

# Leader's Half Yearly Update to the Scrutiny Committee

**Scrutiny Committee**

**Date: 11<sup>th</sup> December 2017**

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Author: Leader of the Council

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

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## **1. Purpose and Reasons**

- 1.1 To allow the Leader of the Council to outline how the Authority has performed in the first half of 2017/18 Municipal Year, towards the Council's priorities and targets.
- 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 work towards the priorities set for 2017/18;
- 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**

What We Have Done Well

- 3.1 First and foremost I would like to thank my Cabinet colleagues: councillors Oliver Donachie, Toby Elliott, Fionuala Foley, Brian Ford, Russell Holland, Mary Martin, Cathy Martyn, Garry Perkins, and Keith Williams for all their efforts on behalf of the people of Swindon. I would also like to thank the Chief Executive on behalf of all the Council's officers who are working so hard to implement policies and deliver quality services within a challenging budget.

Priority One

- 3.2 Pledge 1: We have ensured that 95% of the Borough had access to the Government's standard of superfast Broadband (24 Megabits per second) in January 2017. Since then the private operators have strengthened their capabilities with a new mast at Wanborough. In June 2016, only 84% of residents had such access.

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Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Steve Jones, (01793) 463602 [stevejones@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:stevejones@swindon.gov.uk)

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- 3.3 Pledge 2: Work has commenced on a 2.5Mw solar farm at Barnfield. Currently the Council is more than 6 months ahead of its schedule to deliver 200 Megawatts of renewable energy by January 2020.
- 3.4 Pledge 4: The Council has made a submission to Government for funds to address the transport pressures from North West Swindon and a possible extension to Thamesdown Drive as part of the National Productivity Investment Fund. An announcement on this may come as part of the Budget.
- 3.5 Pledge 5: The town centre now has a new and improved health centre, which opened in June. The old building will be used as a temporary facility until March 2018 to engage with rough sleepers and assist them into appropriate support programmes.
- 3.6 Pledge 7: The Council has completed 66 homes towards our target, which includes a new affordable rented scheme for keyworkers in Old Town, and the redevelopment of Sussex Square in Park South.
- 3.7 Pledge 9: The October Cabinet meeting approved a proposal to enable development of the site at Oakfield with c.250 new homes and provide additional funds to invest in supporting the community. This will be part of a partnership agreement with a major local employer. Work is also underway at a number of other sites in and around Swindon, including the Hawthorns, Cranmore Avenue, and the former Royal British Legion site in Penhill. The Council has compiled a register of all brownfield sites to provide detailed information to developers about existing sites to encourage development. Preliminary work for the development of Queens Drive is underway with consideration being given to initial design proposals. Permission has been sought to continue with a plan to redevelop the Penhill United Reform Church but other sites have been delayed due to the potential scale of Queen's Drive and the need to ensure financial sustainability of the HRA.
- 3.8 Pledge 10: Planning consent for 180 units has been obtained for the development of Aspen House. The financial assessment of the scheme is being updated to help the Council decide on the approach to delivering the development.
- 3.9 Pledge 14: The Council is making good progress with Barrett over the Joint Venture and I hope to be able to provide an update to Members once Barratt has complied with all necessary financial reporting rules in the City. To support this, work is well underway on the new district centre, which will include a pub with community facilities, as well as the new secondary school. . In addition the major highway improvements at M4 junction 16 are progressing well with the works on target for completion in Spring 2018.I would like to pay particular thanks to Councillor Toby Elliott, the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and

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Sustainability, the Corporate Director Resources and Growth and the supporting officers for securing this progress.

## Priority Two

- 3.10 Pledge 15: The extensive investment in schools that has been the hallmark of this Administration since 2004 continues. New schools are under construction at Tadpole Farm, Commonhead, and Great Western Academy all of which are on schedule to open in September 2018.
- 3.11 Pledge 16: Swindon continues to be a high employment area with the number of people in work 6% above the national average and 3% above the average for the South West.

## Priority Three

- 3.12 Pledge 20: Over the last 3 months we have delivered educational programmes to over 2,000 students whose ages ranged from 3 years through to 13 years. A sixth form programme has now been developed and will be offered to schools in the new academic year. Programmes have been re-booked for the new academic year and we will look to build on delivering the programme to schools not yet visited.
- 3.13 Pledge 22: Workers and equipment are now onsite delivering the overhaul of the Oasis, which is an integral part of the plans our new developments partners, Seven Capital, have for the regional leisure destination scheme.

