

PARISH CHAIRS / CLERKS ENGAGEMENT MEETING

MONDAY, 23 OCTOBER 2023

Parish Council Representatives: Ms Jaine Blackman (Bishopstone), Mr Steph Exell (Central Swindon North), Mr Andy Reeves (Central Swindon North), Mr Andy Reeves (Central Swindon South), Mr Neil Hopkins (Central Swindon South), Mr Jake Mee (Central Swindon South), Mr Ian Kearsley (Chiseldon), Ms Val Curtis (Covingham), Ms Georgina Morgan-Denn (Haydon Wick), Mr Vinay Manro (Haydon Wick), Mr Keith Smith (Highworth), Mrs Deanne Rose (Highworth), Mr Colin McEwen (South Marston), Mr Tom Charnock (Stanton Fitzwarren) and Richard Hailstone (Swindon Local Councils Forum).

Swindon Borough Council Representatives: Councillor Jim Grant (Cabinet Member for Communities and Joint Working) Ms Sam Mowbray (Chief Executive), Brian Pinchbeck (Corporate Director, Inclusive Economy and Sustainability) Matt Box (Head of Elections and Democracy), Rob Brown (Head of End to End Waste Services) and Jon Harris (Head of Strategic Transport).

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillor Jim Robbins (Leader of the Council) and Sonia Grewal (Chief Operating Officer).

19. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th December 2023 were received and noted.

The Chair noted that it had been previously agreed the Borough/Parish Protocol and the transfer of services working groups had been established. The Borough/Parish Protocol working group had met and it was hoped that the draft protocol would be circulated and considered by Parishes in the near future.

It was noted that there was currently a planning protocol had been in place for some but that it would be useful for the Planning Department to confirm that this document was up to date.

20. Issues from Parish and Town Councils

(a) Future of Parish Council Election Cycles

The Head of Elections and Democracy reported that Swindon Borough Council had voted to change its election cycle from the voting by thirds model to whole council elections from May 2026. It would thenceforward hold its elections every four years after that. This will have an impact on those parish and town councils currently scheduled to hold elections in 2027 and 2028 as they would no longer be held as combined polls with the borough council elections.

The Head of Elections and Democracy outlined the Parish Councils affected in the initial years and the estimated cost of elections should Parish Councils wish to maintain their current electoral cycles as well as estimated savings should elections be harmonised and an explanation of the financing of elections for the Borough and Parish Councils

If harmonisation were agreed as part of its power under the Section 53 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Swindon Borough Council would seek to increase the term of office for those parish and town councils currently scheduled to hold elections in 2024 to a five year term of office (2021-2026) and thus avoid an election in 2024. Any casual vacancies within these councils occurring up to 8 November 2025 would be handled in the usual manner.

Apart from savings the main additional benefits of harmonising the elections would be the ease to the elector of having one local polling day, increased turnout that a combination of local polls affords and the ability to synchronise the strategic decision making across the borough in respect of both the cycle of electing our representatives and in reducing the impact of multiple pre-election periods.

A consultation would be undertaken with Parish Councils prior to Christmas.

(b) Further Transfer of Services

It was noted that the Borough Council was awaiting a delegation from the Parishes to consider further transfer of services. The Borough would prefer representation of at least one of the larger Parishes to be represented as one option might be for the larger parishes to take on services with smaller parishes approaching those Parish Council in respect of undertaking transferred services. An anticipated working group of 4 to 6 parish representatives was anticipated although its size and composition was for the Parishes to determine and to ensure that parish councils of all sizes were represented. Any recommendations arising from the working group would require ratification by individual Parish Councils.

Parishes were keen to see outstanding issues relating to the previous transfer of services being resolved prior to any additional transfers.

(c) Council Tax Support Grant and Band D figures and Timescales

It was anticipated that further information would be available by the end of November and this would be forwarded to Parish Councils as soon as possible.

(d) Draft Swindon Plan

It was anticipated that a draft Swindon Plan would be presented to the Borough Council's Cabinet meeting in December. If approved there would be a large scale consultation with the public and Parish Councils. The Swindon Plan would include the new administrations three core priorities, how these would be progressed over the first three years and how the Council would engage and work with partners. This would be in addition to the Borough/Parish Protocol and would look at wider Borough issues.

(e) Transport Update

The Head of Strategic Transport updated the meeting in relation to key transport issues including (i) the current strategic position, (ii) the local engagement programme, and

overview of the Swindon Transport Conversation Survey 2023, (iv) ongoing work with Parish Councils, (v) an EV Needs Survey, (vi) Bus Stops and Shelters, (vii) ongoing conversations regarding popular walking routes, (viii) regular meetings with Parish Councils.

The meeting discussed (i) how Parish Councils could assist with more localised surveys, (ii) identifying EV needs and discussions on charging locations including community, car parks and park and ride sites, (iii) the location of new bus shelters which would be funded through advertising, (iv) the usage of walking routes and officer meetings with Parish Councils, (v) possible benefits of agreeing joint providers for EV related installations, (vi) the Borough Council's forthcoming bid for central government funding for EV infrastructure, (vii) the need to decide whether a strategy of rapid charging versus slow charging, and (viii) the need for guidance in respect of EV charging cables running over pavements.

(f) Waste Management

The Head of End to End Waste Services updated the meeting in respect of the roll-out of the new waste collection service, and the meeting discussed (i) the roll-out of food waste collections and the effect of this on collection services, (ii) the replacement of the waste collection vehicles, (iii) the commencement date of 27th November for the new service, (iv) the importance of maximising food waste collections/recycling which accounted for around 40% of current waste, this would not only reduce the cost of landfill but would also generate income for the Council, (v) plastic and cans were incorporated in the same blue bag as these were the easiest materials to separate, (vi) glass and paper would also be collected in separate containers, (vii) a letter would be forwarded to residents to outline collection dates for the collection of the various recyclables and these details and additional information would be available on the Borough Council's websites and would be available through libraries, (viii) the capacity of waste containers and the collection of additional loose and sorted recycling, with the exception of food waste and black bin waste, (ix) the need to communicate with the general public regarding the benefits to the Council of the new recycling process, (x) the need to communicate and educate rather than undertaking enforcement action where issues arise, and (xi) that compostable bags were not required as part of the food waste collections.

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Date of next meeting

The next meeting would be held on 12th December 2023 at 5:00pm.

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