

Cabinet Member Question and Answer Session

Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Scrutiny Committee

Date: 12th February 2018

Author: Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety

Wards: All Wards

Parishes Affected: All Parishes

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report sets out details of the portfolio for the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety.
- 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 Housing and Public Safety.
- 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 Housing and Public Safety.
- 2.2 Put questions to the Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety.
- 2.3 Decide if any further action is required.

3. Detail

- 3.1 The Cabinet Member for Housing and Public Safety is Councillor Cathy Martyn who is accountable for the following Pledges from the Council's Vision:
 - 3.1.1 Pledge 7. Build new affordable homes including 200 new council homes and 66 units through the Affordable Housing Development programme at sites including the Hawthorns, the Royal British Legion site in Penhill, Townsend House in Old Town and the Former Refuge in Park South.
 - 3.1.2 Pledge 8. Complete the redevelopment of Sussex Square.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Michael Ash, Acting Corporate Director, Communities and Housing, mash@swindon.gov.uk

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- 3.2 The Portfolio responsibilities for this Cabinet position were updated in December 2016 and are as follows :
- 3.2.1 Allocations and Advice Services
 - 3.2.2 Empty Homes
 - 3.2.3 Estate and Tenancy Management
 - 3.2.4 Housing Enabling and Strategic Services
 - 3.2.5 Homeline Services
 - 3.2.6 Homelessness
 - 3.2.7 Housing Right to Buy/Sales Services
 - 3.2.8 Neighbourhood Wardens
 - 3.2.9 Private Sector Housing Renovation Grants
 - 3.2.10 Repair and Improvements to Council Housing Stock
 - 3.2.11 Sheltered Accommodation
 - 3.2.12 Environmental and Public Protection Services Gypsies, Travellers and Unauthorised Encampments
 - 3.2.13 Reducing Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Abuse
 - 3.2.14 Control Room Operations
 - 3.2.15 Principal Member for consultation on Public Space Protection Orders
 - 3.2.16 Licensing, including taxis, etc
 - 3.2.17 Community Safety Partnership including young offenders and reducing anti-social behaviour
 - 3.2.18 Reducing Domestic Violence and Abuse
- 3.3 Additional information about work within the portfolio, especially projects in hand that have not yet been completed, are attached at Appendix 1.

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What have you done well?

Delivering The Council's Vision and Pledges

- 3.4 New Affordable Housing. The new redevelopment of Sussex Square has been completed with new residents moving in from March 2017 onwards. The site won Best Affordable Housing Scheme in 2017 at the West Region Local Authority Building Control Awards. This significant regeneration scheme delivers Pledge 8 of the Council's Vision.

Environmental and Public Protection Services

Licensing

- 3.5 Taxi Licensing: the Licensing Manager led a successful joint operation to ensure that private hire cab drivers do not invalidate their insurance through their actions. This operation went well, with some good joint working with the Police. A further operation is planned for the spring.
- 3.6 The Licensing Committee has adopted a number of important licensing documents over the last year. Amongst the most significant have been the setting of a Hackney Carriage Taxi Tariff, against a difficult context of three varying proposals from the Trade; and a policy covering levels of tinting of windows in taxis to assist with the safeguarding agenda, which is above the measures put in place by most other taxi licensing authorities.
- 3.7 Despite being recognised by the Dog's Trust as having one of the highest stray dog populations in the country, we have managed to halve the number of "long stay" strays retrieved, (that is those held for more than a week longer than the statutory period), without resorting to having to put them to sleep, and have also managed to increase number of dogs correctly returned to their owners through better use of resources including social media. In view of this recognition, the Dog's Trust has selected Swindon for 'neutering vouchers', which provides a further service to help reduce stray dogs.

Public Protection

- 3.8 The Health Compliance team aims to encourage and support local businesses and organisations large and small to comply with statutory requirements. There have been a number of successful health and safety prosecutions this year including; N&B food wholesaler – fine of £56,000 for health and safety offences. Poundstretcher were fined £1,000,000 with Swindon Borough Council case allocated £500,000 including costs. Food Hygiene prosecutions included: Best BBQ £4670, Abbeymeads Indian £17,000, Pritams Conditional discharge and Food Standards (Allergens) Tandoori Nights £12,000. We continue to work with

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our Primary Authority partners the National Trust, ISS, Snack and Sandwich and are developing new Primary Authority partnerships with smaller local businesses.

- 3.9 Following the successful prosecution of a counterfeiter, Trading Standards (TS) was awarded through the proceeds of crime, over £10,000. TS has been working with The Outside Clinic on 'Scams Aware'. It became the first business in the region to adopt 'Scams Aware'. It is a Swindon based company which offers sight and hearing tests for housebound patients across the UK. TS provided 'Scams Aware' training and the company refers potential scam victims to TS. The Outside Clinic is part of the 'Buy with Confidence' scheme.
- 3.10 Frank Webb, a prolific rogue trader, previously jailed by TS, when released on licence began to reoffend. After working with the probation service, he was successfully recalled to prison and subsequently prosecuted and given a further 6 months in jail. UK Infotech Technology, an online computer service/repair company (linked to India) was successfully prevented from future trading. Late in 2017 two underage sales operations were jointly carried out with the police testing for the sale of knives. Sales were made to volunteers and TS is investigating and working with the retailers to prevent future occurrences.