## Priority Four

- 3.14 Pledge 26: With health sector colleagues, the Council has agreed £2.9m extra funding for the Improved Better Care Fund 2017/18. With the Sustainable Transformation Plan, the local authority is focusing on making savings which help the Council's finances as well as the NHS without having an adverse effect on patients. The Council is also in the process of creating an 'Accountable Care' system. This is an alliance of several organisations: the CCG, the Council, the Great Western Hospital Foundation Trust and Avon & Wiltshire Partnership Trust and Primary Care. The aim of the system is to realise even more partnership working and joint savings.
- 3.15 Pledge 30: Smoking prevalence in Swindon at September 2017 was 14.9%, which is lower than the English average of 15.5%. For those in manual jobs the prevalence of smoking has declined from 27.4% in 2015 to 20.8% in 2016. This is much better than the trend for England where the figures were 28.1% and 26.5% respectively.
- 3.16 In addition to our work on the pledges, the Council has secured £2.5m government for improvements to the Mead May corridor in West Swindon.

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- 3.17 The Council also remains committed to supporting and protecting residents, especially those who do not have means of support. That is why Cabinet has resolved to provide a complete exemption from Council Tax for all young people leaving the Council's care at 18 until they reach 21. We are also consulting on whether this exemption should be extended up to the age of 25.
- 3.18 In the wake of the Grenfell fire tragedy, Councillor Cathy Martyn, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety and the Council's officers ensured that there was a prompt review of all the Council's tall buildings. This was undertaken in partnership with the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire Service and included visits to buildings to meet tenants along with the Adults' Health, Adults' Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members, the Borough's two Members of Parliament and, later, the Leader of Wiltshire Council. While the homes are safe, in October Cabinet approved further expenditure on fire safety measures to ensure that additional features are included.

## Challenges for the Year Ahead

### Adult Social Care

- 3.19 We face a pressure on Delayed Transfers of Care, the speed with which we can ensure that elderly people return to their own homes after hospital treatment. This involves close partnership working with the Great Western Hospital, the Clinical Commissioning Group, and the Council. Reducing these delays is a high priority for central government as well as the Council and other local agencies
- 3.20 Although in July 2017, our average delay was 15 beds per day, which was of concern to us as well as government, coordinated action by the Council along with the hospital saw that figure fall to seven beds per day in August and we are projecting a further fall to six days in October 2017 – an improvement of over 50% in three months.
- 3.21 However, along with all equivalent, English local authorities, there are significant budget pressures solely from increased demand, which is a consequence primarily of demographic pressures. At £68m in 2016/17, this service area alone now accounts for £50 out of every £100 the Council spends. Managing this demand is going to remain one of the key challenges for this Administration. Councillor Brian Ford, the Cabinet Member for Adults' Health and Social Care and the Director of Adult Social Services can provide more details if required.

### School Attainment.

- 3.22 It is clear to all that this year's GCSE results were a disappointment, as they show Swindon has slipped further below the English average. While the Borough is held to account for attainment, only one secondary school is still in the Council's control, all the rest are in academies.

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- 3.23 While performance at secondary school level continues to be our greatest challenge, there have been significant improvements in children's performance in primary school at Key Stage 1 (5 to 7-year olds) and Key Stage 2 (8 to 11-year olds). The Borough's Year 1 phonics, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 results are in line with or above national averages in the majority of subjects. Provisional data indicates that Swindon Primary School Key Stage 2 results are the most improved in the country from 2016 to 2017.
- 3.24 There has been considerable success in ensuring access to Government's free early years place at 2 years of age. Currently 95% of the children eligible take up a place. The Authority is making good progress in delivering 30 hour child car provision and 98% of all early years settings are good or outstanding.
- 3.25 No doubt some will call for the schools to be returned to the full control of a local education authority under the banner "democratic control". Anyone who looks back at the great success politicians had when managing our schools in the early part of the first decade of this millennium will know how disastrous that was for our children. We had schools so badly maintained that the term "running water" meant that it was raining and the water was leaking our pouring into the classrooms. The education service was so bad that the government forced the Council to hand it over to a trust.
- 3.26 Instead, there a number of positive steps that the Council has already taken that will, in time, bring improvements.
- 3.26.1 First, the majority group voted for a budget allocating £600,000 over three years to the Swindon Challenge Board. This Board, which is chaired by an external officer who was previously a Director of Children's Services in another local Authority, builds on a successful model used by Poole Borough Council. The money will provide additional data and support for schools.
- 3.26.2 Second, as part of making the Challenge Board a success, officers are building stronger relationships with schools, especially with academies. This helps identify potential problems at an earlier stage and facilitates more timely offers of support from the most successful schools to help others raise their standards.
- 3.26.3 Third, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and the Chief Executive undertake joint visits to our Secondary Academies, to provide challenge and support.
- 3.26.4 Fourth, we are encouraging multi-school academies trusts wherever possible so that each trust itself will have more resources and experience to bring to bear to improve performance by twinning the weak with good.
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- 3.27 Within schools themselves, there is a need for strong heads and leadership teams, some of which have only been in post a few months. It will take time for the results to reflect any management improvements.

