funding gap and the potential to reduce this gap through the realisation of new income streams.
- The training and support that would be offered to Parish Council staff following the transfer of services from the Council to ensure they understood the technicalities of the services and had the business support to manage these in the future.
- The financial consequences for this Council of Parish Councils not agreeing to the transfer of certain services and how the shortfall in transfers would be managed.
- The perceived discrepancies between the relationship of the number of new Band D equivalent properties and the forecast for the Council's Council Tax Base growth.
- Concern about the potentially fractured delivery of services by Parish Councils.
- The number of adult health assessments being carried out and the potential effect on Council budgets.

The Committee also considered a motion put by Councillor Moffatt inviting the Leader of the Council to seek the Government's views as to how the Council should maintain its statutory duties taking into account the current and future budgetary pressures. The motion was not passed; however the Leader of the Council explained that this was a discussion being held by the Local Government Association (LGA) and he would endeavour to provide feedback to the Scrutiny Committee from the LGA discussions.

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council for attending the meeting in the absence of the Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, and also the

Director of Resources and Director of Commissioning, and for their full and open responses to members questions and observations on the issues raised.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Budget Position Update report be noted.
- (2) That the Cabinet be recommended to consider the following comments in relation to the Budget setting process 2016/17:
 - a. That recognition of the new health demand change from acute to prevention to facilitate budget saving initiatives be continued.
 - b. That Swindon's economic development, the Council's savings proposals and the identification of new forms of revenue streams be supported.
 - c. That highway projects already approved and committed through the Localities Fund by 31st March 2016 be ring-fenced.
 - d. That the Director of Law and Democratic Services include the review of the delegation of Locality Community Grants within the future review of the Scheme of Delegation to keep current funding in 2016.

47. Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session - Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance

The Chair reported that this item had been withdrawn from the agenda as the Cabinet Member was not available to attend the meeting due to another commitment.

Resolved - That the Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session – Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance be deferred until the Scrutiny Meeting on 21st March 2015.

48. Averies Task Group - Interim Report

Further to Minute 55 (2014/15), the Committee received the Interim report of its Task Group established to review the Local Resilience Forum's (LRF) independent, multi-agency debrief of the Averies Fire Incident. The Committee was invited to consider the report, including the findings and recommendations.

Councillor Maureen Penny, Chair of the Task Group, presented the report and explained that the Task Group met on 3 occasions to receive evidence from 18 witnesses. A further 5 meetings were held to consider the evidence and prepare the interim report. The Committee noted that the Task Group decided to issue an interim report based on the review of the LRF debrief report, whilst the review of the circumstances that led up to the incident would be included in the final report. The final report would be produced following the conclusion of the prosecution of the operators of the Marshgate site by the Environment Agency (EA).

Councillor Penny spoke in detail about the Task Group's interim findings and recommendations and explained that officers would be asked to take action on the interim recommendations and report back to the Task Group once further information was available.

Councillor Penny along with the other members of the Task Group (Councillors Bob Wright – Vice-Chair, Colin Lovell, Steve Weisinger and Des Moffatt) responded to the following observations and questions from the Scrutiny Committee and also a member of the public, invited to speak by the Chair:

- The number of Health and Safety Inspections undertaken at the Marshgate site by the EA over the last 2 years.
- Concern about the ability of the operator to distinguish the different types of waste received on site.
- The monitoring of air quality in the vicinity of the site over the period of the event and possible repercussions in relation to residents future health issues.
- The sorting of waste material from skips on site and the disposal of waste in the most appropriate way.
- Queries about the landfill tax.
- Determination of the source of the fire.
- The status of Averies Recycling and whether the company was still operating.
- The existence of an insurance policy to cover such incidents at waste recycling sites and possible financial gain for operators following a fire.
- The cost of the incident to Swindon Borough Council.

Councillor Penny thanked the Task Group members and officers for their hard work and contributions in the production of the interim report.

Resolved –

- (1) That the findings and recommendations of the Averies Task Group's interim report be supported.
- (2) That it be noted that the Averies Task Group would prepare and submit a final report, to include consideration of the circumstances that led up to the incident, once the criminal proceedings instituted by the EA against the operator of the Marshgate site had been concluded.
- (3) That Councillors Maureen Penny, Chair of the Task Group, Bob Wright – Vice-Chair, Colin Lovell, Steve Weisinger and Des Moffatt be thanked for their hard work in the preparation and production of a very comprehensive and informative Interim Report.
- (4) That the Director of Law and Democratic Services forward the comments about the Local Resilience Forum debrief report contained in the interim report to the Local Resilience Forum.

49. Status of responses to public questions and member requests for action and/or information

The Committee received an updated report advising on the status of outstanding issues and member requests for information.

Resolved - That the report on the status outstanding issues and member requests for information be noted.