Housing

- 3.11 Whilst there was very little difference in the number of Homelessness applications made in Swindon during 2016/17 compared to 2015/16, there was an increase in the number of acceptances. The change in the level of acceptances was higher than was found nationally, as demonstrated in Table 1 below:

	Swindon	Swindon		England	England	
	2015/16	2016/17	Increase	2015/16	2016/17	Increase
Applications	534	529	-1%	81,690	85,300	4%
Acceptances	154	185	20%	37,870	40,320	6%

*Mid 2015 population statistics taken from:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/populationestimatesforukenglandandwalesscotlandandnorthernireland>

- 3.12 A significant and exciting new initiative this year is the **Temporary Winter Housing Provision**. A site has been secured and funded by the Council to deliver a 12 week support programme for a group of 12-18 individuals who have

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been sleeping rough. This group have for a variety of reasons not engaged with statutory housing, health, care and treatment services. The intent of the Winter Provision is for the Council, its statutory partners and the voluntary sector to establish meaningful relationships with each individual so that they can address immediate health needs, stabilise their welfare benefit and employment status, and plan ahead for a sustainable housing offer at the end of the Winter Provision.

- 3.13 **Tenancy Management.** An ongoing challenge continues to be rent collection. The income of the Housing Revenue Account to meet tenants' service aspirations depends on a high rate of collection. The collection rate stands at 96.25% (as at Nov 2017) a remarkable achievement given the on-going changes to the Welfare System. Swindon went live on the 'full' Universal Credit system on 30th November 2016 as an "Early Adopter" of Universal Credit.
- 3.14 **Fire Safety** remains a priority. The Grenfell tragedy has placed a spot light on the Council's processes and procedures. I reported to the Housing Management CMAG, the Adults' Health, Adults' Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September and October (Minute 20, 2017/18 refers) and Cabinet in July (Cabinet Minutes 16 and 47, 2017/18 refer) on our robust arrangements. Along with the Members Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service, and the Members of Parliament, officers and the Cabinet Member visited all the Council's residential high-rise blocks to meet tenants, listen to concerns, and respond directly.
- 3.15 My reports also included additional fire protection measures that will be undertaken ahead of the final findings from the Grenfell Inquiry. These include new internal doors to our multi storey accommodation and a detailed survey recording the integrity of the compartmentalisation in the multi storey blocks, new the installation of new fire doors in our general-purpose high-rise blocks of flats and a fire suppressive system to George Hall Court, which is a high-rise sheltered housing scheme. Future fire risk assessments are to be carried out to a *type 3* level to ensure that the communal areas (common parts) and a sample of flats are included within the assessment for each block of flats. In addition, a detailed sample of intrusive *type 4* fire risk assessment are to be carried out to provide a comprehensive fire safety report for the different types of flats.

Community Safety

- 3.16 **Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.** The CSP team, with partners developed a Reception Centre package in 2017 to provide a safe space for victims of human trafficking and modern slavery. The work of the Partnership was commended by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking as best practice for local authorities.

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What would you do differently?

Licensing

- 3.17 In 2018 there will be a review of our Street Trading Policy. I would like to ensure that no licence reviews are submitted which could be dealt with more appropriately by alternative means. This means working more closely with our main strategic partner the Police. A joint Licensing Tasking Group has been established between the Council's Licensing Team and the Police to ensure that reviews are appropriately targeted to meet our joint objectives.

Public Protection

- 3.18 There are opportunities around further digitalisation of some of the public protection services to increase efficiency and effectiveness. Officers are identifying key areas that can be accessed online such as registration of new food business and access to food hygiene information, training, infectious disease information, private water supply information, allergen information, Health & Safety information, Feed, Animal Health, Approval information and report complaints.
- 3.19 Increased focus on compliance and supporting individuals and organisations to change their behaviours to hopefully reduce the need for prosecution activity.

Housing

- 3.20 The time to set up a Temporary Winter Housing Provision has been more challenging than originally considered. The outcomes of this year's project will be reviewed and if successful I will ensure that additional planning time is allowed for project set up. It is hoped that some of the early successes and lessons learnt will be reported at your meeting.
- 3.21 A clear success this year has been the confidence our residents have shown in our Fire Safety arrangements. However, it is important that we pay particular care and attention to our continued communication and engagement with residents. I anticipate that this will be a finding of the Grenfell Inquiry and we need to prepare for this regular and important engagement.

