

Minutes of the Swindon Local Councils Forum meeting held at 7.00pm on Thursday 21st November 2024 in Committee Room 2, Civic Offices, Euclid Street

Those present: Councillor V Manro (Chairman), S Heyes (St Andrews), J Hewer (Wroughton), D Archer (Wroughton), G Hawkes (Covingham), V Curtis (Covingham), P Park (Central Swindon North), M Lucas (Central Swindon North), Colin McEwen (South Marston), D Griffiths (South Swindon), R Hailstone (Haydon Wick), G Wilson (Liddington), A John (Haydon Wick), C Bunnie (Liddington) and I Jankinson (Blunsdon), R Codrington (Stanton Fitzwarren)

Also in attendance: Laura Cutter (Secretary), Ian Nockolds (WALC County Advisor), J Mee (South Swindon), Kirstin Nelson (Swindon Borough Council), Helena Robinson (Swindon Borough Council)

384 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received and accepted from Councillors G Philpot (West Swindon), S Gattapur (West Swindon), L Gow (Highworth), M Compton (Blunsdon) and N Hopkins (South Swindon)

385 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 19th September 2024 were accepted and signed as a true record.

Proposed: I Jankinson

Seconded: J Hewer

Vote: Agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 19th September were approved as a true record.

386 UPDATES FROM WILTSHIRE ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Members introduced Ian Nockolds (County Advisor) from WALC.

Conference and Networking:

- A conference was held in early November in Devizes
- The conference was well-attended with positive feedback
- Members found it interesting to learn about smaller rural parishes in Wiltshire operating with minimal budgets

Upcoming Events and Elections:

- Wiltshire elections are expected in 2025
- Potential events in Swindon are being planned for early next year - Moredon Sports Hub was suggested as a potential event location

Networking and Professional Development:

- Planning a series of networking sessions for Clerks/Officers and Chairs
- Collaborating with Wiltshire SLCC to ensure complementary events
- Mental health was a significant topic of discussion at the conference

Organisational Developments:

- A Large Councils group is being formed - Mark Smith from Chippenham will host the first meeting early next year.
- The group plans to meet periodically at different locations.

Administrative Updates:

- NALC has determined subscriptions for the next year
- An announcement about the next Executive Meeting is forthcoming
- Members noted significant improvements in communications and thanked Ian for his support

387 BOROUGH & LOCAL COUNCILS PROTOCOL & PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Colin McEwen introduced Kirstin Nelson (Stronger & Safer Communities) and Helena Robinson (Head of Integrated Community Services).

Members acknowledged there has been intermittent engagement with Swindon Borough Council (SBC) over the last 3 years. The protocol was endorsed by Cabinet in March 2024 and has many appendices that need working through. Since the approval at Cabinet, the Swindon Plan has been adopted and the SBC Senior Leadership Team have been tasked with these objectives. The deliverables within the document consider the protocol and annexes, therefore, it was suggested that as the Swindon Plan is the top objective this is now the basis on which the Borough will engage with the Parishes. The Plan has, effectively, subsumed the issues in the Appendices.

Kirstin explained that she has been reviewing gaps within the system and understanding the local matters which have caused some frustrations, dedicated to rebuilding the relationships and communication gaps to promote partnership working. SBC is fully aware that the Swindon Plan cannot be delivered in isolation and is keen to work with enabling partners establishing. Kirstin is tasked with understanding the statutory roles of SBC and establishing where these may be better placed. Once data is received this will be discussed with the relevant parishes to obtain the local knowledge needed and the parishes aspirations within the local community.

Parishes need to understand what the Swindon Plan is and what the roles and portfolios of the people within the roles are. Clerks and Chairs meetings should be more strategic and leadership updates rather than the frustrations of not having up to date or correct SBC Officer information.

Kirstin has collected issues via the Clerks at each parish council and the issues are being investigated. Many issues surrounding S106 monies are now moving, and funds are being paid. Some parishes unsure where the S106 money is coming from as had a lot of development, so clarification was requested.

Other items put forward included SBC sharing parish communications; as an example three parishes worked together to host a decade disco for the memory café, and as this is a social care element SBC could have shared the news story, as benefits several parts of Swindon.

Chiseldon mentioned an example faced by a small parish council, it wishes to install a public bench, which costs £300, but the street works licence is £700 plus the costs of installation, PPE and resourcing etc. which makes this simple project unaffordable.

Liddington explained about works required down a narrow footpath, the verges are overgrown, so contacted SBC but the cost of this was too expensive. Ideas need to be collated on how this could be done, rather than the obstacles faced, this would be

helped in most cases with a conversation and understanding from both parties. Appreciate resourcing and available time is a constraint.

SBC Ward Councillors need to be integrated into local projects and actively encouraged to attend Parish Council meetings.

Members thanked Kirstin and Helen for attending the meeting and welcomed them to future meetings where required.

19.32 Kirstin and Helen left the meeting.

Members accepted that the provisions of the Protocol Annexes had been subsumed by Borough's adoption the Swindon Plan. Members wished to remain engaged with the Borough. The remit of the Working Party was accordingly extended to the Plan and its implementation.

Members have dealt with three different Officers and Councillors over the last three years – but if there is some stability, there may be some progress. Parishes are finally mentioned within the Swindon Plan.

388 CASE STUDIES

The Chairman introduced the item regarding delivering services and considering future provisions. The Chairman invited sharing experiences and/or best practice and efficiencies. As an example, smaller parishes may require services from larger parishes such as Street Sweeping, grounds maintenance and play area repairs.

Wroughton – recently moved into a unit and taking over a redundant garage. Has 6 grounds team and recently purchased a road sweeper which has been accepted very well. Wroughton is going to be taking over some community grass cutting within Wichelstowe (roadsides, etc but not management areas). Wroughton has a BMX track and several play areas to maintain. Wroughton is involved with the planning of the Wichelstowe Sports Hub. Grounds team deal with day to day tasks such as fly tipping, graffiti removal and maintenance of street furniture. Consumables could be purchased in

Central Swindon North – Has outsourced grounds maintenance and services to contractors who are doing well. This generally saves the expense of management, training facilities, HR. A lot of ad hoc play areas and playing fields work requires high level maintenance. Understand that the National Insurance issue is causing knock on effect to Contractors who may have to consider prices moving forwards.

South Swindon – Acknowledged that the salary budget and managing staff is time consuming, however, the flexibility is beneficial and allows parish to do whatever it wishes to do. Have been in current depot for 5 years and it is now become too small, so another venue is being sought. The current proposal is too large so would consider being able to share the space with nearby parishes. The unit is 30,000sq feet but only need 10,000sq feet. Will be refreshing vehicles next year, adding on another one would result in discounts etc if negotiating at the same time. Tennis court/multi use games area has recently been refurbished and has a sand base which could be suitable for demonstrating equipment.

Members agreed it would be useful to have an index of what each parish is working on i.e. (tendering, grounds maintenance facilities/storage, street sweeping, weed spraying) and other shared services. This could be available on teams and be updated by individual parishes and form space for general discussions/advice and networking amongst Members. This development is timely due to budget setting and projects being agreed for the year ahead.

Members acknowledged that they have many template risk assessments and safe systems of work, policies and procedures, so always ask and these can be distributed to save time.

389 SPORT ENGLAND PROJECT

South Swindon and Central Swindon North are working together on a joint bid to bring some money down from Sport England. The project has been going for 5 months and so far, a budget of £130k has been awarded to put a bid together for work within areas of deprivation and within four wards. The project is focusing on health and how to get people more active. Voluntary Action Swindon has been employed to do some community research and the outcome could be a £3-4 million pound grant.

The project investigates the reasons why people do not wish to use local facilities and sporting hubs – such as finances, energy, crime, no lightening. Experience from Moredon Sports Hub is that it has been very successful and future ideas to bring to this if there is more grant funding available.

390 MEMBER COUNCIL VOTING RATIOS

Central Swindon North put forward concerns that the larger parishes could be outvoted by some of the smaller parishes on some items and was looking for some proportional representation when voting on certain local matters.

Members determined that there is no binding agreements made within the Forum and that parishes can continue discussions individually. Recently the example of the Transfer of Services negotiations, there was agreement that SLCF would stop negotiations, but individual conversations could continue. SLCF presented a long list of reasons to cease negotiations – such as unclarity on TUPE'd staff, legalities, statutory responsibilities not being clarified. There was no clear proposals 18 months into the discussions. Parishes of all sizes were at the meetings whereby this were discussed, and the consensus was that all agreed to the same approach.

Members recalled that during the negotiations in 2017 on transfer of services, a lot of smaller/medium parishes were being offered different incentives to take on different work, which led to common practice myths which led to confusion and inadequate deeds. There was general agreement that it had been advantageous to have had joint representation for the recent ToS negotiations. This should continue to ensure that there was transparency and equity going forward.

The Chairman apologised if any items were not communicated properly and will ensure that messages moving forward are clear. The Terms of Reference were last agreed in 2017 so perhaps this discussion can be reviewed when updating the documents. The Forum is a place for general collective discussions on how parishes can work together on local items and how to improve communications and Swindon as a whole.

Members Reports

R Hailstone – Attended Standards Committee Working Party – SBC is looking into changing code of conduct, in line with new negotiation model, proposing to go to consultation in the new year. Based on the feedback, the new code of conduct will be approved at the Annual Meeting of SBC next year. The new code of conduct is simpler and easier to understand, there are some differences in what a personal

interest and a pecuniary interest is. Training would need to take place. Parishes should be consulted.

I Jankinson – Oasis consultation closes on the 27th November. Is there any updates on the Local Plan Review?

C McEwen – Has received a summary of what SBC meeting structures and acknowledged both are called 'Forums' which could lead to confusion. CEO/Chair & Clerks Leadership meetings due to commence in January 2025.

J Mee – Proposal from Neil Hopkins (build a green Swindon) scheme running for thermal image cameras – losing heat, doesn't think deliverable by Swindon and potential could be done as a parish scheme and buy in equipment, these can be hired. 100 people in demand in Trowbridge, could roll out amongst residents. There is potential funding – so the project may not cost anything other than time – will circulate this through and is happy to answer any questions.

A John – Highways maintenance issues 20mph; SBC initiative, working with SBC Ward Cllrs in Haydon Wick. Sent survey in October online and in person, some also through public enquiries.

V Manro – Gov consultation about hybrid meetings 16th December, giving parishes the opportunity to make own choices.

391 ITEMS FOR THE NEXT AGENDA

To be passed to the Secretary and Chairman in advance of the next meeting on Thursday 20th March 2025.