

SELF REGULATION SELECT COMMISSION
27th June, 2013

Present:- Councillor Currie (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Beaumont, Beck, J. Hamilton, Sharman, Tweed, Vines and Watson; the Deputy Leader (Councillor Akhtar) also attended for item 8.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ellis and Godfrey.

1. COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman welcomed the new Members of the Self Regulation Select Commission to their first meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D. Beck declared a prejudicial interest in item 8 (Revenue Account Outturn 2012/13) as an employee of the Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber of Commerce and left the meeting whilst that item was being considered.

3. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or the press.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 2ND MAY, 2013

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Self Regulation Select Commission held on 2nd May, 2013 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

5. REPRESENTATIONS ON PANELS/WORKING GROUPS

Resolved:- That the following Members of the Self Regulation Select Commission be appointed to the Panel and Group shown for the 2013/2014 Municipal Year:-

(1) Health, Welfare and Safety Panel: - Councillor T. R. Sharman (substitute : Councillor J. Hamilton).

(2) Recycling Group: - Councillor S. Ellis.

6. PERFORMANCE CLINICS FRAMEWORK AND GUIDANCE FOR THE SELF REGULATION SELECT COMMISSION

Further to Minute No. 69 of the meeting of the Self Regulation Select Commission held on 28th March, 2013, consideration was given to a report presented by the Performance and Quality Manager concerning the Council's achievements in delivering its commitments to citizens. Against

a backdrop of diminishing resources, this task is very challenging and requires a review of the way the Council monitors and manages performance when expectations are not being met.

The report stated that this Council has successfully used performance clinics in the past, but the way these clinics have been used and the frequency with which they are held has changed, reflecting the reduced resources available.

In order to reflect both this direction of travel and the need to refresh the Council's approach, the report included suggestions of three types of clinic which could be used in different circumstances: (i) Managerial, (ii) ad hoc challenge events; and (iii) planned challenge. These three types of performance clinic were described in the submitted report and would be capable of being triggered in a variety of circumstances in response to a specific issue, theme or cause for concern. Members were informed that:-

(a) a Managerial performance clinic is internal and managed entirely by the Service accountable Director and by Performance and Quality staff;

(b) ad hoc challenge events - recommended by the Council's Senior Leadership Team, by Cabinet Members or by a Select Commission, usually after managerial action has failed to achieve an improvement in outcomes; and

(c) Planned Challenge Events as part of the annual work programme of the Council's Scrutiny function.

The Select Commission also noted that the Council's former Resources Directorate staff would set up and run performance clinics and divert resources away from front-line problem solving and delivery. Consequently, it is important that the performance clinics are used appropriately and sparingly. The performance clinics should not be seen as the default response to poor performance.

The view of the Select Commission was that ad hoc challenge events should be chaired by an 'independent' Cabinet Member, who does not have portfolio responsibility for the service in question. The Select Commission referred this view to the Deputy Leader for his consideration.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That the Deputy Leader be asked to approve the arrangements for future Elected Member-led performance clinics.

7. INVEST TO SAVE UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 75(3) of the meeting of the Self Regulation Select Commission held on 2nd May, 2013, consideration was given to a report presented by the Workforce Strategy Planning and Development Manager

describing the progress and impact of the Invest to Save Bid to reduce the Council's use of independent foster agency placements. The submitted report detailed the actions taken, number of foster carers recruited and savings.

The Select Commission noted that the Invest to Save Proposal had been agreed in August 2011 and is a three year investment. This invest to save proposal is focused on increasing the number of fostering and adoptive placements. The first year target of a net increase of 12 fostering households was achieved and the second year target of 18 was exceeded by 2. The final year target is a net increase of 23 fostering households. These are minimum targets. In terms of adoption, the first year target of approving 17 was exceeded by one, whilst in the second year the target of 21 approvals was missed by 2, due to checks and references being delayed. It was noted that these two cases have now been approved. During the third year, the adoption service is required to approve 21 adopters.

The report stated that the approval activity needs to be balanced against the focus on ensuring retention of foster carers. Year two has seen consistent recruitment activity with foster carers and a significant improvement in activity from the previous year. Details of the retention of foster carers were included in the submitted report.

Members asked questions about:-

- the financial arrangements in respect of support for foster carers;
- the experience of other local authorities.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the actions taken through the invest to save bid to recruit foster carers and prospective adopters be noted.

(2) That the Select Commission notes that this invest to save programme will continue to be monitored by officers on a monthly basis and also by the Corporate Parenting Panel to ensure that targets are achieved and more fostering and adoptive placements are available locally.

