

CABINET - 8 March 2018

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: R Sleigh OBE, I Courts, T Diccico, K Grinsell, R Hulland, K Meeson, T Richards OBE, A Rolf, J Burn and J Windmill

(Cllr Burn left the meeting at 7.30pm and Cllr Windmill left at 7.45pm)

Officers: Nick Page, Paul Johnson, Deborah Merry, Andrew Kinsey, Alison McGrory, Jenny Wood, Dr Munday, Sally Hodges, Dr Wardle, John Pitcher and Jane Game

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Evans.

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

In relation to the private item Cllr Courts reminded Members he was a Director of the Urban Growth Company.

3. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

Cllr T Hodgson gave notice that he wished to address Cabinet on item 7 – Shirley Business Improvement District, and his address has been recorded under that minute.

4. MINUTES

The Cabinet received for information the minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2018.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 February be received for information only.

5. CLOSURE OF SOLIHULL POLICE STATION

The report before Cabinet highlighted the recent announcement by the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (WMPCC) to close Solihull Police Station and the impact of that decision.

In presenting the report the Cabinet Member for Stronger Communities and Partnerships made the following points which in summary included:

- The residents, MP's and Councillors concern over the impact of the closure and associated risks, particularly set against the increased crime rates in the Borough;

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- Concern regarding the quality of the consultation and very short time scale, which had given rise to questions as to whether this was a genuine consultation;
- A full public consultation on detailed proposals needed to be carried out which would reassure the public about the operational effectiveness of the police service in central and south Solihull;
- Logistical concerns needed to be addressed regarding issues such as:
 - Where will the custody suite be;
 - Where will Community Support Officers (CPOs) be based;
 - Where will police vehicles be located; and
 - What plans will be put in place to ensure no deterioration in police response times and police effectiveness in central and south Solihull.
- The Council would consider the colocation of customer facing police service, to the mutual benefit of residents, the Council and police, but the location of colocated operational policing was more of a challenge and one which had not been addressed by the WMPCC;
- The Council was asking the WMPCC and his Board to reconsider the proposal, so detailed proposals, which had been properly assessed could be considered, so enabling the Council to work with the WMPCC to look at the colocation of the customer facing police service and consider the challenge of the colocation of operational policing; and
- Very importantly assurances were required that there would be no deterioration in the police service if the closure went ahead, especially in light of the increased crime rates over the last 12 months;

In attendance were the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Superintendent Javid. The WMPCC responded by making the following points which in summary included:

- The WMPCC set the context behind the proposal which were based on the impact cuts to the police budget had, had, which included the reduction of Police officers the increasing demands being made on the police service and the increases in crime rates, all meant difficult decisions had to be made;
- Decisions regarding the use of police buildings were operational matters and the responsibility of the Chief Constable, but the disposal of the buildings was the WMPCC responsibility;
- With fewer Police Officers less space was required and Homer Road Station was under occupied with 80% of the building not being used;
- On the issue of consultation the WMPCC referenced a number of meetings Council Officers had, had over recent years with Police colleagues

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regarding the use of Homer Road Police Station, its future use and the issue of colocation;

- The WMPCC explained that the closure proposals would release £5m which equated to 100 extra Police Officers and the colocation option would benefit both parties;
- With regard to time scales if Homer Road was closed this would not be until 2020 and not until alternative provision was in place. There would be time for further discussion regarding colocation and the provision of the service; and
- In essence the proposal being put forward was being done in light of ongoing budget cuts, trying to balance increases in demand, against fewer officers and an increase in crime rates. The proposal would allow for more Police officers to be on the ground.

The Leader then opened up the debate and in summary the following points, issues and comments were raised:

- Members felt that the detail regarding how the decision to close Solihull Police station was unclear, for example what factors did the technical weighting take in to account and how did this compare to other Police stations;
- There were questions around how effective operational policing would be given travel times between north and south Solihull, and the fact that it needed to be recognised that the Estate Strategy would impact on the performance of police operations and efficiency;
- On a point of clarification on the issue of meetings with Officers of the Council and Police colleagues, discussions had taken place as part of the Master Planning work Officers were doing on the town centre. However, this did not negate the need for the WMPCC to engage residents in a public consultation exercise;
- The WMPCC also clarified that no decision to close Solihull Police Station would be made until there had been a public consultation on the alternative provision;
- A number of Members cited their recent experiences with regard to police engagement in ward matters and the fact that public confidence was low;
- Members also wanted to know where the command and control centre would operate from;
- Chief Superintendent Javid confirmed his focus was to have as many Police officers on the street as possible and to continue to work in partnership with the Council for the benefit of the residents and the Council. He cited examples of where colocation had worked and services enhanced in other areas of the country. He also confirmed that the Solihull Police station was under utilised, was not fit for purpose and was no longer used as a command and control centre, this was based in Birmingham;

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- Reference was made to the fact that the Council was in a similar position to the WMPCC, as the Council had to deal with reduced budgets which had impacted on services provided to residents. Going forward it was important that the Council and WMPCC worked together to come up with a solution which best served the public and ensured an effective service; and
- In light of the comments made during the debate it was suggested that the proposed decision needed to be amended to take on board the WMPCC commitment to undertake a public consultation on alternative provision before Solihull Police station was closed, which Members supported.

In closing the debate the Leader in thanking WMPCC for attending the meeting did remind him that the Council would be holding him to account in relation to his new Estates Strategy. In thanking Chief Superintendent Javid for his attendance the Leader wanted to acknowledge the service provided by Police Officers serving in the Borough.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the commitment of West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner to defer any decision on the closure of Solihull Police Station pending public consultation on relocation to alternative premises be noted and welcomed;
- (ii) That an immediate response be sought to a number of questions that the announcement has raised including: clarity on the number of police officers available in Solihull, location of custody suites and the continuation of a customer facing presence in central Solihull;
- (iii) That assurance be sought from the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner that Solihull residents would directly benefit from the investment in additional frontline policing;
- (iv) That the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner be made aware of the Council's concern about the degradation in police response and support in Solihull over the last 12 months;
- (v) That consideration be given to the options for colocation of police officers within Council buildings on the understanding that there is a financial contribution to the Council and that colocation would have to be of benefit to the residents of Solihull; and
- (vi) That the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner be asked to make a commitment to work with the Council regarding the disposal of the building as this is an important location in the town centre Strategy and should be considered as part of the one public estate initiative to support the Council's strategic objectives.