## St Lukes

- 3.28 There have been distinctive challenges at St Luke's which handles some of the most troubled and potentially disruptive pupils in the Borough. A combination of leadership issues, higher than desired levels of staff vacancy and an increase in the number of staff on leave for maternity or medical reasons, have all affected the quality of education.

- 3.29 In the last few weeks of October the school has:

- 3.29.1 Undertaken whole-school staff training to improve teaching standards, behaviour management, and safeguarding. Some of this training came from senior leaders at the Peak, a similar school in Gloucestershire, part of the White Horse Federation Multi-Academy Trust.
- 3.29.2 Six permanent, three temporary support staff and additional specialist teachers have been appointed. As part of the process of converting the school to an Academy, a new head has also been recruited.
- 3.29.3 Most children have now been integrated back into the school while the remaining small number on alternative programmes will return in the latter part of this term.
- 3.29.4 Negotiations are taking place with a view to the experienced and capable White Horse Federation Trust undertake the leadership and management of the school prior to conversion to Academy with the Trust.

## Safeguarding Children

- 3.30 Across the country there are a number of challenges putting extreme pressure on all Councils that provide children's services with the LGA estimating that there was a £605m overspend in England last year. Firstly, the demand is growing. Currently we have over 300 children in care. Secondly, there is a nationwide shortage of experienced social workers and managers although the number of agency social workers covering vacancies in Swindon is just over 16%, which is in line with the national average. Not unsurprisingly the stress of this work means that there is a high turnover rate for those involved in caring for the victims of abuse. Third, there is the overall pressure on budgets, mainly due in Swindon to the placement cost of children in the Council's care.
- 3.31 Nevertheless, Swindon is taking a data-led approach to identify the most effective, earliest interventions that both safeguard children and reduce pressure on the local authority's resources.



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- 3.32 Given that all councillors are corporate parents, it is vital that all 57 Members receive the relevant training. At the time of submitting this report, only 40 councillors had completed the online training. I would invite the Opposition and Minority Group Leaders to join with me in ensuring that all Councillors completed this training before the end of the calendar year.
- 3.33 Councillor Fionuala Foley, the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and School Attainment along with the Director of Children's Services will be able to update Scrutiny more when Councillor Foley submits her annual Question and Answer report in 2018.

## Regeneration

- 3.34 While there is positive news about Wichelstowe, it is with regret that the Council's partnership with MUSE has not brought about the desired investment in the second and subsequent phases of the Kimmerfields development. Moreover, the wider business conditions have changed since 2008, particularly affecting the nature of retail-led town centres where shoppers have switched to online delivery. Hence, Cabinet has resolved to start the mutual termination of the development agreement.
- 3.35 Nevertheless, the Council remains convinced that there is a positive future for a reshaped town centre development. Already, planning applications have been approved to provide new housing on the Aspen House and Tented Market Sites whilst work is in hand to bring forward a residential scheme at Falcon House. It is anticipated that a new model for the redevelopment of the town centre will be brought to Cabinet soon.

## North Star

- 3.36 Having secured Seven Capital as the developer, progress is now being made on the North Star site. Work is now underway to modernise the Oasis while the developers are on schedule to deliver an outline planning application early in 2018. Had the Council listened to those who simply called for the agreement to be terminated, none of this would be happening now.

## Forward Swindon Ltd (FSL)

- 3.37 Forward Swindon Ltd has been proceeding with the core programmes assigned by Cabinet. It has been instrumental in supporting the joint venture that has now been signed with Barratt to develop the first phase of 1700 houses in Wichelstowe, in support of Priority 14. FSL has also been redeveloping the Carriage Works and 1-3 Farringdon Road, also known as the W G Little building. These developments will help provide sustainable futures for part of our historic railway infrastructure. On behalf of the Council, FSL has also successfully secured a number of compulsory purchase orders to support the town centre redevelopment. It was unfortunate that one particular landowner used the court

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system to the full to resist this, which delayed assembling the necessary land portfolio for several years.

- 3.38 Nevertheless, given that FSL's current funding will come to an end in 2018 and with the need to review the Kimmerfields development, it is opportune to review how the Council best secures regeneration. The model that was correct when FSL was set up may no longer be the most appropriate one for the Council.
- 3.39 An external firm of specialist advisors was commissioned and has provided the Administration with new insight about how best to shape this service, which has formed part of a report to the December Cabinet meeting.

## 4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Article 6.02 of the Council's Constitution requires the Leader to submit a report immediately after the Council's Annual meeting or at such time as may be agreed by the chair of the Scrutiny Committee and the Leader. The Committee could eschew receiving the half-year update; however, this would weaken the Committee's ability to hold the Administration to account.

## 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



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## **6. Consultees**

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (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