

CABINET MEMBER FOR SAFE AND ATTRACTIVE NEIGHBOURHOODS
3rd March, 2014

Present:- Councillor McNeely (in the Chair); Councillors Astbury and Goulty (Policy Advisors).

J68. AREA ASSEMBLY CHAIRS

The following report was submitted:-

AREA ASSEMBLY CHAIRS
20th January, 2014

Present:- Councillor McNeely (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Beaumont, Currie, Dodson, Read, Falvey, N. Hamilton, Havenhand, Johnston, Swift, Sims and Whelbourn.

Apologies were received from Councillor J. Hamilton.

19. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 11th November, 2013, were noted.

20. LEGAL ADVICE FOR FAMILIES

Sharon Lockwood, Solicitor from Howells Solicitors, was welcomed to the meeting. Sharon provided details to Area Assembly Chairs relating to the 'Free Advice for Families' programme that Howells were currently running.

The scheme provided free legal advice for parents in South Yorkshire until 2015. The scheme was running despite the legal aid cut backs that had come into effect from April 2013.

Howells had accessed the funding from a successful bid they had submitted to the Department for Work and Pensions to undertake a two year pilot. The parameters of the bid covered the provision of financial advice, family law, housing, debts, benefits and employment advice to families with children.

Those eligible included: -

- Separated and separating parents;
- Threshold earning level of up to £45,000 (single income, not combined income);
- Covered a free appointment and three hours of work;
- Mediation;
- Counselling – for couples or individuals;
- Engagement.

Discussion ensued on the scheme as presented: -

- This is a useful resource and should be promoted widely.
- In some Area Assemblies the information leaflets were being widely distributed;
- Why was the scheme not available for couples without children and parents who were remaining together but still requiring help?
 - The focus of the tender had to be specific about which groups would be eligible.

- Sustainability of the scheme following the end of the pilot;
- Costs of family law processes: -
 - People were increasingly representing themselves in Court and taking 'background' advice from legal professionals on the paperwork and processes;
 - Some areas of family law still had access to free legal funding, including domestic violence and cases where children's social care were involved.
- Potential for future support at the end of the funding and taking the funding over a longer period.

Resolved: - That the information shared be noted.

21. AREA ASSEMBLY UPDATE

Andrea Peers, Area Partnership Manager, provided an update in relation to the Wentworth Valley Area: -

- Community First Celebration before Christmas, 2013. All current projects had been showcased together. The event had been well attended, upbeat and there had been cross pollination of ideas;
- Community members had helped to arrange the event, they had accessed mentoring and funding had been accessed from the Community Leadership Fund.
- An awareness raising session on countering CSE was planned for community groups on signs to look out for and what to do. Following the event a report would be brought back to Area Assembly Chairs about how well the event worked.

Andrea Peers, Area Partnership Manager, provided an update in relation to the Rother Valley South Area: -

- Disused allotments – letters had been sent to plot holders regarding rights and responsibilities.
- An 'Uprising Event' was planned for 21st February, 2014 for young people. It would be hosted and run by JADE and aimed to give an authentic nightclub experience for under 18s. Funding had been accessed from JAG money and a bid to CAP. It was hoped that 600 people would attend. Partners including sexual health, Know The Score and the Community Alcohol Partnership would be in attendance and have information available.

Christine Staniforth, Area Partnership Manager, provided an update in relation to the Wentworth North Area Assembly Area. The funeral of Harry Toole had been really well attended. The condolences of all were passed on to his family, his death was a sad loss to the area.

LED Christmas tree lights had been purchased from Swinton and Wath Members' Community Leadership Fund contributions.

Affordable Warmth Sessions provided by the National Energy Action organisation had been run for staff and partner training in the areas of Wentworth, Harley and Brampton. Council houses were classed as relatively energy efficient, so efforts were being concentrated in areas where housing stock was less well insulated. Further sessions in February would be provided. Feedback about the training session was shared from an Elected Member who had been in attendance. Christine agreed to pass this back to the NEA, who had been the external training providers.

