

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
15th October, 2014

Present:- Councillor Read (in the Chair); Councillors Cowles, Gilding, Roche and Sims, together with co-opted members Mrs. L. Shears and Mr. B. Walker.

Also in attendance:- Councillor Jepson and Mr. D. Pickering.

Apologies for absence were received from The Mayor (Councillor Foden) and from Councillors Andrews, Atkin, Gosling and Whelbourn and from co-opted members Mrs. P. Copnell and Mr. P. Cahill.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this meeting.

28. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

29. COMMUNICATIONS

There were no items to report.

30. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 16TH SEPTEMBER 2014

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission, held on 16th September, 2014, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

31. SHEFFIELD CITY REGION

The Select Commission received a presentation from the Director of Planning, Regeneration and Culture and the Economic Development Manager entitled "Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership Combined Authority", providing an overview of the Local Enterprise Partnership. The presentation and Members' discussion highlighted the following issues:-

- this subject had been identified, during the scrutiny review of support for Rotherham's local economy, as a matter about which Members required further information;

- a structure diagram was provided of the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Sheffield City Region Combined Authority;

- the principal strands of housing/residential, infrastructure, HS2, skills for growth and partnership and business growth;

- the complicated nature of the arrangements and the need for clear lines of accountability;
- the Sheffield City Region – a “functional economic area” (accommodating 1.8 million people; supporting 700,000 jobs);
- start-up rates of new businesses, productivity, private sector employment – all are below national averages, although there have been improvements in recent years;
- it is acknowledged that there ought to be improvement in the economic performance of the Sheffield City Region;
- history and development of the Local Economic Partnership and of the Combined Authority (the latter being formally established on 1st April 2014);
- the Combined Authority’s remit for transport arrangements, including the management of the region’s 10-years allocation of major transport scheme funding; the allocation of funding for transport from the ‘Growth Fund’;
- the Combined Authority’s remit for economic development, providing accountability and ‘holding’ the public money (including Growth Fund allocations); the Local Economic Partnership leads on strategy and delivery;
- the Combined Authority’s remit for Planning – the duty to co-operate; aligning the work of the Local Plans (the district councils retain the role and function as the Local Planning Authorities); details of the Strategic Economic Plan; economic and demographic forecasting to aid future integrated infrastructure across the City Region;
- the staffing structure of the Combined Authority/Local Economic Partnership and its total, annual operational costs (Members asked to be provided with these details);
- comparison with previous regimes (eg: Yorkshire Forward; English Partnerships; the Dearne Valley project; etc);
- the availability of brownfield sites, across the region, for future industrial development;
- the Local Enterprise Partnership is still in its infancy, therefore any judgement of its value and effectiveness may be premature; some benefits have already accrued (eg; the Growth Fund, with local businesses able to access grants; establishment of the new Enterprise Zones);

- the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) – a strategic body established to drive forward economic growth (the LEP comprises Council Members and private sector representatives from across the Region, with a private sector representative taking the chair); operation of the Inward Investment Team, which attracts new businesses to the Region;
- the Strategic Economic Plan – to transform the local economy during the next decade; used to bid for central Government funding from the Growth Deal;
- the LEP Growth Deal – supporting infrastructure projects; skills bank; training for people; business investment and support programme; the establishment of the British Glass Academy; Members asked to be informed of the chosen location of the Academy building;
- European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy (ESIF) – total value of more than £177 millions for the Sheffield City Region – used to deliver the Strategic Economic Plan; money provided from the European Union (eg: the European Social Fund); joint working with external organisations (eg: Department for Work and Pensions);
- details were provided of the Sheffield City Region ESIF Committee;
- Skills and Employment – three strands to the “Skills Growth Deal”; the Skills Bank (funding for training); Progress to Work (people aged 24 years and over); other projects such as: “Learn to Work (schools/careers); “Skills Made Easy” (apprenticeships);
- ways of identifying the skills gap (employer-led by the private sector);
- local Chambers of Commerce help with promotion of “Skills Growth Deal” projects;
- the nine priority sectors of the Local Economic Partnership (ie: Advanced Manufacturing and Materials, Business and Professional Services, Creative and Digital Industries, Healthcare Technologies, Logistics, Low Carbon, Property and Construction, Retail, Sport Leisure and Tourism);
- the Regional Growth Fund – provided by the coalition Government to aid the expansion of business and creation of new jobs;
- Enterprise Zones (at Waverley; also near to M1 motorway junctions 36 (Barnsley) and 29 (Chesterfield); impact of the proposed HS 2 rail route upon Waverley and the possible relocation of that Enterprise Zone to Dinnington); business rates are to be held centrally by the Combined Authority (and the LEP); Members requested details of the site locations and boundaries of the Enterprise Zones;
- payment of the Living Wage and possible impact upon the City Region;

- the current strategic aims of the Sheffield City Region are transport and economic growth (although it was noted that such aims may occasionally be subject to change).

