

Leader of the Council: Annual Report

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 20th June 2016

Author: Leader of the Council

Wards: All

Locality Affected: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 To allow the Leader of the Council to set out the Administration's priorities for the 2016/17 Municipal Year and review the previous year.
- 1.2 To allow the Scrutiny Committee to ask questions about those priorities.
- 1.3 The body of the report contains references to a number of the Council's plans and policies and allows the Scrutiny Committee to discharge one of its functions under Article 6.02 of the Council's Constitution.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the achievements for 2015/16 and Leader's comments on the year ahead.
- 2.2 Put relevant questions to the Leader of Council;
- 2.3 Decide if any changes to the Overview and Scrutiny work programmes are required as a result of the progress report; and
- 2.4 Decide if any further action is required.

3. Detail

Achievements in 2015/16

A clear vision for Swindon

- 3.1 The most profound achievement in 2015/16 was the adoption of the Council's Vision, Four Priorities and Thirty Pledges (Council Minute 33 2015/16 refers). Through this, the Council has a strategic direction towards 2030 that is clear to the public, businesses, partners, and staff.
- 3.2 The Vision states:

“By 2030, Swindon will have all of the positive characteristics of a British city with one of the UK's most successful economies; a low-carbon environment with compelling cultural, retail and leisure opportunities and excellent infrastructure. It will be a model of well managed housing growth that supports and improves new and existing communities.

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Swindon will be physically transformed with existing heritage and landmarks complemented by new ones that people who live, work and visit here would recognise and admire. It will remain, at heart, a place of fairness and opportunity where people can aspire to and achieve prosperity, supported by strong civic and community leadership.”

- 3.3 The Vision contains four strong political priorities and thirty pledges, which are attached at Appendix 1. These encompass both the business as usual activities, particularly around the personal social care, safeguarding children and public health agendas, as well as the additional goals towards which we are working. Above all, the Vision sets out how the Council works in partnership with all relevant groups - other public bodies, the voluntary and charity sector, other councils, and the private sector – as well as residents, to secure success.
- 3.4 Since adopting the high-level goals that formed the priorities and pledges, the first task that we undertook was a major engagement exercise to make staff more aware of the Vision and how it would affect them. This included the all-staff briefing sessions at STEAM in September 2015 and an eye-catching, thorough, and effective internal communications program. As a consequence of this, our staff survey has shown a significant improvement of its council employees understanding and embracing what the local authority’s strategic intent is.
- 3.5 The emphasis is on delivering the four priorities and thirty pledges while recognising the difficult financial context facing local government. We are addressing this through three themes: growing the economy, going local, and building resilience. These terms will feature in cabinet reports and are there to support, not replace, the priorities.

Delivering the Priorities and Pledges

- 3.6 Supporting economic growth is the most important element of the Vision as it is integral to all the priorities. The independent Centre for Cities report in January showed that Swindon could justifiably claim that it has made a significant contribution to national economic growth. Using a measure called “gross value added per worker” we each contributed £58,510 to the British economy, which is more than Oxford or Bristol and seventh of the 63 leading British towns and cities. Our employment level is 77.3% - the fifth best of the 63 leading British towns and cities.
- 3.7 By December 2015, the number of people in work in the Borough had risen by 8000 since May 2010. This means 77.5% of the population is in employment, which was above the rate for both the South West (77.4%) and Great Britain (73.6%).

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- 3.8 The total number of people unemployed and claiming Job Seeker's Allowance has fallen from 4827 in May 2010 to 1903 in April 2016, a reduction of 60.6%. Over the same period, youth unemployment has fallen from 1150 to 435, a reduction of 62.2%.
- 3.9 We have seen significant private sector investment in Swindon, indicative of the economic confidence being shown in the Borough and which has led to the creation of new jobs. Examples include the expansion to car dealerships at Euro way, speculative commercial developments at Kembrey, and development at Gateway North. In the last few months, work has also begun on developing a strategic employment site at Symmetry Park in the New Eastern Villages.
- 3.10 With Forward Swindon Ltd, over 1m square feet of industrial or commercial space and 243k square feet of retail space were taken up in 2015/16 – both above the performance target. The businesses expanding or moving into Swindon include:
- 3.10.1 High tech. companies such as UKTI Dynamatic and Johnson Matthey Fuel Cells' Hydrogen Hub Project Launch,
- 3.10.2 Finance in the form of Be Wiser Insurance, with other investors who are likely to become public in the near future, and
- 3.10.3 Additional warehousing for Oak Furnitureland and Wasdell Packaging
- 3.11 In support of Pledge 15 and our desire to continue providing a range of good, local school places, Cabinet agreed to support the Great Western Academy, Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust, The White Horse Federation, Uplands School, and Schools Company in their bids to set up Free Schools (Cabinet Minute 75, 2015/16 refers).
- 3.12 As part of the going local agenda, the Council has completed phase one of the Community Governance Review. It was disappointing but not unexpected that some used this stage, where the Council intentionally offered no firm plans for debate, for political opportunism. Members will debate these issues at an extraordinary Council and Cabinet will consider its future course of action, both of which meetings will occur after the publication of this report.
- 3.13 Nevertheless, there is a long tradition in Swindon of those who are, or have been, town and parish councillors. I would like to acknowledge the role still being played by Borough councillors from the main political parties who also serve on town and parish councils.
- 3.14 Alongside this, a number of parish councils have agreed to take on some services that were previously provided by the Borough Council. In these areas, the initial reports are that the quality has improved without undue increases in Council Tax.
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Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Steve Jones, (01793) 463602 stevejones@swindon.gov.uk

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- 3.15 There is a separate report before Scrutiny from Cabinet setting out the administration's desire to have more engagement and consultation with residents about specific proposals before making any decisions.
- 3.16 As part of our priority to protect vulnerable people, which is supported by our building resilience theme, and because of our pragmatic, ideology-free approach to seek only the best solutions, Cabinet has resolved to review its contract with Seqol and bring back in house some of the care workers (Cabinet Minute 57, 2015/16 refers). This will ensure that we can provide suitable quality care packages while controlling costs more effectively.
- 3.17 The Voluntary Sector Hub opened at the end of 2014 creating a single point of access where residents can access timely information and advice from multiple agencies in one visit. In addition to this, the new web portal called 'My Care My Support' was also launched to support adults and their families find out about what services and support is available in their local area. 75% of service users said in 2016 that they had access to advice and information up from 74% in 2015 and in line with similar authorities.
- 3.18 Overall 70% of adult service users say they feel safe, up from 65% in 2015 and of those 91% of service users say services make them feel safe, both of those indicators are an improvement and better than the national average. The number of service users who say they have control over their daily life increased from 77% to 78% better than similar authorities
- 3.19 We have established a single point of contact for reporting children's safeguarding concerns to the Council. We have made good progress in working to protect children from sexual exploitation, domestic abuse and neglect. Of note we have significantly reduced the numbers of vacant social worker posts and have now filled all middle and team manager roles thus reducing the Council's reliance on agency workers
- 3.20 We have already made progress on the following pledges:
- 3.20.1 In June, we will see the switching on of first part of the UKBN network so that we are on target to ensure 99% of the Borough has access to the government's minimum broadband speed (pledge 1). I am grateful to the councillors in Priory Vale and St Andrews for their help in suggesting new sites for masts that will still allow a quality service to be accessible. I am delighted that this cost-effective intervention by the Council as well as central Government has stirred commercial interest in providing competition for superfast broadband in the northern sector, something that had hitherto been lacking.
- 3.20.2 There are new solar energy farms in which the people of Swindon share the profits (pledge 2). Abundance, the company that ran the programme to seek investments reported that Swindon had one of the fastest, highest
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take up rates they had seen and every share has now been sold. Swindon is well on track to achieving its ambitious target for local low carbon electricity supply of 200MW by 2020, current provision is at 153MW.

3.20.3 We have demolished two obsolete 1960s car parks at the Wyvern and at the Bus Station (pledge 3).

3.20.4 We have signed the final agreements to secure a modern, expanded health centre (pledge 5).

3.20.5 Work continues on building modern homes at Sussex Square, which, along with the new shops will revitalised that area (pledge 8).

3.20.6 Construction has begun on the health facility in the town centre, to complete phase 1 of this exciting Kimmerfields regeneration scheme, which will transform central Swindon (Pledge 12).

3.20.7 Planning consent has been granted for 20 hectares of employment land at Symmetry Park, which will kick start development of the Eastern Villages, and help support an important element of the local economy (Pledge 13)

3.20.8 We have the final agreement from our private sector development partners to secure new homes in West and Middle Wichel (pledge 14)

3.20.9 We are continuing to reduce the number of occasions on which we have to use bailiffs to collect debt (pledge 24) by having earlier, better interventions to assist people.

3.21 Above all, we delivered this with a balanced budget for the tenth year in a row.

The Year Ahead

3.22 While the Administration remains committed to the Vision and the core services that we will continue to deliver alongside it, our actions are constrained by the Government's need to restore fiscal responsibility to the nation's public finances. That means our central government grants will continue to decline over the next few years before being withdrawn completely under a new system of financing local government through Business Rates retention. At the same time, the pressure for more and better personal social care services will continue to rise simply because of a growing, ageing population.

3.23 It is no longer possible for the Council to make the level of savings necessary to balance the budget each year through one-off cuts or small adjustments to services. To assume that a service must always be delivered by the Council, or cannot be altered in any way if transferred to another provider would result in fiscal disaster. To hold on to traditional universal services and believe that they can only be provided by the Council is not financially sustainable.