Christine Staniforth, Area Partnership Manager, provided an update in relation to the Wentworth South Area Assembly Area. A Christmas event had been run on 23rd December, 2013, in Dalton Parish Hall. Twenty-two people had attended.

The Christmas Fayre was for disadvantaged community work. A 'Summer Wonderland' event was planned for February.

Shaun Mirfield, Area Partnership Manager, provided an update in relation to the Rotherham North Area Assembly Area.

- Presentations that would be provided for the Area Assembly included the HS2 presentation and the Integrated Youth Support Services.
- Potential relocation of the SNT base;
- Consultation events relating to 'Supporting the Landlord Licensing' in the central areas;
- A meet and greet with new Officers, Members and partners had been arranged;

Councillor N. Hamilton wished to record his thanks to Sargent Billy Bell, who had moved to the Maltby Area, for his service.

Discussion ensued on the premise requirements for the area's SNT. A further meeting would take place with all Partners to resolve the issues.

Resolved: - That the information shared be noted.

22. COMMUNITY FIRST EVALUATION

Consideration was given to the report presented by Shaun Mirfield, Area Partnership Manager (Housing and Neighbourhood Services, Neighbourhood and Adult Services Directorate) that outlined an evaluation of the impact of the Community First Neighbourhood Match Fund in Rotherham to 31st December, 2013.

Nationally, there were three aspects to the Community First Neighbourhood Match Fund: -

- The Neighbourhood Match Fund - £30 million - a small grants programme for some of the most deprived areas in England, administered by the Community Development Foundation (CDF);
- National Endowment Match Challenge - £50 million;
- Community Organisers.

The Cabinet Officer for Civil Society viewed the Community First Neighbourhood Match Fund as: -

1. A means of enabling small social action projects, encouraging individuals/groups to bring change to some of the most deprived communities in the country;
2. A tool to support new and existing projects;
3. Part of a broader power shift, putting local residents in the driving seat, building their capacity and confidence to develop community led solutions.

Evaluation had been undertaken in Rotherham based on the three Cabinet Office objectives.

There was confidence that the Community First Neighbourhood Match Fund was meeting the first objective in Rotherham.

- £712,000 would be delivered into voluntary-community sector projects in some of the Borough's most deprived neighbourhoods. To date, £396,964 had been awarded by the 11 Ward based Community First Panels to 255 projects;

- The submitted report included examples of best practice in relation to the first objective, and included which of the Ipsos Mori categories each project supported.

In relation to the second and third objectives, the picture was more mixed. Funding had largely been awarded to existing projects. Panels had, however, increased their knowledge of and links to the work of existing projects in their Wards. Feedback from Panels' voluntary-community sector members had highlighted how they had welcomed the opportunity to work with Councillors and senior officers. Local residents had been involved in setting local priorities, approving projects for funding and projects representing community-led solutions to local issues. This represented a positive experience and confirmed that groups/organisations who, with support, could take on a greater role in future work.

Discussion ensued on the regrettable situation that had led to 2 of Rotherham's Deprived Neighbourhood's not being eligible to participate in Community First under the criteria supplied by the Cabinet Officer for Civil Society.

The next steps towards the end of the funding stream were discussed. It was noted that there was a £21,000 remaining allocation to be made from Year Three's funding allocation. Year Four's funding would need to be allocated over the nine-month period between April – December, 2014.

Discussion ensued on the information presented: -

- Increasing the range of voluntary and community sector organisations that submitted funding bids;
- Future infrastructure sustainability;
- Case studies in the report would be very useful way to illustrate the benefit;
- Information sharing between partners, including project management and analysis;
- A smaller number of small groups were coming forward with funding bids;
- A further message should be sent out emphasising the deadlines for when the money needed to be spent by.

Resolved: - That the information shared be noted.

23. BUDGET CONSULTATION

Consideration was given to the presentation Asim Munir, Community Engagement Officer (Housing and Neighbourhoods, Neighbourhood and Adult Services Directorate) gave that outlined the, 'Money Matters / Council Priorities Consultation (2014/2016) that had taken place towards the end of 2013.

The consultation process had taken place between 28th October, 2013 – 29th November, 2013.

The presentation included: -

- Methodology – how and where the consultation programme had been conducted;
- The questions asked as part of the 'Money Matters Consultation (2014-2016);
- How the 'on-line forum' had been used for the first time;
- The headline messages received by the on-line forum and the suggestion scheme, the employee budget savings initiative and the consultation event.

The headline messages gained so far: -

- Political and Governance issues;
- Human Resource issues;
- Making efficiencies;
- What could the community do more to help;
- Community responses mirrored what employees said;
- Needs-led focussing on those in the greatest need;
- Promotion on self-help;
- Earliest stage of intervention – but not create a dependency either;
- Minimum cost of universal services;
- Multi-use of assets and greater partnering with the Voluntary and Community Sector;
- Silo working;
- Empowering communities to help themselves;
- Promoting and valuing volunteering;
- Promoting neighbourhood pride, supporting community groups with information and resources;
- Providing tools, equipment and training;
- Stop or reduce – statutory or value and priority driven;
- Outsourcing and encouraging parish councils and the Voluntary and Community Sector;
- Strong support for delivery by private sector, VCs and parish – open and competitive tendering;
- Funding in kind;
- Turn off street lighting;
- Direct payments.

The way forward –

- Media campaign and feeding back to the press;
- On-line forum feedback.

Discussion ensued and the following issues were raised: -

- Thought to be given to extending on-line forum style of consultation for future consultations;
- Support for the increased use of social media as a way of engaging and moving forward;
- Ensuring that those not using social media or the internet were not left out of opportunities for representation;
- With social media and on-line forums, it could be expected that an instant response was received to consultation responses.

The Community Engagement Officer reported that a Fair Trade Dinner had been arranged for 10th April, 2014. The meal would cost £20 a ticket for a five course meal. Tickets would be on sale shortly.

Resolved: - (1) That the information shared be noted.

(2) That the item of further utilising social media and on-line forums within Area Assemblies be brought to a future meeting for consideration

24. TENANTS CONFERENCE 2014

Christine Staniforth spoke about the forthcoming Tenants' Conference on the 27th March, 2014.

Tenants had been invited through the tenant involvement letters, meaning that advertising the event brought no additional costs.

Workshops to be provided at the conference included – digital inclusion, demonstrations on how to access council services on-line, volunteering and welfare reform information.

Information relating to the Streetpride Champion re-launch, and the welfare seminar was also requested to be considered.

Resolved: - That the information shared be noted.

25. CSE AWARENESS RAISING

The previously mentioned CSE awareness/training event being hosted by Wentworth Valley was noted. It was agreed that the lessons learned would be passed on to a future meeting of the Area Assembly Chairs.

Resolved: - That the information shared be noted.

26. AREA ASSEMBLY AND AREA ASSEMBLY CO-ORDINATING GROUP MEETINGS

Consideration was given to the submitted document presented by Paul Walsh, Housing and Communities Manager (Housing and Neighbourhoods, Neighbourhood and Adult Services Directorate) outlining the Area Assembly and Area Assembly Co-ordinating Groups proposed Terms of Reference and Article 12 of the Council's Constitution (Minute No. 16 of the Area Assembly Chairs Meeting held on 11th November, 2013, refers).

Discussion was undertaken on the information in the documents. Feedback from the Area Assembly Chairs was positive, and a small number of factual matters were highlighted.

Required changes: -

- Change the date of the Annual Council Meeting shown at Section 7.4 to 6th June, 2014 (not 24th May, 2014);
- In Section 7.2.(9) remove reference to four-years of office and replace with 'a full term of office';
- Section 7.3 to make reference to 'co-optees'.

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

(2) That, subject to the above amendments being made, the Terms of Reference for Area Assembly and Area Assembly Co-ordinating Group Meetings, and Article of this Council's Constitution, be approved.

(3) That the revised document be presented to Full Council for adoption.

27. AREA PARTNERSHIP TEAM STAFFING UPDATE

It was noted that Kay Bacon had retired shortly before Christmas. All of her colleagues had wished her well. A recruitment process was underway for this post.

Elaine Hedge was also due to leave the Council.

One Councillor wished to record their belief that silo-working was leading Area Assembly staff to have to spend large amounts of their time chasing information.

Resolved: - That the information shared be noted.

28. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING -

Resolved: - That the next meeting take place on Monday 10th March, to start at 2.00 p.m. in the Rotherham Town Hall.

J69. KEY CHOICES PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Director of Housing and Neighbourhood Services, regarding the future of the Key Choices Property Management (KCPM) Service which had been established since 2006.

The KCPM Gold Service currently managed 80 properties, owned by 66 different landlords, and the KCPM Bronze and Silver Service which had an additional 10 landlords in its portfolio. Its core business was to manage private rented properties and to increase the access to such properties for those who approached KCPM. However, in the current economic climate it was not appropriate that the Council provided a subsidised housing management service for private landlords and, despite repeated attempts to make it self-financing through increasing the portfolio, the total number of managed properties had not increased.

As demand for private rented homes increased, the Service needed to be redesigned so that the Team were able to offer a housing option and resettlement service to help more vulnerable people in housing need. It was proposed that the Property Management Service be removed from KCPM, reduce the size of the Team and develop a more central role within the Council's private rented sector agenda with more emphasis on engagement to improve standards, increasing access and tenancy sustainment.

Further information was provided on the reasons for the review of the service, the alternative approach and the need to continue with a short term tenancy intensive intervention service to support vulnerable people.

Discussion ensued on the opportunities to access private rented accommodation and increase confidence in landlords, the quality of private rented accommodation, the need for some kind of tenancy support for vulnerable customers and the need to share information with landlords with regard to the services and costs of alternative letting agents.

Resolved:- (1) That the Key Choices Property Management Service be disestablished but retain and enhance the critical support functions as set out in the report submitted.

(2) That support be provided to existing Key Choices Property Management Service landlords to identify and transfer to a suitable letting agency of their choice and, if appropriate, to offer ongoing support to current tenants.

(3) That the transfer of the housing management service for private landlords be reviewed in twelve months' time.

J70. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2013/14

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Finance Manager, Neighbourhood and Adult Services, relating to the Housing Revenue Account which would require a reduction in the planned transfer from working balances (HRA reserves) of £0.532M, which was £2.067M less than the approved budget.

Appendix A of the report provided the Budget Operating Statement for 2013/14 which showed the various income and expenditure budget lines which made up the net cost of delivering the Service. The latest forecast net cost of Service was £-7.880M, together with Revenue contribution to Capital costs and interest received, would result in an overall deficit of £0.532M to be transferred from Working Balances.

Expenditure

Based upon expenditure and commitments to date, total expenditure was forecast to outturn at £72.049M compared to a budget provision of £73.091M, a decrease in spend of £1.042M. The main variations were:-

Contributions to Housing Repairs

- Repairs and Maintenance – Currently forecast to underspend £452,000 against a budget at £17.966M. The Empty Homes budget was difficult to forecast given it being a responsive service. At the end of December there had been 216 more completions than budgeted, the main reason being the impact of the Welfare Reform as more tenants requested a transfer to smaller properties. Within the Housing Repairs budgets there was an overall forecast overspend on Empty Homes due to increase in minor voids offset by a forecast underspend on overheads within revenue schemes plus shares savings now agreed with both contractors

Supervision and Management

- Forecast to outturn at £19.675M, overall underspend of £390k. The main reason for the variation was higher than expected staff turnover including delays in implementing the review of structures across a number of teams. This was reduced by an additional contribution to the Furnished Homes reserve due to additional income as more clients used the Scheme

Income

- Total forecast income collectable was £79.929M, an increase of £1.025M above the approved budget of £78.904M
- Dwelling rental income was projected to over-recover by £205k. However, non-dwelling rents was forecast to under-recover against budget by £24k due to a review of other properties resulting in less income due to the HRA
- Income from charges for services and facilities were forecasting an outturn of £4.315M, an over-recovery of £713k mainly as a result of additional income on Furnished Homes due to increase in the number of clients, additional fee income from Right to Buy sales plus one off income from prior year charges for District Heating. However, there was a forecast under-recovery of income from clients using Sheltered Neighbourhood Centres services as tenants opted out of the laundry charge
- Other fees and charges were forecasting an over-recovery of income of £131k related to additional unbudgeted income in respect of the sale of tenants contents insurance, recovery of Court costs, income from second hand furniture and income from utility companies for the use of solar panels

Discussion ensued on the costs associated with the laundry service, the need to encourage tenants to take up the competitive home insurance on offer, the projected void targets, the rolling programme of tenancy checks and some concerns expressed by leaseholders.