Copies of the presentation slides are to be provided for all Members of this Select Commission.

It was noted that a seminar for all Members of the Council, about the operation of the Sheffield City Region, is to be held on Tuesday 25th November, 2014 and representatives of the Sheffield City Region will be invited to attend.

After thanking officers for the informative presentation, the Select Commission agreed that:-

- a) the presentation was the starting point to developing a greater understanding of the implications of the Sheffield City Region structures; however, at this stage, it had raised more questions than provided answers;
- b) the Scrutiny Manager shall provide a briefing note for a future meeting of this Select Commission, about the implications for the work programme of consideration of this matter;
- c) further information shall be sought about the resources being committed by this Council and its partner organisations to the Sheffield City Region structures.

32. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE - SCRUTINY REVIEW - UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 36 of the meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on 27th November, 2013 and Minute No. 25 of the meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on 16th September, 2014, consideration was given to a report, presented by the Director of Streetpride, concerning progress with the implementation of the action plan arising from the scrutiny review of this Council's Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing services. A copy of the updated action plan was included with the submitted report.

The report also included an explanation of the difficulties experienced with grass cutting, across the Borough area during the Summer of 2014. An important aspect had been the 'perfect' grass growing conditions created by the mild Winter during late 2013 and early 2014.

The Select Commission's discussion highlighted the following issues:-

: the type of grass cutting machinery being used (the detailed contractual arrangements were noted);

- : complaints received by the Council about various quality issues, such as the frequency of cutting, non-removal of grass clippings; reference was made to the examples of specific sites about which complaints were being made by members of the public;
- : requests from the public for grass cutting to happen more frequently;
- : the 28 sites, located in various areas across the Borough, upon which there was only limited grass cutting, leaving longer grass and sometimes having a pathway cut through the grass (this arrangement enabled cost savings to be made);
- : reduced grass cutting frequency as a budget/cost reduction exercise (it was noted that the arrangement of five cuts per year was acknowledged to be the minimum amount);
- : Housing Revenue Account funding for sites which are Council-owned and funded from that account; there has been improved frequency of grass cutting at these sites (ie: intervals of two weeks, whilst other Borough Council-owned sites have been cut at intervals of four weeks); details were provided of the arrangements and funding for the grounds maintenance of HRA sites during the Winter 2014/2015 and later in the year 2015, involving specific selected sites across the Borough;
- : the impact of very wet weather upon grass cutting; the hindrance also caused to grass cutting by the construction of fencing in and around sites;
- : the intention to commence grass cutting during March 2015 (depending upon weather conditions), in accordance with the agreed budget;
- : 'gateway' sites to the Rotherham town centre and also to other towns and villages around the Borough area, where it is important for grounds maintenance to be undertaken regularly in order to enhance the attractive appearance of these areas;
- : the quality of cutting is usually dependent upon the type of mower used (eg: flail, rotary and cylinder mowers); the different types of machinery are used on all sites, although at different times of the cutting season, to try and maintain a consistent standard of grass cutting across all sites;
- : the arrangements of the Council's grass cutting teams of operatives, who will utilise the various types of grass cutting equipment and machinery;
- : the impact of budget reductions on grass cutting frequencies; the use of temporary employees during the cutting season which increases the flexibility of the grass cutting arrangements;

: whether the responsibility for the grounds maintenance of very small areas of open space (usually situated in residential areas) remains with the householders or becomes adopted and is therefore maintainable at public expense; it was noted that these areas are often included within newly-constructed residential developments;

: the practice of 'grubbing out' to ensure the removal of weeds; an additional street sweeper will be utilised to try and ensure a good standard of weed removal;

: the recording of contacts from the public, so that the Streetpride teams of operatives will be sent to the areas of highest demand; it was explained that Streetpride already undertakes the monitoring of calls and contacts and whilst it is important to adhere to the maintenance schedules, there is an element of flexibility to move the teams of operatives to the worst areas (this practice is also used in respect of street sweeping);

: the continuing use of volunteers and Streetpride champions; the loan of equipment to community groups undertaking litter-picking; it was noted that budget reductions had resulted in the disestablishment of staff positions who would promote community litter-picking around the Borough area and in schools;

: the volunteer scheme "Love My Streets" is still being developed and certificates issued to volunteers who assist with street cleansing and grounds maintenance.

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

(2) That the Action Plan for the scrutiny review of this Council's Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing services be updated, as a consequence of today's discussion, in order that it may be signed off as completed.