

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
24th February, 2016

Present:- Councillor Beck (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Cutts, Godfrey, Gosling, McNeely, Pickering, Reeder, Sims, Smith, Whelbourn, Whysall and Wyatt, together with co-opted members Mrs. L. Shears, Mr. P. Cahill and Mr. B. Walker.

Also in attendance - Councillor Sims (Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety) and Mrs. D. Thomas (Centre for Public Scrutiny).

Parish Councillors P. Blanksby (Wales Parish Council) and D. Smith (Dinnington Parish Council), attended for consideration of item 44.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Buckley, Jepson and C. Vines.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this meeting.

41. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

42. COMMUNICATIONS

Members of the Select Commission placed on record their appreciation of the services to this Council of the Director of Streetpride, Mr. David Burton, who would be retiring in the near future. Members wished Mr. Burton a long and happy retirement.

43. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 20TH JANUARY 2016

Resolved:- (1) That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission, held on 20th January, 2016, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

(2) That, with regard to Minute No. 38 (Rotherham Town Centre Masterplan), the draft Masterplan be reported to the next meeting of this Select Commission.

44. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF LITTER AND FLY-TIPPING (TASK AND FINISH GROUP)

Further to Minute No. 39 of the meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on 20th January, 2016, consideration was given to a report, presented by Councillor A. Atkin (Chair of the Task and Finish Group), concerning the work of the Litter and Fly Tipping Task and Finish

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Group, which had now completed its review of the problem of the increase of litter and fly tipping within the Rotherham Borough area. The review was one of a number of reviews of service areas within Environment and Development Services, identified by the Commissioners and Elected Members as priority scrutiny reviews to take place during 2015/2016.

The report stated that the review had been undertaken against a background of annual revenue budget reductions for both street cleansing and enforcement duties and also the perception that enforcement was not necessarily effective in changing behaviour in respect of reducing littering and fly tipping.

Members considered the contents of the full report of this scrutiny review and its recommendations.

The Select Commission's discussion of this item highlighted the following salient issues:-

: the proposal to establish an officer post of 'Love My Streets' Co-ordinator is now the subject of further consideration (after one unsuccessful attempt to fill the post); the post has an available budget and is to be considered further by the Chief Executive; the role of the post will be wide-ranging and will include the development of partnership working;

: there is scope for the further development of partnership working between the Borough Council and Parish Councils and the avoidance of duplication in dealing with the problem of litter; the possibility of Parish Councils employing their own litter wardens who would be trained in the role and authorised to issue fixed penalty notices to people who deliberately drop litter;

: the current review of enforcement by the Borough Council and the possibility of deploying more multi-skilled enforcement officers at street level; such a role was not considered to be appropriate for the Police Community Support Officers;

: the suggestion that elected members (either Borough or Parish) should be trained and authorised to issue fixed penalty notices would not be progressed;

: the street cleansing revenue budget for 2016/17 (which is subject to Borough Council approval on 2nd March, 2016) may essentially be the same as that for 2015/16, but may have a slight reduction;

: whether there is scope to reduce the fees charged to the licensed private sector housing landlords (ie: within the Council's selective licensing areas) for the collection and disposal of bulky waste items; there was some evidence that fly tipping may increase whenever there are changes of tenants and furniture, materials, etc. have to be disposed of; a fee reduction may possibly serve to reduce the incidence of such fly tipping

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on these occasions; it was noted that there was currently no budget subsidy available, within the Council, to meet the cost of any such reduction in fees;

: the selective licensing (of private sector housing landlords) has produced improvements in the Dinnington area, although the problem of empty homes persists, eg: the gardens of empty homes are sometimes used as dumping grounds for refuse and the problem remains if the absent landlord is unable to be traced; the Borough Council's Strategic Housing Team is reviewing the most effective way of engaging with private sector landlords, to try and resolve the various issues relating to empty properties;

: the problem of fly-tipping along country lanes, away from built-up areas and centres of population; a suggestion that small items of commercial waste should be permitted to be disposed of at the Borough Council's waste recycling sites; the Waste Management Task and Finish Group has been examining this issue, including the possible introduction of additional fees and charges which may enable these sites to be opened during longer hours; the probable causes of fly-tipping were discussed (eg: certain waste not being accepted at waste recycling sites; the reluctance of some people to pay fees for the disposal of specific types of waste); these complicated issues are the subject of continuing analysis;

