

Proposal to adopt Parish Service Provision Mission Statement:

Author: Parish Chair

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Background:

Central Swindon South Parish Council, formally known as “South Swindon Parish Council” (SSPC) was established in its own right May 2017. The order to create the Parish was signed by the Borough Solicitor November 2016. Prior to the first parish elections, the Parish executive - made up of Borough Councillors - oversaw the creation of the entity as a Shadow Parish committee.

Prior to the order to create SSPC being enacted, the Borough Council conducted 2 consultations. Parallel to the consultations, there also existed a cross-party working group of Borough Councillors tasked with agreeing boundaries and warding of the proposed new parishes.

The first consultation focused on a potential list of services and assets that could be transferred from the Borough Council. Theoretically, it was understood the various Shadow Parish Councils could decide the scope of services and assets to be transferred.

The second consultation changed focus regarding the list of services in that the Borough Council had taken the position that the service and assets listed would either be:

- ceased
- defunded
- Subject to a statutory minimum

...therefore placing additional pressure on the Shadow Parish to assume services and assets.

It should be noted that those who opposed the creation of Parish Councils in unparished areas of the Borough were not “anti-parish councils” but sought to highlight:

- Parishes should not be created top down
- A Borough Council should not create Parish Councils for the purpose of raising council tax over the legal threshold that would otherwise trigger a referendum.
- that the Borough Council Administration should be effectively petitioning the Secretary of State with regards to substantial reductions in the Central Government Grant Settlement.

The Borough Council should not have sought to pass a proportion of this Borough Council fiscal deficit directly to a Parish Council tax base.

South Swindon Parish Shadow Council accepted the transfer of street-cleaning, groundworks and playground maintenance as a minimum requirement. Allotments were transferred by legal default.

South Swindon Parish Council took over responsibility for the formal parks:

- Queens Park
- Town Gardens
- GWR Park

Note: In the second consultation, the Borough Council were clear that they could no longer afford to continue to fund the formal parks and that future services would be at a statutory minimum unless the Parish accepted transfer. Due to the historical, social and economic importance of these parks to the borough, the Shadow Parish accepted transfer on the provision that the size of the Parish could maintain an economy of scale to support a borough wide asset.

Reason:

Recent communications have highlighted that the Borough Council is seeking to make further budgetary savings by requesting that Parish Councils across Swindon subsidise statutory duties, such as highway maintenance, cold weather road gritting, tree maintenance and enforcement.

The mission statement below sets out clearly that SSPC is not in a position to raise the precept or cut existing services in order to subsidise current Borough statutory or non statutory services, therefore enabling the Primary Authority to minimise the impact on the expected increase to Council Tax. It is implicit that, under these circumstances, services would not be enhanced and commitment of Parish funds is unlikely to pass the test to prove value for money for our Parishioners.

In summary, The mission statement proposal strengthens the Council position that Parish funds must not be apportioned to mitigate Borough Council cuts without providing enhanced benefit to parishioners and where the Primary Authority can petition the Secretary of State for communities or conduct a referendum.

Parish Service Provision Mission Statement:

- Central Swindon South Parish Council, formally known as “South Swindon Parish Council” (SSPC) is an essential part of the structure of local democracy within the Borough of Swindon.
- SSPC represents the tier of local government closest to the electorate and best placed to serve local communities within the Parish boundaries.
- SSPC is responsible for the services it provides, it establishes policies and decides how money will be raised and spent for the whole community.
- SSPC will always attempt to make balanced, informed decisions, where it has statutory powers and duties to act, based on the differing needs of the whole community.

- The implicit position and stated aim of SSPC is to seek best practice models to deliver service provision and, where applicable, add value and enhance the services provided by the Primary Authority for the benefit of SSPC parishioners.*

(It is the implied position of SSPC that the Council will forthwith decline / cease to :*

- 1. subsidise*
- 2. solicit*
- 3. accept the transfer of*

additional services - statutory or otherwise - from the Primary Authority where it can not be evidenced that the sum total of a proposed Parish budget committed to additional service provision enhances the existing service and provides value for money.)

Proposal:

That the Parish Council adopts the Parish Service Provision Mission Statement as above.