Community Safety

- 3.22 The limited powers of criminal legislation to tackle repeat perpetrators of Domestic Abuse means that a number of victims in Swindon are being subjected to a cycle of abuse. There are some useful powers in civil legislation and the partnership fully resourcing this focus would see a reduction in repeat victims and perpetrators at MARAC.

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Reducing Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Abuse

- 3.23 Continue to work with partner agencies with an increased focus on the impact on the child with regard to substance misuse. Further exploration and understanding of the opportunities that new media technologies provide in tackling the issue of substance misuse and preventing harms caused by substance misuse using a more targeted approach.
- 3.24 The needs assessment identified that there are key groups that seem to have particular issues relating to substance misuse. Alcohol related hospital admissions for females under forty and males over 65 are both significantly higher than the national average. Hospital admissions for substance misuse for those age 15 – 24 years have increased in Swindon and we need to address this. We are recommissioning the alcohol liaison service at GWH and plan to include all substances within this liaison service, which we also plan to link to mental health services.
- 3.25 We need to work with the new service provider to ensure that the voice of service users and carers is heard and that services are fully evaluated effectively to ensure their needs are met.

.What are the Challenges facing your Portfolio?

Public Protection

- 3.26 Given current and future budgetary pressures prioritisation of service provision will need to focus on its statutory responsibilities and those areas which are most able to deliver the needs of our community as recognised through the Councils vision and priorities and in particular by protecting those who are most vulnerable or at risk.

Licensing

- 3.27 The licensing service continues to deal with a wide range of important and high profile issues; however, until recently it has operated well below required staffing levels, placing additional pressure on a small number of key officers. Whilst two posts have been filled, there is still a level of staff development required which is likely to mean that the service is not able to operate fully in the pre-emptive manner that I would like. Particular challenges in the next year exist around the urgent review of the Street Trading Policy.

Housing

- 3.28 The social housing rent reduction of 1% per year until 2019/20 over-shadows all other housing challenges, as it results in a reduction of over £20 million in the

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housing capital programme. I am pleased to say that current reserves and efficiency savings continue to reduce the immediate impact on tenants and I will continue to mitigate against this loss in funding. I have also approached our local MPs and the Minister of State to review the difficult funding arrangements facing Swindon's HRA.

- 3.29 Homelessness is the other area where although budget pressures have eased thanks to our success in a higher grant award, but this still remains a challenge for future years, particularly 2019/20. Consequently I have asked officers to review our temporary accommodation portfolio in order to reduce the financial risk to the Council whilst also ensuring an adequate supply. There will also be the additional statutory responsibilities arising from the Homelessness Reduction Act, for example extending the time that the Council has a statutory duty to prevent homelessness occurring.
- 3.30 A 2 to 7 year contract was let for vacant property repairs with a potential value up to £14 million. Poor performance by the principal contractor has led to a delay with voids being re-let and legal action is being taken to recover rent loss. The existing contractor is due to complete their work by February 2018. Interim contracts are being let with 3 contractors for a 12 month period, whilst a strategy is developed from lessons learned to let a new contract.
- 3.31 As part of the changes in the private rented sector, Government has extended Mandatory House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing to a greater proportion of the HMO stock taking into account all HMOs with five or more person regardless of the number of stories in the property. In Swindon this is likely to increase the number of HMOs that must be licensed from the current 120 to around 600 – 800. Work is being done to ensure that we are as ready as we can be for this very significant change. Due to the nature of Swindon's housing stock and market, the great majority of HMOs in Swindon will fall under a Licensing scheme following these changes, and this will allow for much more effective regulation of the sector.

Community Safety

- 3.32 The CSP team has a significantly extended portfolio (eg. Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, Prevent) and , as a partnership, cuts to police and other partner resources mean that we need to operate collaboratively across the system to ensure a co-ordinated positive response to emerging issues.
- 3.33 Domestic Abuse (DA) affects individuals and families as well as the Council and partner agencies. Measures have been put in place to improve this concern for 2018/19 with commitment from internal and external partners. A Swindon Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is underway to inform a 2018 Swindon Strategy

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that examines the extent of DA in Swindon, maps existing service provision, and explores evidence around interventions to tackle DA.

Reducing Drugs, Alcohol and Substance Abuse

- 3.34 Challenges for the forthcoming year will be to implement the priorities identified in the new Substance Misuse strategy, to embed the new treatment service and ensure that the performance of the treatment service continues to improve. We need to improve the uptake of Blood Borne Virus immunisations, screening and treatment. We will be focusing on improving the prevention element of provision such as increasing the use of social media etc. One key area of focus will be to improve the integration of services for children of substance misusing parents. We shall also be looking to improve the identification of children at risk of substance misuse through the introduction of a screening tool linked to adverse childhood experience.

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.

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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 under review by the Overview Scrutiny Committee and if it makes any recommendations.

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 Appendix 1 – additional information on work within the portfolio.