Resolved:- That the latest financial projection against budget for 2013/14 be noted.

J71. NEIGHBOURHOODS GENERAL FUND REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2013/14

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Finance Manager, Neighbourhoods and Adult Services, in relation to the budget monitoring and financial forecast for the Neighbourhoods General Fund within the Neighbourhoods and Adult Services Directorate to 31st March, 2014, based on actual income and expenditure for the period ending January, 2014.

The latest forecast showed an overall underspend of £252,000 against an approved net revenue budget of £2.463M as follows:-

Strategic Housing and Investment Service (+£11k)

- Lower than expected staff turnover against budget

Housing Options (-£90k)

- Projected underspend including a projected underspend on the Dispersed Units Trading Account and within the Private Sector Adaptations Service as a result of increased fee income

- Projected overspend on the Key Choices Property Management Service as a result of lower than anticipated income

Housing and Communities (-£69k)

- Projected underspends within Area Assemblies and Supplies and Services as a result of the Council-wide moratorium on non-essential spend
- Partially reduced by a small overspend on Anti-Social Behaviour due to lower than expected staff turnover
- Small underspend within Community Safety Unit as a result of a recent vacancy
- Underspend also within Community Leadership Fund

Central (-£7k)

- Small underspend due to savings on Supplies and Services

Business Regulation (balanced)

- Business Regulation was projecting a balanced budget
- Pressures on staffing costs within Health and Safety, Food and Drugs and Animal Health budgets were being offset by savings within Trading Standards due to continued vacant posts
- Projected overspend within Licensing due to increased IT costs for Licensing Management software and projected income for new licences not being as high as originally anticipated
- Bereavement Services projecting an underspend as a result of lower than forecast costs relating to repairs and maintenance

Safer Neighbourhoods (-97k)

- Savings within Community Protection through vacancy management, further savings achieved as a result of the moratorium on non-essential spend and additional grant funding
- Partly reduced by a small remaining pressure on income due to reduced Environmental Protection Act applications
- Statutory health and safety work on landfill sites resulting in a forecast overspend

Consultancy spend to date was £46,808 in respect of data analysis relating to Green Deal Energy Efficient projects which is grant funded. There had been no spend on Agency within Neighbourhoods' General Fund budgets.

Resolved:- That the report be received and the latest financial projection against budget for 2013/14 noted.

J72. HOUSING INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2013/14

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Business and Commercial Programme Manager, which represented the indicative outturn position for the 2013/14 Capital Programme.

As at the end of Period 10 (January, 2014), total spend on the HIP was £15,631,246M compared to a budget provision of £17,878,163M, an underspend of £2,246,917 (-12.5% variance).

The report submitted provided details of savings and slippage on the individual schemes of work with the overall programme and highlighted the fact that the resources not drawn down in 2013/14 would be carried forward into next year.

Further information was provided on:-

- Total Capital Works to Properties.
- Fair Access to All.
- Regeneration/Neighbourhood Renewal – Private and Public Sector.
- Other Public Sector.

Savings and slippages identified were primarily across schemes funded through the Major Repairs Allowance and would be carried forward into future years.

Discussion ensued on the complexity of the new integrated Housing Management System, deregulation of Council-owned garage sites and on disabled adaptations.

Resolved:- (1) That the spend and forecast position to the end of Period 10 (January, 2014) be noted.

(2) That the total slippage of £1,263,067 be approved.

(3) That the use of £362,853 of Capital receipts to fund reduction of Private Sector Adaptations backlog be approved.