

Minutes of the Swindon Local Councils Forum meeting held 15th February 2024 at the Civic Offices and online via Teams.

Those present: Councillors R Hailstone (Haydon Wick), V Manro (Haydon Wick), V Curtis (Covingham), D Griffiths (South Swindon), G Wilson (Liddington), J Hewer (Wroughton), G Overbury (Wroughton), J Jefferies (Chiseldon), C McEwen (South Marston), K Williams (Highworth), A John (Haydon Wick), G Hawkes (Covingham), S Heyes (St Andrews), M Lowther (South Swindon), A Jimmy (Haydon Wick), I Jankinson (Blunsdon), V Brodin (Bishopstone), J Ali (West Swindon), L Gow (Highworth), C Williams (Castle Eaton)

Also in attendance: L Cutter (Secretary), D Bourne (Council Advisor, Wiltshire Association of Local Councils), L Evans (Covingham & Liddington), D Rose (Highworth), E Freemantle (Wroughton), K Morgan (South Marston), A Reeves (Central North Swindon), K Clay (Hannington), E Sylvester (St Andrews)

S Hay (Swindon Borough Council), Councillor J Grant (Swindon Borough Council), B Pinchbeck (Swindon Borough Council),

357 Apologies

A Loxton (Stratton), P Sunners (Chiseldon)

357 Minutes

Members agreed to approve the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 23rd November 2023.

Proposed: Councillor V Curtis Seconded: Councillor D Griffiths

Vote: Agreed with (3) abstentions.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd November 2023.

358 Swindon Catch Up

Mr S Hay, Interim Planning Policy Manager, gave a presentation on the progress of Swindon Borough Local Plan 2043 and improvements to communication methods to increase engagement with the local community.

A Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is about how the Council will engage with people on planning matters including new land use plans for the Borough and importantly planning applications. To meet these requirements, the Planning Team is consulting formally for a period of six weeks (29th January to 11th March 2024) on a draft statement to enable residents, community groups and key organisations with an interest in Swindon to respond. This is a key opportunity to inform better approaches to engaging in planning. The consultation is available to view here -

<https://letstalk.swindon.gov.uk/sci-public-consultation>

Mr S Hay also updated on Practical Work on Site Assessments which will undertake a rigorous constraints assessment and enable suitable sites to progress through to inclusion into other appraisals and transport modelling.

S Hays left the meeting at 19:20

359 Borough & Local Councils Draft Protocol

Members received an update from the Protocol Working Party. The draft protocol was sent out in January, with a view to individual parishes discussing the document and providing comments to the Forum, ahead of the final draft version going forward to Swindon Borough Council. The purpose of the document is to set out clear communication boundaries and responsibilities which will enable all parties to work collaboratively.

Many parishes were happy to adopt the document without any comments and therefore it was recommended that the final draft version is submitted to Swindon Borough Council's Cabinet Meeting in March 2024. The document will supersede the 2015 Borough, Town & Parish Council Charter. The document will be reviewed and adapted regularly, where necessary, with amendments being taken to the Swindon Local Councils Forum meetings and distributed to parishes. SBC Planning Officers have agreed to work with the Working Party on developing Annex 6 – Planning Protocol.

Proposed: Councillor C McEwen

Seconded: Councillor I Jankinson

Vote: Agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: To submit the draft document of the Protocol to Swindon Borough Council for adoption in March 2024.

360 Transfer of Services

The Transfer of Services Working Party gave a brief overview of recent conversations held with Swindon Borough Council Officers about the potential Transfer of Services and introduced a list of questions that were submitted to Brian Pinchbeck and Councillor J Grant:

Funding

- 1. What is the transitional funding transfer amount to the larger parishes – under the original proposal?** *Up to £1M, however, we would want to try to work together so as to get the figure lower than this by looking at other mutually beneficial savings such as options as discussed ref depot accommodation at Waterside for those Parishes who it would benefit.*
- 2. What will the ongoing funding be after 2024/2025?** *The £1M is the maximum and covers the total transition period.*
- 3. Who are classed as the 'larger parishes'?** *Central Swindon North and South Swindon plus West should they be interested in the option.*

Grouping

- 4. Which larger parish council is responsible for which smaller parish councils? Does SBC have some say about this, or will it be down to the smaller parishes to decide who to group with?** *This has not been determined and would be part of the discussion should we reach agreement.*
- 5. Will smaller parishes be forced to group with larger parishes?** *As all parishes are obliged by law to shop around for best value, a contractor may be cheaper delivering these services, there is also a concern that first and foremost the larger parishes will want to look after their own patch and their own residents. Smaller Parishes can either cross finance larger Parishes to carry out the work in their Parish or decide not to fund the work at all or buy the work in from another supplier.*
- 6. Can the smaller parishes decide to take on these services themselves?** *Yes of course should they wish. This would probably cost more due to the economy of scale a larger parish could gain and therefore deliver a lower total cost*
- 7. Who will take the overall liability, the Borough Council, the larger parishes taking on the services or the smaller parishes receiving them?** *This would be the normal arrangements that occur when you buy a service in A supplier would have public liability insurance and therefore cover anything falling under this.*
- 8. Is the proposal about residents paying a supplementary fee (outside of the precept) to fund these services still on the cards? Will you have an update on this proposal?** *Yes, although we need to check if this is a legally allowed approach.*

TUPE

9. **What are the Service Level Agreements or Key Performance Indicators on the services? What is expected of the staff?** *This information has been sent through.*
10. **Staff allocation % - some of the services would be split between a few parishes and currently there is only a small number of resources assigned to that task (i.e. 6 FTE over what could be up to 10 parishes). It was also noted some may come with 20+ years' experience whereas others will only come with 2 years, how will these be fairly distributed?** *This drives you to a proposal to devolve to a small number of Parish to maintain the economy of scale.*
11. **How many staff are due to be TUPE'd?** *The number would relate to what activities move. The list has been passed across.*

Services

12. **Will the current Transfer of Services Deeds be amended to reflect the new services that parishes are taking on?** *We would assume so.*
13. **Are we expecting country parks; such as Coate Water, Lydiard, Barbury Castle, Birdrop Downs, Lawns, Mouldon Hill to be transferred in the near future?** *It is not being proposed to include country parks they are out of scope.*
14. **Who will take on the Town Centre? As residents Borough wide and beyond will use the amenities.** *This needs to form part of the agreement along with funding arrangements covering all parishes.*
15. **With regards to car park maintenance – will the income generated from the car parking tickets be offset to the parishes delivering the service?** *It is not intended to pass any car park revenue to Parishes as this would further deteriorate the financial position of SBC.*
16. **Amenity grass cutting on verges – expect the operatives will have to be Chapter 8 trained and have other skills outside of usual verge grass cutting due to the roundabouts/ traffic etc?** *In certain areas this will be the case.*
17. **Can you give an update on the reason for the libraries meetings scheduled in to Clerks & Chairs diaries? Is this another service likely to come to the parishes?** *We have a mixed method of running libraries across the borough We want to explore how we could drive best practice and potentially work together to understand if cost saving / customer enhancements are possible.*

Members felt that there was still a level of financial detail that would need to be provided by SBC Officers to enable them to take a proposal back to individual councils for discussion.

SBC Officers agreed to work on the details with Councillor J Grant and pass this information across within the next fortnight to allow sufficient time to meet the May 2024 timescales for negotiating with potentially TUPE'd staff.

The transitional funding could be applied to SBC to continue providing the service for the remainder of the financial year if it could demonstrate that there will be a change to the service in 2025/2026. From April 2025, there will be no transitional funding to pass to parishes undertaking these services but will allow plenty of time for parishes to consider the costs and budget for them accordingly. SBC Officers will provide the detail and present local councils with the options of taking on the service, funding SBC to continue providing the service – especially in heavily used areas such as the Town Centre or the scope of work for parishes to cost this out with local contractors and the larger parishes. Members agreed that if parishes were buying in to SBC's services, the services would have to be improved as the current method is not adequate.

Members felt that the October timescale was unrealistic given the complexities of the services to be undertaken and the resources, equipment, insurance, and liability agreements. Members agreed that paying for the SBC services seemed to be the most supportive and simple method.

The options to be presented are:

- Costs of moving activities to larger parishes.
- Costs for SBC to continue providing the services.
- Costs if agreement not met and SBC will cease services from 1st April 2025
- Costs for parishes to take on their own services.

SBC Officers will also review the previously applied 'Special Rate' to Council Tax bills which could help fund the services away from parish council precepts.

361 Members Reports

D Bourne (WALC): Advised that she was leaving her position at Community First / Wiltshire Association of Local Councils but has thoroughly enjoyed participating in the Swindon Local Council Forum meetings and impressed by the discussions, networking and parishes working collectively. Encouraged Members to attend the Wiltshire Association of Local Councils meetings, the next one is on zoom on Monday 19th February 2024 and some representation from Swindon to discuss Wiltshire wide issues – some of which are similar – could be useful to share best practice.

Councillor J Grant (SBC): Local Pickleball Club is on the lookout for indoor venues, approximately the size of two tennis courts. The club is willing to pay and is interested in promoting the sport locally for all ages.

362 Items for the Next Agenda

To be passed to the Secretary ahead of the meeting on Thursday 21st March 2024.

The meeting finished at 20:49