

BUDGET CONSULTATION - NATIONAL NON-DOMESTIC RATEPAYERS

WEDNESDAY, 27 JANUARY 2016

PRESENT:- Councillors Russell Holland and David Renard

Representatives of the Business Community: Richard Lay (Lay Holdings) Sue Pycroft (Vox PR) Leigh Robinson (Swindon Chamber of Commerce) Kevin Williams (Brunel Centre) LPO Conway (RWEnpower) James Phipps (Exaclibur)

2. 2016-2020 Direction of Travel Financial Context and Budget Proposals 2016/17

Councillor Russell Holland, the Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance welcomed the invited representatives of local businesses to the meeting. He explained that the meeting was designed to inform local businesses of the Council's Budget proposals for 2016/17, due to be considered in detail by the Cabinet at its meeting on 10th February 2016, and to give representatives an opportunity to put questions on some of the issues to himself and David Renard, Leader of the Council,

It was noted that Under Section 65 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 the Council had a duty to consult with representatives of Non-Domestic Ratepayers about its proposals for expenditure. The Council had set out to achieve this by way of (a) a Public Notice placed in the Swindon Evening Advertiser, (b) a similar notice and information being placed on the Council's website from 2nd December 2015, and (c) arrangements being made for this meeting to which representative from businesses had been invited.

Copies of the following reports considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 9th December 2015, were included in the agenda pack for this meeting:

- Delivering The Vision – Growing Swindon's Economy
- 2016 – 2020 Direction of Travel, Financial Context and Budget Proposals 2016-17

Councillor Holland introduced the reports, expanding on the strategic context and framing for the direction of travel of the Council to deliver the Vision for Swindon over the next four years, and placing the specific proposals within the expected financial context, and the particular processes the Council had adopted to ensure it has a balanced budget for 2016-17 and a sustainable financial position moving forward. It was members' view that responsible financial management underpinned the Council's Vision priorities and pledges by ensuring best use is consistently made of all available resources as well as providing focus for its transformation work. Councillor Holland also provided a current budget position statement from the Cabinet Member for Finance, People and Performance, with particular regard to:

- The detail of the Local Government Finance Settlement for 2016-17
- Progress in relation to engagement and consultation with residents,

stakeholders and service users on the organisational strategic response approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 December 2015.

Following their introduction of the reports, Councillors Renard and Holland, supported by the Council's responded to questions put by the Council's Board Director Resources, responded to questions put by the representatives on the following issues:

- The economy promoting self-employers
- Lack of encouragement for small businesses to get started
- Resourcing Forward Swindon
- Making Swindon more attractive for decision-makers
- Making the Planning system more user-friendly
- The resourcing for the Business Support Officer post referred to in the report
- Business Rates
- Problems recruiting high calibre staff
- A central repository for information that could be given to businesses concerning Swindon
- Property options in Swindon Town Centre
- National Parking policies
- Measuring the success of Forward Swindon
- A forum for the scrutiny of Forward Swindon
- Private business representation on the Economic and Regeneration Board
- the Council's finances
- the filling of Council staffing posts