: different ways of involving the wider community in litter clearance (eg: volunteering for litter picking days); the provision of appropriate support for volunteers, as well as the co-ordination of their work; a budget is available for the provision of support to volunteer groups, eg: for the disposal of refuse;

: organisations such as Rotherfed (the Rotherham Federation of Tenants and Residents) could be asked to inform the Borough Council about the community groups which may be interested in participating in community clean-up and litter-picking events;

: the Rotherfed organisation offers environmental grants (eg: of £250), although there is currently a low take-up of them; Members requested details of this system of grants;

: whether there is scope for contracts with private sector organisations for enforcement duties; it was noted that such organisations prefer to operate within town centres rather than more rural areas;

: litter 'hot spots' and the use of closed circuit television systems (eg: within town centres and at shopping precincts) to assist with enforcement; ensuring that local businesses are responsible for clearing litter from the streets and public spaces fronting their premises; it was noted that some businesses are more responsible than others and there are some which fund the provision of street litter bins;

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: the deployment and effectiveness of street cleansing resources within the Rotherham town centre was highlighted;

: the importance of high-level campaigning (eg: the Tidy Britain Group) and the possible involvement of schools; specific cleansing for events, eg: the 'Clean for the Queen' initiative, celebrating the forthcoming 90th birthday of Queen Elizabeth II; various 'spring clean' and clean-up events were being arranged during the period March to June 2016;

: the problem of litter on principal roads and highways and whether it would be possible to close such roads, temporarily, to assist street cleansing operations; sometimes the expense of traffic management schemes and partial lane closures (necessary for the safety of the workforce on the highway) served to limit the number of occasions on which such street cleansing took place;

: the use of mobile and covert cameras to try and prevent fly-tipping in rural areas;

: whether it would be possible to extend the Rothercard system, by the introduction of a small fee, to persons who do not currently meet the criteria for Rothercard; members requested further information about this issue;

: principal local authorities (eg: Borough/District/County Councils) are responsible for keeping clean all public land and roads within their boundaries, apart from roads which are the responsibility of the Highways Agency; the Borough Council cannot transfer its statutory duty and responsibility for street cleansing to other organisations (eg: Parish Councils), even though it is permissible to use agency arrangements for the carrying out of the actual work on the ground.

Thanks were expressed to all of the Elected Members, co-opted members and officers who have contributed to the work of this Task and Finish Group.

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

(2) That the scrutiny review report of Litter and Fly Tipping, together with its recommendations, be supported and be forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and to the Cabinet and Commissioners for further consideration.

(3) That, further to resolution (2) above, the Improving Places Select Commission supports the proposal to appoint an officer to the post of 'Love My Streets' Co-ordinator (as referred to in the recommendations of this scrutiny review).

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(4) That, whilst acknowledging the limitations imposed by the reducing public sector revenue budgets, the Improving Places Select Commission encourages the increasing use of co-ordinated working and partnership working between statutory and community/voluntary organisations, in terms of effective and consistent street cleansing.

(5) That Elected Members be informed of the various events being organised in respect of the 'Clean for the Queen' initiative during 2016.

45. IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION - SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

Discussion took place on the draft work programme for the Improving Places Select Commission for the 2016/2017 Municipal Year. The following suggested topics were discussed:-

(a) a broad theme concerning the commercialisation of some of the Council's services, including income generation (eg: business rates);

(b) a scrutiny review of RIDO (the Rotherham Investment and Development Office);

(c) Air Quality throughout the Rotherham Borough area;

(d) a cross-cutting review of the contribution of the scrutiny function to the achievement of the outcomes in the Council's improvement plan;

(e) a cross-cutting review of the impact of service changes and budget reductions on specific Council services, highlighting the way in which services may operate in the future (eg: the youth service);

(f) the possible re-establishment of the Recycling Group (a working group of Elected Members considering the wider benefits of and encouraging increases in the recycling of waste materials).

Members acknowledged that the use of the Task and Finish Groups by this Select Commission, during 2015/16, had been successful and ought to continue.

Resolved:- That, taking into consideration the suggested topics now discussed, a further report on the 2016/2017 draft work programme be submitted to the next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission.