

CABINET

WEDNESDAY, 11 JULY 2012

PRESENT:- Councillors Roderick Bluh (Chair), David Renard (Vice-Chair), Mark Edwards, Fionuala Foley, Dale Heenan, Russell Holland, Brian Mattock, Garry Perkins, Vera Tomlinson and Keith Williams.

Councillor Mark Dempsey attended the meeting in respect of Minutes 17, 20, 22, 23 and 27. Councillor Stan Pajak attended the meeting in respect of Minutes 16, 17, 19 and 28. Councillor Julian Price attended the meeting in respect of Minutes 24 and 27. Councillor Rochelle Russell attended the meeting in respect of Minutes 17, 19 and 26. Councillor Bob (Robert) Wright attended the meeting in respect of Minutes 16, 17, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27 and 28.

11. Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of the need to declare any known interests in any matters to be considered at the meeting.

12. Exempt Items - Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved – That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during the discussion of the matters referred to in Agenda Item No. 19 of the Notice of the Meeting on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act, and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information concerned. (Minute 28 refers.)

13. Stronger Together - Accommodation

The Chair advised that this item had been withdrawn. He explained that as the result of the receipt of a letter earlier in the day from Unison expressing the trade union's concerns at proposals contained within the Stronger Together Accommodation report and the lack of formal consultation that had taken place with the trade union and with staff on the issue, he had decided to defer consideration of the item to enable appropriate consultation to take place and for the concerns raised to be considered. The report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

14. Minutes

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11th June 2012 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

15. Public Question Time

The following questions were asked in accordance with Standing Order 28 –

Questioner

Ms Karyse Day, Chiseldon.

Question

In view of the consistent refusal of Swindon Primary Care Trust, and the Joint Director of Public Health, to meet with Swindon Link representatives to discuss the commissioning of complementary and alternative medicine services would the Council agree to request its Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the Primary Care Trust's failure to involve and engage patients in its decision not to commission such services to meet the health and equality needs of Swindon residents, and to demonstrate how it has responded to the public in relation to the commissioning decisions it has made?

Response

The Chair thanked Ms Day for her question. The Chair and the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care responded at the meeting.

Questioner

Mr Colin McEwen, South Marston Parish Council.

Question

Will the Cabinet note that the strict definition of a "strategic site" as requiring 850 housing units, as proposed by the draft Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations (Agenda Item 12) appears to prevent proper funding of complex and locally sensitive developments?

Response

The Chair thanked Mr McEwen for his question. The Chair and the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability responded at the meeting. Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability, agreed to provide a further written response to Mr McEwen on his question and comments.

16. Adoption of the Corporate Strategy 2012

The Leader of the Council, the Board Director, Transformation and Strategic Projects and the Head of Strategy and Innovation submitted a joint report concerning the preparation of the Council's Corporate Strategy and setting out the progress made to date and details of the proposed priorities and strategies to underpin the Strategy and of the plans being developed support them.

The Chair referred to the significance of the emerging Corporate Strategy for the future of the Council and the way it would respond to the challenges it faced and the outcomes desired by local residents.

Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Streetsmart and Corporate Services, proposed that the second bullet point in paragraph 3.9 of the joint report should be changed for subsequent reports to more accurately reflect the role of Streetsmart as the Council's "client" rather than to refer to its "contractor". She believed this would help residents and partners to clarify where responsibility rested.

Councillor Bob Wright welcomed the strategy but commented that in his view the emerging strategy currently reflected little "hope and happiness" in its tone. He believed that this was an important element of any vision and strategy and that it

would also be a key factor in encouraging engagement with local communities and harder to reach groups such as young people with such a strategy.

The Chair noted and supported Councillor Wright's comments and advised that his observations would be taken into account in the future work to be undertaken to develop the strategy.

Councillor Stan Pajak welcomed the report and the progress made in developing the Strategy. He was particularly pleased to see it was being developed as a "partnership" document. He saw it as a key tool to promote Swindon and to set out the response to the challenges that it faced in the future around funding and demand for services. He hoped that through a partnership approach this would avoid the duplication of service provision and enable the most effective use of the limited resources available to benefit local communities.

The Chair welcomed the comments of Councillors and those of Cabinet colleagues. He emphasised the significance of the work already undertaken by the Council through Stronger Together and the importance of the strategy to take that forward.

Resolved – (1) That the purpose and scope of the Council's Corporate Strategy, as stated in paragraphs 3.1, 3.2, and 5.1 of the joint report, be approved.

(2) That approval be given to Part One of the Council's Corporate Strategy as referred to in the joint report, in the form of:

- The most important challenges and opportunities identified in paragraph 3.5;
- The Priorities listed in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7; and
- The Strategies listed in paragraphs 3.9 (as amended) to 3.13.

(3) That the Head of Strategy and Innovation be authorised to work with Councillors and officers to develop the measures of success and more detailed strategies as the basis for Part Two of the Council's Corporate Strategy for consideration by the Cabinet at its meeting on 5th September 2012.

(4) That it be noted that the Council's complete Corporate Strategy will be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration prior to being presented to full Council for adoption on 20th September 2012.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

17. Budget Management 2012/13 and Budget Strategy 2013/14 and Beyond

The Cabinet Member for Finance and the Board Director, Finance, Revenues, Benefits and Property submitted a joint report setting out the current forecast outturn position of the Council's Revenue Budget as at the end of May 2012, the medium-term financial context for the Council's Budget, and proposed guidelines for setting the 2013/14 Budget and Medium Term Resourcing Plan for 2016/17.

Councillor Mark Edwards, Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced the report and highlighted the projected position for the outturn of the Council's Budget, at year end. He referred to the reasons why there was a projected overspend in spending on Children's services and the actions that were being taken to address this. He commented on the continuing challenges the Council would face as it moved forward into the next and future Financial Years, and on the steps it would need to

take and the strategies it would need to implement to address these challenges and to continue to deliver high quality services to local residents. Whilst the careful management of the Council's finances had placed it in a strong and robust position there remained considerable risk and uncertainty for the Council's finances in the short and medium term as a result of changes in local government funding and, in particular, the impact of the implementation of the Government's changes in Housing finance, Benefits and Business rates.

Councillor Bob Wright referred to the changes in Housing finance and the interest rate associated with the Council's debt charges. He commented on the impact of the implementation of the Government's Welfare and Benefits changes on the demand for Council housing and on its support for the health and wellbeing of local residents.

The Chair noted Councillor Wright's comments and that the Council and residents would be faced with significant challenges.

Councillor Stan Pajak commented on the changes to Housing finance and Benefits and to the implications of these for the Council. He asked for clarification on the issue of the oversupply in the sheltered housing sector and the steps to be taken to address this.

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for One Swindon, Localities and Housing, responded to Councillor Pajak's comments and explained that consultation was being undertaken on the possible amendment of the eligibility criteria for sheltered housing, by considering slightly lowering the age limit.

Councillor Mark Dempsey referred to the importance of engaging and listening to local communities, but queried the proposed spending on the "Big Conversation". He wondered if it would not be better to use this funding to reduce the impact of the service reductions that were taking place elsewhere.

The Chair noted Councillor Dempsey's comments and explained the significance of the "Big Conversation". It was not just a budget consultation exercise. He would arrange for Councillor Dempsey to receive a written breakdown of the costs associated with the project.

Councillor Rochelle Russell commented on the success of the "Life" project in Swindon and the significance of this approach for the future.

The Chair noted that the significance of Swindon's "Life" project was nationally recognised. He believed that it established an approach that would be refined and adopted across the Council to deliver both a more effective outcome to residents and reduced costs for the Council and its partners. He reiterated the challenges facing the Council and its finances. However, he believed the action the Council was taking and the strategies proposed within the report would equip it well to respond to those challenges.

Resolved – (1) That the projected out-turn position of the Council's Revenue Budget for 2012/13, as set out in Table 1 and Appendices 1 and 2 of the joint report, be noted.

(2) That the one-off allocation of £97,000 from earmarked reserves to fund a more engaging Budget Setting process for 2013/14 by increasing the understanding

of, and participation in, local decision making under Stronger Together be approved.

(3) That the one-off allocation of up to £200,000 to fund work associated with the implementation of major Housing and Council Tax Benefit changes, the introduction of the national universal credits system and a local welfare fund to be met from Government Grant and one-off specific reserves, be approved.

(4) That the one-off allocation of £36,000 from earmarked reserves to fund essential improvements to the Capita One Information Technology system to improve the flow of information and reduce duplication in the handling of data between the Children and Families Referral Team and other teams, be approved.

(5) That the Revenue Budget virements, as set out in Appendix 3 to the joint report, be approved.

(6) That the challenging financial context for the Council for 2013/14 and beyond and, in particular, the new risks that will be faced around future funding be noted.

(7) That the proposed strategies, as set out in Table 2 to the joint report, to address the 2013/14 Budget, be endorsed and Council officers undertake further work in these areas.

(8) That the 2013/14 Budget assumptions, as set out in Appendix 4 to the joint report, the key issues to be considered in developing a Housing Revenue Account Medium Term Financial Plan, the position on Housing Revenue Account Reserve balances, and the key issues facing the Dedicated Schools Grant, be noted.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

18. Capital Programme 2011/12 Out-turn, Capital Programme 2012/13 and Treasury Management Performance 2011/12

The Cabinet Member for Finance and the Board Director, Finance, Revenues, Benefits and Property submitted a joint report concerning (a) the outturn position of the Council's Capital Budget for 2011/12, (b) the Council's Capital Programme for 2012/13, and (c) the Council's Treasury Management performance for 2011/12.

Councillor Mark Edwards, Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced the report and highlighted the outturn position of the Council's Capital Budget and its linkage to the achievement of the Capital Programme for 2012/13. He commented on the use of Council borrowing to fund Capital works and on the challenges the Council faced. He referred to the need for decisions on Capital spending and for Capital projects to be based on robust review and monitoring and to be appropriate to meet the requirements of Swindon and its residents.

Resolved – (1) That the 2011/12 Capital Out-turn position the Capital Programme for 2012/13 and the 2011/12 Treasury Management performance and Prudential Indicators, as set out in the joint report, be noted.

(2) That the new Capital Programme schemes, as set out in paragraph 4.2 of the joint report, be approved.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

19. Additional Primary School Places in Swindon Town Centre

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, the Board Director, Commissioning and the Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment submitted a joint report concerning the provision of additional primary school places in Swindon Town Centre, and setting out (a) the outcome of the consultation on the three potential school sites reported to the Cabinet in December 2011, (b) alternative options put forward by St Joseph's Catholic College and the White Horse Federation during the consultation exercise, and (c) proposals for further consultation on a location for the additional school places from September 2014.

Councillor David Renard, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, commented on the background to the report and highlighted the need for additional school places in Swindon Town Centre. He referred to the outcome of the consultation exercise and to the new suggested options that had arisen. He explained the reasons for the preferred options put forward in the joint report and why he believed these were the most appropriate to meet the increasing demand for primary places.

Councillor Stan Pajak, Eastcot Ward Councillor, supported the recommendations within the report. He noted that at the consultation meeting he had attended the majority attending were residents living adjacent to possible sites and not parents affected by the shortage of school places. He wondered if more could be done to involve this group in the process in order that a more balanced response could be received.

Councillor Bob Wright, Central Ward Councillor, referred to the consultation that had taken place within the local area and locality and the strong support within the community for the option put forward by St Joseph's College. He referred to the advantages of this option for local residents, the school community and for the Council's finances.

Councillor Rochelle Russell asked whether any proposals had come forward for a "free school" in Swindon.

Councillor David Renard, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, thanked Councillors for their comments. He advised that there had been no approaches made to the Council regarding "free schools" at the primary level. However, discussions were taking place with Commonweal Academy regarding a possible "free school" "sixth form" provision.

Resolved – That, for the reasons set out in paragraph 3.16 of the joint report, the Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment be authorised to undertake further wide spread consultation and a detailed financial appraisal on the proposals to provide an additional two forms of entry (60 reception places) by providing a new school at the County Road Depot site or by an expansion of St Joseph's Catholic College to a 4-19 school.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, the Board Director, Commissioning and the Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment submitted a joint report concerning the provision of additional primary school places in North Swindon, and setting out (a) the outcome of a feasibility study commissioned for the provision of an additional two forms of entry (60 reception places) in North Swindon from September 2014, and (b) proposals for undertaking a public consultation on two options set out in the joint report.

Councillor David Renard, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, commented on the background to the report and highlighted the continuing need for additional school places in North Swindon. He referred to the outcome of the feasibility study and to the difficulty of identifying solutions. He explained the reasons for the options presented in the joint report and the consultation that would be undertaken on these.

Councillor Renard reported that he had received earlier in the day the following comment from Haydon Wick Parish Council regarding the proposal "Haydon Wick Parish Council supports the need for more primary school places but the site at Mouldon Hill is inappropriate due to it being a serious flood plain and not on a safe walking route for the majority of housing." He noted the comments and advised that these would be taken into account as part of the proposed consultation and incorporated into the review of the options available.

Councillor Mark Dempsey referred to the continuing and pressing demand for school places in North Swindon. He asked what consideration had been given to the future provision of secondary school places in the area. He also noted that a new primary school was included in the plans for the Tadpole Farm development and wondered if this could be used to offset some of the pressure for places elsewhere in North Swindon.

Councillor Renard thanked Councillor Dempsey for his comments and questions. Whilst there was no immediate pressure on secondary school places in North Swindon it was planned to submit a report on long-term planning of secondary school places to the Cabinet in autumn 2012. The school provision planned for the Tadpole Farm development would reflect the demands likely to arise from that development and it therefore was unlikely to be able to respond to the current pressures occurring elsewhere in North Swindon.

Resolved – (1) That the results of the feasibility study for an additional two forms of entry (60 reception places) from September 2014 in North Swindon, be noted.

(2) That the Board Director, Commissioning be authorised to conduct wide spread consultation on the two options for an additional two forms of entry (60 reception places) from September 2014 in North Swindon as follows:

- Expansion of Orchid Vale Primary School and provision of a new one form entry (30 reception places) school on land to the west of Thamesdown Drive at Taw Hill.
- Provision of a new two form entry (60 reception places) school on land to the west of Thamesdown Drive at Taw Hill, Swindon.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the

report to the meeting.

**21. One Swindon - Annual Report - First Year
(Minute for Confirmation)**

The Cabinet Member for One Swindon, Localities and Housing and the Board Director, Localities submitted a joint report setting out the One Swindon Annual Report for July 2012. A joint supplementary report was circulated at the meeting setting out further changes to the Annual Report (Appendix 1) following a One Swindon Board meeting held on the 3rd July 2012.

Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for One Swindon, Localities and Housing, explained that the Annual Report set out the work undertaken by the One Swindon partners in the first twelve months since the programme was approved by the Council (Minute 97 2011/12 refers), and commented on the future plans to expand on the impact of One Swindon.

Resolved – (1) That the first One Swindon Annual Report, as set out at Appendix One to the supplementary joint report, be noted and referred to the Council for approval.

(2) That the Board Director Localities, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, and the Cabinet Member for One Swindon, Localities and Housing, be authorised to develop a set of objectives for the second year for endorsement by Cabinet and the One Swindon Board.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

**22. A Community Infrastructure Levy for Swindon
(Minute for Confirmation)**

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability and the Head of Planning submitted a joint report concerning the requirement for the Council to prepare a Community Infrastructure Levy to secure financial contributions from new development to fund essential infrastructure.

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability, advised that recent legislative changes had made it more difficult for the Council to secure developer contributions to mitigate the impact of new development through Section 106 Planning Obligations. He believed that there were now clear Planning and financial benefits for the Council to implement a Community Infrastructure Levy for the Borough to fund essential infrastructure. He referred to the work that had been undertaken to prepare the Swindon Community Infrastructure Levy Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule and to how the Levy would be implemented and used. He emphasised that this was the charging element of the Community Infrastructure Levy and that the “Delivery Plan”, that would also be a very key element, was to follow.

Councillor Mark Dempsey referred to the Haydon 3 Section 106 Agreement and to how he hoped that the Community Infrastructure Levy would enable funding to be spent in the areas directly affected by the development concerned and would take account of the wishes and requirements of local communities.

Councillor Bob Wright enquired how the levels set within the Charging Levy had been identified. He commented on the Council's wish to encourage small business development and to whether this priority was reflected in the Charging schedule. He believed it would be useful if briefings on Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy could be included in the Member Development programme.

The Chair noted Councillor Dempsey's comments and explained the background to the renegotiation of the Haydon 3 Section 106 Planning Agreement and its intention to offset infrastructure costs associated with the impact of the development on the Borough.

Councillor Heenan explained that the Charging Schedule was subject to independent review and validation and that was how levels had been arrived at. He advised that many of the issues raised by Councillors and Cabinet colleagues would be addressed and considered when the Delivery Plan element of the Levy came forward. Briefings had already been held for Councillors on Section 106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy, but he was happy to see these repeated. They would be open, as previously, to all Members.

Resolved – (1) That the Council be recommended to approve the Swindon Community Infrastructure Levy Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule as set out in Appendix 1 to the joint report of the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability and the Head of Planning.

(2) That the Head of Planning be authorised to publish the Swindon Community Infrastructure Levy Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule for public consultation, in accordance with the process and procedures set out in paragraph 2.19 of the joint report.

(3) That the Head of Planning, in consultation with the Director of Law and Democratic Services and the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability, be authorised to make minor factual or typographical amendments to the Community Infrastructure Levy Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule prior to consultation.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

23. Towards a University in Swindon

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, the Board Director, Commissioning and the Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment submitted a joint report concerning the progress made in establishing a Swindon Higher Education Strategy Project Group to develop a new higher education strategy for Swindon. (Minute 93 2011/12 refers.)

Councillor David Renard, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, commented on the background to the report and highlighted the progress that had been made in establishing the partnership Project Group. He drew attention to the Project Group's objectives and that it intended to submit a draft strategy and outline business case to the Cabinet in December 2012.

Councillor Mark Dempsey welcomed the report. He was disappointed by the lack of a Labour Group representative on the proposed Project Group and he asked

if this might be considered. He enquired what resources were going to be made available to support the Project Group and its work.

Councillor Renard noted Councillor Dempsey's comments and confirmed he would give the issue of representation consideration. He believed the skills and knowledge that each partner would bring to the Project Group were the only resources needed at this stage to bring the project forward.

Councillor Bob Wright referred to the successful University Technical College bid and to the latest site plans, He commented on the link to any future university provision.

Councillor Dale Heenan, Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability, referred to the importance of a partnership, team approach and a clear strategy. He believed these would be central to delivering a university for Swindon at some stage in the future. He cautioned that the provision of a university would not be a quick process and that the role of the partnership Project Group would be key.

Resolved – That the progress made to date be noted and the objectives set out in the terms of reference of the Swindon Higher Education Strategy Project Group, as referred to in paragraph 3.4 of the joint report, be approved.

(Councillor Russell Holland, Cabinet Member for One Swindon, Localities and Housing, made a personal declaration of interest in respect of the above item as he was a member of the Governing Body of New College, Swindon.)

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

24. Swindon Local Transport Plan - Implementation Plan 2012/13 - 2014/15

The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Strategic Transport and the Board Director, Service Delivery, submitted a joint report concerning the proposed Local Transport Plan Implementation Plan for 2012/13 to 2014/15, and the Local Transport Plan Capital Programme budget apportionment for 2012/13.

Councillor Keith Williams, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Strategic Transport, referred to the Council's Local Transport Plan (LPT3) adopted by the Council in April 2011. He explained that the LTP programme was subject to an annual report to the Cabinet to ensure transparency in the apportionment of the funding and to aid the delivery of the programme. He highlighted the main features of the Implementation Plan for 2012/13 - 2014/15. He explained how flexibility was built into the Plan to enable schemes to be brought forward or delayed if circumstances required this.

Councillor Julian Price commented on the Plan. He asked whether consideration had been given to linking it to other Local Transport Plans in order that Swindon could be seen in the wider context as a "Travel to Area". He referred to the removal of speed cameras in Swindon and asked if there were any plans to return to such provision? He noted the intentions regarding workplace travel plans and wondered if consideration had been given to sports or events travel plans, for example associated with Swindon Town Football Club? He asked for clarification on

the proposed orbital bus route and whether this was a Town Centre orbital route or around Swindon route?

Councillor Williams responded to Councillor Price's questions and comments and advised that he would be happy to speak to Councillor Price in more detail on these issues following the meeting.

Resolved – (1) That the Local Transport Plan (LTP) Implementation Plan for 2012/13 to 2014/15, as set out in Appendix 3 to the joint report, be approved.

(2) That the Local Transport Plan Capital Programme budget categories and total spend for 2012/13, as detailed in Tables 3 to 6 of the Implementation Plan, be approved.

(3) That, further to the decisions in (1) and (2) above, the Head of Highways and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Strategic Transport and the Cabinet Member for StreetSmart and Corporate Services, be authorised to:

- prioritise schemes in accordance with One Swindon priorities,
- approve scheme progression in accordance with the updated Protocol (originally approved by the Cabinet in July 2010),
- vary allocations between different budget categories,
- approve variations in scheme costs, and
- add / substitute schemes, provided expenditure is contained within the approved total budget.

(Councillors Keith Williams Cabinet Member for Leisure and Strategic Transport, and Councillor Fionuala Foley, Cabinet Member for Streetsmart and Corporate Services, made personal declarations of interest in respect of the above item as they were Council appointed Non-Executive Directors on the Board of Thamesdown Transport Ltd.)

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

25. Debt Management

The Cabinet Member for Finance, the Board Director, Finance, Revenues, Benefits and Property and the Head of Revenues and Benefits submitted a joint report concerning the performance by the Council and its partners in relation to debt management and the collection rates for Council Tax and Business Rates in 2011/12.

Councillor Mark Edwards, Cabinet Member for Finance, introduced the report and referred to the excellent performance of the Council and its partners across a number of collection and debt management activities.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits explained the detail of the report and highlighted the benchmarking undertaken with other local authorities and Swindon's continued successful performance in comparison with national performance targets and indicators.

Councillor Edwards referred to the Council's continued excellent performance rates at a time of difficult economic conditions, and to the way in which it not only successfully collected the debts, but did so with compassion where it was required

in order to assist vulnerable residents.

Resolved – (1) That the Debt Management performance be noted, in particular that (i) Council Tax collection was maintained in 2011/12, (ii) the collection of overpaid Benefits, miscellaneous incomes and Business Improvement District charges improved, (iii) collection rates for Housing, Car Parking penalty charge and Business Rates reduced, (iv) Swindon collection rates remain either top quartile or above average compared to other unitary authorities, and (v) Council Tax arrears of £1.3 million owed from previous financial years was collected in 2011/12.

(2) That the Revenues and Benefits and Housing teams, and the Council's partner Capita, be congratulated on their performance in Debt Management and Collection Rates for 2011/12.

(The Chair left the meeting during the consideration of this item. Councillor David Renard, Vice-Chair, took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.)

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

26. Review of Education Transport Appeals Procedure

The Cabinet Member for Children's Services, the Board Director, Commissioning and the Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment submitted a joint report concerning the outcome of the review requested by the Cabinet on the Transport Appeals Process, specifically whether the Council should restore the ability of parents to personally address the School Transport Appeals Sub Committee, and for the decision to be implemented in September 2012 (Minute 104 2011/12 refers.)

Councillor David Renard, Cabinet Member for Children's Services, commented on the background to the report and the Council motion, which had resulted in the review. He highlighted the response received to the consultation undertaken. He expressed his support for the approach recommended in the joint report.

Councillor Rochelle Russell expressed her support for allowing appellants the opportunity to address the Appeals Sub-Committee. She referred to her experience as both a member of the Sub-Committee and as, in the past, an appellant. She asked for clarification to be provided on who would be responsible for determining that "exceptional circumstances" would apply in any particular case.

Councillor Bob Wright expressed his support for allowing appellants to address the Sub-Committee. He explained that much of his constituency work involved providing help to residents to fill in important forms. Many of his constituents found this difficult whilst they could clearly express themselves in a face-to-face situation.

Councillor Renard noted the views expressed and reiterated his reasons for supporting the review's recommendations.

Resolved – (1) That the results of the review, including the consultation, of the Education Transport Appeals Procedure be noted, and the existing Transport Appeals process be retained that considers written case papers only without the presence of the local authority or the parent / carer, unless there are exceptional

circumstances where, because of specific medical reasons, the claimant is unable to present a written case, or where English is not the appellants first language and they do not have a good command of written English.

(2) That the requirement for all members of the Transport Appeals Sub-Committee to be trained in the detail of the Council's Transport Policy and its implementation before taking up his or her responsibilities as a member of the Committee, be endorsed.

(3) That the decisions referred to in (1) and (2) above be implemented in the Transport Policy for September 2012 and 2013.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

27. Train Services for the Future - Update on Great Western Main Line Rail Issues

The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Strategic Transport and the Board Director, Commissioning presented a joint report setting out the work undertaken since February 2012 to progress Swindon Borough Council's priorities on rail, particularly in respect of the Great Western Main Line. (Minute 94 2011/12 refers.)

Councillor Keith Williams, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Strategic Transport, commented on the work being undertaken to seek to influence decisions being taken on rail issues affecting Swindon and to work with Bristol City Council and Cardiff Council to promote the Great Western Main Line Corridor.

Councillor Mark Dempsey commented on the serious impact of high rail fares both for local commuters and for the growth of the Swindon economy. He enquired what action had been taken to work with local MPs to lobby the Government on the issue.

Councillor Julian Price acknowledged the concerns over fares but highlighted there were other significant benefits that could result from improved rail services. He referred to the establishment of rail halts in commuter and new development areas where this was possible. This would have a significant effect on Swindon's traffic problems. He enquired why Swindon was seeking to work only with Bristol and Cardiff on such issues.

Councillor Bob Wright referred to the disparity in charging bands implemented by the rail companies. In particular that it was cheaper to buy a ticket to Didcot and then from Didcot to London than to buy a ticket from Swindon to London. This, in his, view was a completely unacceptable situation.

Councillor Williams thanked Councillors and Cabinet colleagues for their comments. Despite the Council's best efforts Network Rail remained unconvinced and unsupportive of establishing commuter halts. He commented that in respect of new developments he believed that rapid bus transit offered a more flexible answer than a fixed rail based solution. He explained that the Council had entered into a memorandum of understanding with Bristol and Cardiff Councils in view of a number of mutual interests around their position on the Great Western Main Line / M4 corridor.

Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture, commented on the meetings that had previously taken place with the local Members of Parliament and Government Ministers on the rail fares issue and that he was sure this lobbying would continue.

Resolved – (1) That the work undertaken since February 2012 to progress Swindon Borough Council's priorities on rail, be noted.

(2) That the Board Director, Commissioning be authorised to undertake further co-ordinated lobbying on the matters of economic development through the Memorandum of Understanding between Bristol City Council, Cardiff County Council and Swindon Borough Council and the joint working of officers, Councillors and local Members of Parliament towards the same objectives.

(3) That the Leader of the Council, along with the Swindon Members of Parliament, be requested to continue to raise the matter of the current level of fares to and from Swindon rail station with the Department for Transport at every appropriate opportunity, in order to maximise the advantage for Swindon residents and businesses of a cheaper rate of rail travel in the future.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.

28. Strategic Acquisition of Buildings and Land at Regent Street and Morley Street, Swindon Town Centre

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture, the Head of Commissioning, Economy and Attainment, and the Board Director, Finance, Revenues, Benefits and Property submitted a joint report concerning the strategic acquisition of buildings and land at Regent Street, Temple Street, and Morley Street, Swindon Town Centre.

Councillor Garry Perkins, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture, explained that an opportunity had arisen for the Council to undertake the purchase of a number of strategic properties that would help pave the way for a future regeneration opportunity centred on the Granville Street Car Park, with links to both Regent Street and the Brunel Centre. He detailed the properties involved and referred to the financial implications for the Council of seeking their acquisition. He reported that, unfortunately, the Council had been unsuccessful in an auction bid to acquire a parcel of land at Morley Street, Swindon, as referred to in the report.

Councillor Stan Pajak and Councillor Bob Wright commented on issues surrounding the acquisition of the sites and their use in the short-term.

Resolved – (1) That the Board Director Finance, Revenues, Benefits and Property, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, be authorised to secure the purchase of the property in Regent Street, Swindon, identified as shaded area "A" on the plan attached as Appendix 1 to the joint report, on terms required by the Director of Law and Democratic Services and Head of Property Assets to protect the interests of the Council, using Prudential Borrowing as described in paragraph 3.5 of the joint report.

(2) That the Board Director Finance, Revenues, Benefits and Property, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, be authorised to secure the purchase of the property in Temple Street, Swindon, identified as shaded area "B" on the plan attached as Appendix 1 to the joint report, on such terms as required by the Director of Law and Democratic Services and Head of Property Assets to

protect the interests of the Council, and on the basis that the property is to be demolished as soon as practicable thereafter and the site converted into a pocket park, subject to planning consent being obtained.

(3) That further to the decision in (2) above, the Board Director Finance, Revenues, Benefits and Property make available a total budget of no greater than £1.75m for the purchase and all works, with funding as detailed in paragraph 3.13 of the joint report.

(4) That it be noted that the Council was unsuccessful in its bid at a recent auction of land at Morley Street, Swindon, as identified as shaded area "D" on the plan attached as Appendix 1 to the joint report.

(5) That it be noted that the Head of Property Assets, Council officers and Forward Swindon Ltd. will continue to monitor opportunities for acquisitions in the area immediately surrounding the Granville Street Car Park and to seek Cabinet approval to proceed to purchase as they arise.

The reasons for the decision and alternative options are as set out in the report to the meeting.