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- 3.24 That is why in December 2015 we set out a medium term financial strategy, which requires the wholesale transformation of the local authority. At Cabinet in June 2016, we elaborated on this strategic approach to managing the Borough's finances in the Medium Term Financial Context and Budget Strategy 2017-18 report. We have much greater confidence in the level of funding that will be available from 2020; we just have to manage the process to reach that date. There will be no more "salami-slicing" because we have already made those reductions. Instead, Council will be invited to take the necessary but challenging decisions that will ensure the long-term delivery of quality outcomes for the Borough.
- 3.25 With the Vision and the continued sound financial management that we have practiced for a decade, I am confident that the pledges and priorities will help Swindon's economy continue to grow. By being an attractive place in which to do business, work, and live, we will support the private sector in generating the wealth on which all public services depend.

Implementing the Vision and the Council Plan

- 3.26 As with the previous and successful 50 Promises, the Council will be open and transparent about the progress it is making towards achieving the thirty pledges. I have made sure that each pledge has a Cabinet Member who is personally responsible for it. In Appendix 2, I have added the pledges to the usual list of portfolio responsibilities. I would expect the Scrutiny Committee to question Members about these pledges at their Question and Answer reports throughout the year. I also expect the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to play an active role in monitoring performance.

The Council Plan and the Performance Dash Board

- 3.27 To manage the programmes over the next four years that are necessary to deliver the Vision, we have produced a Council Plan, which Cabinet considered on 16th June 2016 and which Scrutiny will consider elsewhere on its agenda. The Plan sets out how the Council will proceed within the constraints of the Medium Term Financial Context and Budget Strategy.
- 3.28 Alongside the Plan, which sets out the specific targets to deliver, we have created a performance dashboard so that Members, residents, businesses and other interested groups can monitor our performance.
- 3.29 The dashboard will be easily accessible online and will provide a high level of transparency and accountability. It can be quite daunting to make one's self accountable in such a public way. This is the burden of responsibility that comes from being the administration rather than the opposition. However, I embrace the positive challenges that emerge, as it will ensure that the whole Borough as well as the Council will achieve more.

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Supporting Economic Growth and Wealth Creation

- 3.30 As may be appreciated, much of the work around growing the economy has commercial confidentiality concerns that cannot be made public before formal contracts are signed. One public example is Oxford Brookes' commitment to a £10m new and expanded campus in Swindon.
- 3.31 At the same time, we are in the closing stages before two companies in the financial sector confirm investment and expansion plans. These proposals will indicate the significant value employers are continuing to place on Swindon and how the Council is working with employers to secure a range of new, skilled jobs.

Protecting Vulnerable People

- 3.32 If you refer to the Council Tax information leaflet, you will see that of every 100 pounds we raise through this source, we spend about 70 on adult social care and safeguarding children. I make no apology for the amount we spend on a small proportion of the Borough's population. This money is necessary to protect our children from sexual exploitation, domestic violence, and abuse. It is vital to ensure that vulnerable elderly residents have an adequate level of care to live independent lives as long as possible.

Sound Management of the Council

- 3.33 Some people believe that we can avoid significant changes by re-allocating the one-off money we are allocating to drive transformation. We aim to use that money to deliver £15m of the £19m savings in 2017/18. Had we spent it elsewhere, as was suggested at Council, we would have been left with a £15m black hole, along with the additional costs from trying to keep services going. In my opinion that is a short sighted and self-defeating tactic.
- 3.34 It is worth reminding ourselves of how much things have changed during the last 12 years and will continue to change.
- 3.34.1 We have balanced the budget for the last 10 years and have a sound financial platform to build on.
- 3.34.2 We have seen massive investment in the borough's infrastructure, including new and expanded schools, the town centre, and Wichelstowe.
- 3.34.3 Following the earlier success of the 50 Promises, we have adopted The Vision for Swindon. The four priorities and thirty pledges it contains are backed by a strong, transparent accountable process, which includes a public "dashboard" and explicit Cabinet Member responsibility.
- 3.34.4 Partnership working is key to delivering the Vision, as the Council cannot do everything itself. The current administration is willing to continue

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working with all potential partners and will not dismiss any, such as the private sector, because of an ideological agenda.

- 3.35 To summarise, the choice before the Council is to change, or to stagnate; to thrive or to decline. The Vision and this administration's willingness to embrace transformation offer Swindon the prospect of a sound economy and good local government.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 There are no alternative options; Article 6.02 of the Council's Constitution requires the Leader to submit a report.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial or procurement implications in this report.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 The author has considered legal and human rights legislation in the preparation of this report. It is considered that the report's recommendations are compatible with Convention Rights.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 Where appropriate, these are addressed in the body of the report.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 Full Diversity Impact Assessments will be undertaken on proposals listed in this report when they are included in Cabinet reports for Members to determine whether to implement them. Hence, no DIA was undertaken at this time.

Risk Management

- 5.5 None

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

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8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1: The Vision's Priorities and Pledges
- 8.2 Appendix 2: The Cabinet Member Portfolios