8. REVENUE ACCOUNT OUTTURN 2012/13

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Director of Finance concerning the Council's revenue budget out-turn for the 2012/2013 financial year. The report included the following summary details:-

(i) In 2012/13 the Council budgeted to spend £213.290 millions on its General Fund Revenue Account. Actual spending for the year was £212.402 millions, a saving against budget of £0.888 million (or -0.42%). Of this amount, £0.705 million is accounted for by surpluses on trading accounts, leaving a net underspend of £0.183 million.

(ii) Requests to carry-forward £159,000 of unspent 2012/13 budgets for specific projects/purposes were also included in the submitted report. If approved, the remaining balance available to support the budget is £24,000.

(iii) In addition, the Delegated Schools' Budget was £183.574 millions. Actual spend against this was £182.958 millions, an underspend of £0.616 million for the year. This has been added to Schools' Reserves which at 31st March 2013 stood at £8.227 millions.

(iv) The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in 2012/13 was budgeted to make a contribution to the HRA General Reserve of £1.838 millions. Actual contribution to this Reserve was £6.801 millions, an additional contribution of £4.963 millions.

(v) This is a very positive outturn, especially given the challenges faced in-year which necessitated the implementation of a moratorium on all but essential spending from October 2012. It is the result of the hard work of both Elected Members and staff in managing reducing levels of funding at a time of increasing service need, and also the generally good and responsible financial management on the part of budget holders.

(vi) Reflecting the above out-turn position, and subject to the recommendations in the report being approved, the Council's Revenue Reserves as at 31st March, 2013 were: General Fund Reserves available and uncommitted to support the Budget £9.316 millions and Earmarked Reserves £51.345 millions of which £41.663 millions is ring-fenced for HRA, Schools and to meet future PFI contractual obligations. Reserves at the end of 2012/13 are in line with planned levels.

Members of the Select Commission discussed the following issues:-

- the Select Commission thanked the Council's staff, especially those in the Finance Service and in Children and Young People's Services, for the achievement of a balanced budget;
- the Housing Revenue Account budget allocation for improvements to Council-owned garage sites (Members suggested that this matter required further consideration at a future meeting);
- under-utilisation of bad weather contingency and contractual risks budgets (Housing Revenue Account);
- schools budgets, the composite schools' budget reserves and the incidence of budgets being under-spent.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That the Self Regulation Select Commission notes the following recommendations which are being made to Cabinet:-

(a) to note the Council's General Fund, Schools' and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Revenue Outturn Position Statements for 2012/13;

(b) to note the level of the Council's Revenue Reserves as at 31st March, 2013; and

(c) asked to approve the carrying forward of underspends on Trading Services (£704,895) and requests for carrying forward of specific items (£158,709) in accordance with the Council's approved policy.

(Councillor Beck declared a prejudicial interest in this item and left the meeting whilst the matter was being considered)

9. WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report, presented by the Senior Scrutiny Officer, which updated Members of both the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and all of the Select Commissions on the outcomes from the "development session" on the scrutiny work programme, held during the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board meeting on 24th May, 2013, and on the proposals for allocation of that work programme to each of the Select Commissions in 2013/14.

Members discussed the various subjects listed in this Select Commission's work programme, noting that other issues may be brought forward for scrutiny review during the forthcoming year.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That revised work programme, as now discussed, be approved.

(3) That Councillor Beck be nominated to represent the Self Regulation Select Commission on the scrutiny review group for the scrutiny of local procurement policies and support to businesses, being established by the Improving Places Select Commission.

10. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business 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 Local Government Act 1972 as amended (information relating to the financial/business affairs of any person (including the Council)).

11. SUPPORT FOR THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Senior Category

Manager (Procurement) outlining the work currently being undertaken by this Council in support of the local economy, activity which continues to be a priority. The scope of the report and Members' subsequent discussion included:-

- tendering for Council services;
- use of local suppliers;
- local employment issues (including the YORbuild contractors' framework);
- traded services;
- e procurement and e invoicing;
- fair trade products;
- 'meet the buyer' events;
- consortium agreements for the procurement of goods and services;
- the use of key performance indicators in respect of the monitoring and review of the Council's suppliers;
- comparisons with other local authorities in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That the various issues, now discussed, which are factors in the growth of the local economy, be considered as part of the scrutiny review of the Sheffield City Region economy to be undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

12. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Self Regulation Select Commission be held at the Town Hall, Rotherham on Thursday, 25th July, 2013, commencing at 3.30 p.m.