

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
20th September, 2017**

Present:- Councillor Mallinder (in the Chair); Councillors Albiston, Atkin, B. Cutts, Elliot, Jones, McNeely, Reeder, Sheppard, Taylor, Vjestica, Walsh and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Allen, Buckley, Jepson, Price and Julie Turner.

77. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

78. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no members of the public or press present at the meeting.

79. COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the area

IPSC are planning a session in relation to housing related topics on 17th January. Members were asked to send their questions to Christine Bradley.

The Chair reported that she had met with Damien Wilson, the Strategic Director for Regeneration and the Environment to discuss the Forward Plan along with a meeting with Councillor Lelliott the Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy.

A meeting is planned in October for the Chair to meet with the Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety, Councillor Hoddinott.

In September the Chair will go to the London Borough of Camden to see how the various London Boroughs carry out their scrutiny roles.

On 22nd October the Chair will go on a training course to Coventry to look at how to collect data and how that data can be used for scrutiny purposes.

Members involvement in the Neighbourhood Working Group (NWG)

IPSC has identified this topic as a piece of work to scrutinise. It is a conflict of interest for Members to be on the NWG and then to scrutinise the work it has been involved in when their work is presented to Places. Members are asked to declare an interest at the start of the meeting in November.

Representatives on Outside Bodies

Following on from a report submitted to the Cabinet and Commissioners Decision Making meeting on 26th June 2017 where representatives from this Commission were sought to sit on the board of these organisations:-

Women's Refuge
Groundwork Cresswell
Rush House
Environmental UK

Following further investigation into this matter, it was concluded that at this time no Council representative is required.

District Heating

Councillor Sheppard reported that a meeting is scheduled for October to include Councillor Beck, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Tom Bell – Assistant Director of Housing to set out a new plan for district heating. Councillor Sheppard will report back at the November meeting of this Commission.

80. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 19TH JULY, 2017

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on 19th July, 2017, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

81. SCRUTINY REVIEW: EMERGENCY PLANNING

The Chair formally thanked Councillor Wyatt and members of the Cross Party Task & Finish Group (The Group) for their work in completing the scrutiny review on Emergency Planning.

Councillor Wyatt started his presentation of the report by outlining that some of the ideas brought out in the review have been implemented already, as the Emergency Plan was a living document and it needed to adapt and be fluid enough to meet all eventualities. IPSC will want to monitor the recommendations which were made from a sound basis of information.

One of the reasons why the review was undertaken, were the Commission's concerns over the strength, structure and the effectiveness of the plan in an emergency situation. The Select Commission Group was aware that lives could potentially be at risk in circumstances where the EP would be made operational and it would not be sufficiently robust.

The reasons for The Group undertaking the review were:-

- The existing EP was out of date, the current version was dated September 2013 Amendment 35;

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- High turnover of staff in the Authority at a senior level over a short timescale;
- High number of new Elected Members in the Council; and
- The number of staffing changes in other organisations linked with the EP

The work on the review had taken over 12 months to complete. The Group were reassured to learn about the significant knowledge and skills the Forward Liaison Officers' possess.

Councillor Wyatt expressed his thanks to Members and Officers in Stockton-On-Tees who hosted a visit by The Group to discover how their Joint Service Agreement operates in relation to Emergency Planning.

Rotherham's Emergency Plan is part of a Joint Service Agreement with Sheffield City Council, but this was not the focus of the scrutiny review.

The aim of the review was to:-

Test the resilience of the Emergency Plan operation including examining the:-

- Internal governance including meetings structure, attendance and terms of reference for all the groups involved.
- Resilience arrangements networked within Directorates.
(The existing group of Directorate representatives was no longer reflective of the current Council structure.)
- Resilience of arrangements with external agencies involved in the EP process

The findings from the review identified

- Circulation of a controlled document
- Lack of joint meetings between Rotherham and Sheffield under the Joint Service Agreement
- Overall management of the EP process due to changes in officers and Members
- Primary operations room was not exclusively used for EP purposes but also as a training facility
- The secondary operations room at Clifton Park provided limited resources
- Requirement to recruit and train more volunteers
- Lack of a corporate exercise for the service
- Lack of information sharing between partner organisations
- The need to provide training to Parish Councillors on the EP
- No dedicated 4x4 wheeled drive vehicle
- Procurement staff, over time has been excluded from the EP process

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- When the EP was operational, the Council effectively became an emergency service, a fact to be made known to the Council's suppliers of goods and services
- Corporate Risk Manager was employed by the Council and was available to provide a "critical friend" support to the EP Team when rewriting the plan
- Attention was given to improving community resilience in the time of an emergency
- Ward Councillors needed to receive training on the EP and to understand their role in the process along with supporting the Cabinet Member
- The types of risk in the Borough could change – e.g. having the Advanced Manufacturing Park within its boundaries, this could be seen as a target for terrorism
- All members of the Communications Team were proficient in dealing with all media types along with having access to all documents on a shared drive
- All the Managers in the Communications Team had received training in the EP process
- A member of the Communications Team was on call at all times and they worked closely with the Borough Emergency Co-ordinator when the EP was operational
- The system currently in use in the Borough Emergency Operations Rooms (BEOR) was unsupported and further work needed to be done to establish the access codes for the system
- Overall the IT systems relating to the EP needed to be examined and ultimately systems needed to be based in the Cloud, therefore eliminating the need for a BEOR
- The IT systems were not part of the Shared Service Agreement with Sheffield.

The review took account emergency of an incident that happened during the period of the review, e.g. the fire at Kilnhurst.

Councillor McNeely raised concerns over recommendations 7, 11 and 14, all of which related to the Joint Service Agreement with Sheffield, which Sheffield were not complying to. A request for the Leader, Chief Executive and the Local Resilience Forum to strengthen these recommendations as soon as possible.

Discussions took place after a point raised by Councillor Walsh over the identified unsupported IT systems currently in use by the Council and the urgency for this to be dealt with and to put data into the Cloud. Councillor Wyatt supported Councillor Walsh's concerns noting that this work had been done on the IT systems some years ago but also raised the point not just about the resilience of IT systems but of resilience within the community and the work with Parish Councils and the use of community assets. Awareness of financial restraints but more joint working needed to

be encouraged between the Borough Council, Parish Councils along with local people who volunteered for such tasks as snow wardens.

It was noted by the Chair that the pre-meeting also supported this idea.

Damien Wilson the Strategic Director for Regeneration & Environment commented that members of staff from his Directorate had been involved in completing the review. Assurances were given by Damien that what was reported to be an unsupported IT system was in fact an independent system within the Council's framework. Work was underway to bring all IT systems and make them compatible onto the same platform.

The review was a good piece of work and by applying the principles of best practice, some of the recommendations identified by the review had already been implemented.

Councillor Walsh requested that a full scale training exercise based on the Emergency Plan be undertaken as soon as possible and the new version of the Emergency Plan (now known as the Major Incident Plan) be adopted and kept as a controlled document in one place.

Damien Wilson confirmed that it was important to the review the Emergency Plan due to the large number of new Officers in the Strategic Leadership Team along with the number of new Council Members. It was noted that in Damien's view Rotherham experiences a high number of real live operations such as marches, fires and flooding.

The Strategic Leadership Team had not worked together as a team in an emergency situation.

Some joint training work has already started with the Strategic Leadership Team who recently received a presentation on the Major Incident Plan. A point to note that the type of potential emergencies Rotherham was likely to face had changed over the last 10 years and the Council needed to be able to react to these.

Recommendations from the review

Recommendations

1. That the Major Incident Plan is reviewed bi-annually by a group of Members from the IPSC and this work forms part of the work programme for that year, however the document is to be reviewed by officers on a continual basis.
2. Mandatory training is to be provided to all Members about the Major Incident Plan to increase their awareness and involvement in any major incident.

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3. Training relating to the Major Incident Plan should be mandatory to ensure all staff who volunteered are confident in the role they play in the management of the incident.
4. An “out of hours” training exercise to take place once all volunteers have been trained. Full training exercises then take place on a regular basis.
5. A targeted approach to recruitment from employees who can be “job matched” to appropriate roles in the operation of the Major Incident Plan.
6. There are sufficient volunteers to staff the EP for at least two shift changes.
7. A protocol to be developed to ensure that the partner organisations in the Major Incident Plan are notified as a matter of course when significant incidents occur in the borough and through the Local Resilience Forum, ways are to be identified and carried out on building relationships between partner organisations involved in the Emergency Plan – in particular to the turnover in staff.
8. A facilitated meeting/away day involving the emergency services and RMBC major incident staff on the ground to promote team working.
9. An on-going programme of training sessions for Parish Council members should be arranged to ensure any new members receive training on the subject.
10. A representative from Procurement to be involved in the Borough Emergency Operations Room to facilitate timely ordering of goods/services and to provide information if the Belwin Fund becomes operational.
11. Through the Shared Service Agreement funding is secured for a Community Resilience Worker.
12. The Corporate Risk Manager is involved in the role of a “critical friend” any amendments of the Major Incident Plan
13. A flow chart to be designed detailing the Major Incident Process and highlighting how and when Members are to be involved in the process.
14. The Chief Executive / Leader of the Council to inform counterparts in Sheffield of their concerns over the lack of meetings in relation to the Joint Service Agreement.
15. The situation relating to the unsupported IT systems is rectified.

Resolved

- (1) That the report and recommendations from the review be approved.
- (2) That the report be forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board for their consideration.

82. ASSET MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Councillor Lelliott, Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy, introduced this item stating that Asset Management had previously been under the guidance of the Commissioners but was now back in the control of the Council. The information to be presented was all included in the Asset Management Improvement Plan which were the combined results of the independent review undertaken by CIPFA and the recommendations put forward by the Commissioners

Paul Woodcock, Assistant Director Regeneration, Planning and Transport along with Louise Murray, Strategic Asset Manager, gave a presentation on Asset Management to the Commission.

The story so far...

- Corporate Property Unit provided professional advice and managed some assets.
- Holding Directorates managed some assets and their budgets.
- Decisions made could be Directorate/Team focused and not to wider benefit of Council.
- CIPFA Property Health Check recommended adoption of Corporate Landlord and creation of Strategic Asset Management function.

The position now.

- All Council land and property were viewed as strategic assets – service and community need considered alongside property issues.
- An Asset Management Plan was almost complete – Policy, Strategy and Action Plan.
- One Public Estate and partnership working was underway.
- Service Asset Management Plans and Service Level Agreements were in place.

The Improvement Plan.

- 17 over-arching improvement recommendations derived from Health Check.
- Ranging from governance to a restructure to the creation of a comprehensive Asset Management Plan.
- Monitored at Asset Management Board and reported to Cabinet.
- Recent recommendation for return of powers – awaiting final confirmation.

OUTLINE STRUCTURE

The Asset Management Team

Comprises a Policy, a Strategy and an Action Plan and five main policy objectives:

1. Enabling delivery of Council's services and priorities.
2. Supporting economic growth, housing growth and town centre regeneration.
3. Maximising opportunities through adoption of One Public Estate.
4. Developing growth income through commercial/non-operational activities.
5. Maximising commissioning opportunities for property projects and services.

TEAM Structure

The Reviews

- Operational Property Review – includes 248 varied operational properties; based on SAMPs, strategy, condition survey outcomes and action plan. Completion date - 31st March 2018.
- Commercial/non-operational Property Review – includes 232 varied assets; based on condition survey outcomes, let ability and investment return. Completion date was 30th September 2017 through this would be extended as condition surveys had only recently commenced following identification of funding.

The Outcomes

- Reviews would enable rationalisation of portfolios leading to release of assets and also savings.
- Contributes to housing and economic growth.
- £2.32m capital receipt in 2016/17; £1.17m so far this year against a £2.0m target.
- Revenue savings of £780,000 (2014/15), £284,000(2015/16) and £664,000(2016/17)
- £612,560 so far this year against a £1.178m target.
- Next year, the target was £594,000.
- Rigorous asset challenge and Directorate co-operation would be key to achieving stretching target.

Other Improvement Points

- Property Maintenance Review and Compliance.
- Review of Soft Facilities Management.
- Facilities Management provision to Academies.
- Review of Internal Fee Recharging.
- Constitution and Scheme of Delegation.
- Performance Management.
- Data Management.
- Directorate Engagement.
- Corporate Profile and communications.
- Staff training.

What are we doing differently

- Increased internal engagement – via AMOG/AMB and with service representatives.
- Strategic working with Directorates to ensure optimum outcomes.
- Closely working with Housing and RiDO to help deliver housing and economic growth.
- Supporting revenue savings and capital receipts targets through rigorous asset review and challenge.
- Improved Member and community engagement.
- Decisions made in line with approved Policy.

The Future

- Increased engagement with Members and all internal/external customers.
- Completion of reviews leading to strategic rationalisation of the estate.
- Implementation of a planned, preventative maintenance plan.
- Identification of sites to facilitate housing and economic growth both owned and acquired.
- Increased partnership working.
- Generation of growth income through investment acquisition.

Damien Wilson noted that the health checks had provided confirmation that the Asset Management Service was fit for purpose and assurances that all the associated risks with the Service had been identified. The Council carried out the management of assets well but had not got the balance of resources correct to provide a comprehensive service. This was confirmed by the return of powers to the Council.

The future of working to the Corporate Landlord model was very important and how officers bought into this idea. The Corporate Landlord message needed to be shared through the Council.

Assets needed to be viewed as what they were and not what they were being used and to also keep potential uses in mind for the asset and the potential yield it could bring. This message needed to be shared and understood across the Council.

Services provided by the Council should not dictate how buildings were used but instead the use should be governed by the landlord/tenant relationship.

The Council's assets were a finite resource. If assets were disposed of then that income could potentially be used to acquire buildings which would generate a rental income stream for the Council at zero cost to the rate payers.

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Examples of such projects included:-

TECentre, was acquired with funding from Sheffield City Region and would provide an income stream.

Beighton Link Project which was business units funded using finance from the private sector, JESSICA funding with underwriting by the Council. There was a shared risk associated with this project which reduced over three years when the likelihood was that the units would be occupied providing local people with employment and a rental income received by the Council.

A change in culture was required to fully adopt the corporate landlord model, but this model would encourage Ward Councillors to get more involved in Council-owned buildings in their area.

Councillor Reeder raised the issue over lack of maintenance by the Council on the properties in its ownership. An acknowledgement to this fact was made and that it was not specific to Rotherham Council. This was a short term outlook and one that needed to be redressed. The results of the conditions of the building would be provided on the completion of the condition survey, which would result in an Investment Plan being produced. Buildings would be prioritised firstly from a health & safety perspective to if the building could be transferred to the community.

Councillor McNeely asked for confirmation of when the operational and condition surveys were to be completed and noted that empty properties cost the Council money. The surveys would be completed by the end of March 2018 and information relating to the cost to the Council on empty properties would be provided.

Councillor Atkin asked for confirmation on the "Right to Buy" initiative, but this only related to homes in the Borough and not community buildings. The presentation mentioned Estates and Valuation both of which were technical areas of work and provided assistance in relation to all Council-owned properties and not just Housing.

The point was made about there being more than one Town Centre in the Borough and all of the Town Centres should be considered when work was being considered or that there were employment opportunities coming forward.

Discussions took place around let ability using a property at Fir Close as an example, which was losing £8,500 per year. Hire of the property was charged at £18 per hour but was considered too expensive for small community groups to pay. Councillor Atkin suggested that it would be better to have some income rather than no income from the hire of the building.

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Damien outlined what let ability meant with the bottom line of there being a minimum hourly cost necessary for the Council to keep the building staffed and operational. There was an increased need to look at the full cost of recovery for the use of buildings. Councillor Lelliott stated that the points being put forward as an issue would be discussed at the Asset Management Board.

The Chair offered the suggestion that organisations such as Voluntary Action Rotherham and RotherFed may be able to help support groups who wanted to meet.

A proposal was put forward to holding a seminar for Members on the topic of Let ability to promote a better understanding on the topic.

Damien Wilson stated that a report was to be submitted to Cabinet in October in relation to Swinton Town Centre and the opportunities currently available. There was a need to look at the assets owned by the Council in all of its Town Centres to provide employment opportunities. The Council was now assembling land, buildings and creating a vision for Rotherham. Along with the Masterplan and the Supplementary Planning Document, Rotherham Borough would be of interest to developers who wanted to come to the area.

Councillor Walsh was encouraged by the presentation on Asset Management but noted the action to Review Internal Fee Recharge was amber in the ratings. Corporate Landlords charged fees to service providers and there was a potential to develop an empire. Councillor Walsh suggested monitoring this element. Damien explained the reason behind this action. Historically charges for work had been higher for services in order to meet an inflated income target. This was an attempt to look at charges and therefore make it more competitive in the open market. A response in relation to the internal recharges was awaited from Financial Services.

Councillor Cutts concurred with what had been said about the increased interest in Rotherham. There was a greater responsibility to recognise and utilise our assets.

There were now only three football pitches on Herringthorpe playingfield but the grass on the whole field still needed to be cut. This area was currently in the Masterplan. If all the pitches were not used then less income was received. Under the current budget proposals managing how the Council used its assets was under close scrutiny.

Investors are now looking to Rotherham at what land was available. The Forge Island site would be shortly going to market with the Council undertaking a specification for its potential uses to maximise the potential benefits it could bring to the town. Domine Lane was also being considered in relation to the Forge Island site. The Council was in communication with property owners in the areas surrounding Forge

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Island to get the best possible outcomes for the area in terms of the Town Centre Masterplan, however, not all property owners were interested in releasing land.

A planning application has been received by the Council from a private source relating to Westgate for 47 apartments along with a commercial element.

Sheffield Road was part of land assembly and the Council was in discussions with the Royal Mail regarding their site on Westgate/Sheffield Road.

Other smaller businesses owned land in that area which was preventing a land assembly project coming together.

Councillor Reeder asked a question relating to the derelict building on Corporation Street and whether or not business rates were applicable. Business rates were applicable unless there was an exemption on the building. The Council had limited powers in being able to deal with this building as it was in private ownership. A Section 215 Notice had been served and a charge has been put against the property.

Councillor Jones pointed out that the issue of recharging between Services only created an extra cost called "on costs" which in reality employed two people, one to issue the cost and one person to accept and log the payment. Councillor Jones continued that there were buildings within the Borough which were in a bad state of repair. Decisions needed to be made as to the best use of those buildings. If they were to be sold then the money could be used to re-invest in the Council's remaining properties. The standard of the remaining buildings needed to be examined.

Many local groups were looking at Community Asset Transfer as this was an opportunity, with the assistance of funding e.g. Lottery Funding, to refurbish the buildings for use by local groups, with ownership remaining with the Council.

The Council was happy to work with Local Councillors to improve the way Asset Management was undertaken.

Co-opted Member, Lillian Shears, noted that groups needed to look at the running costs of the buildings. High costs could result in groups folding.

A paper was circulated by Lillian Shears in relation to the piece of scrutiny work on repair appointment, communication process and the customer journey by RotherFed.

In answer to Councillor Albiston's question on knowing when a building was fit for purpose, this was agreed on at the Asset Management Board after a survey has been completed.

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Discussions took place around encouraging Directorates in the Council to work together strategically. This was the role of the Asset Management Board which was responsible for all the operational buildings in the Council's ownership.

Concerns were raised by Councillor Albiston as to how investment could be made into the poorer communities and the ethos of Asset Management not turn into a postcode lottery. How could the Council invest in the poorer communities? Councillor Albiston added her support to the Community Asset Transfer.

The Council needed to be clearer to the community on what was available. There was concern with regard to the offloading of buildings to community group who then invested time in running a building rather than providing services. The approach of the Council should be to be involved with working with community groups.

Full cost recovery was supported – there were some services that may not warrant charging full costs because it was due to the social benefits the service provided; a balance was required between economic and social benefits.

Through the Asset Management Board the Council had a more strategic overview of the buildings and the quality of them in its ownership. A business plan would need to be prepared for any new potential use of buildings to be approved by the Asset Management Board and ultimately Cabinet.

A process was in place regarding the transfer of community assets to community groups.

Damien Wilson undertook to ascertain the number of buildings had been transferred to community groups under the Community Asset Transfer scheme.

Each Directorate needed a strategic approach to its Service directory need which informed the Corporate Landlord function.

In moving forward, the Strategic Asset Management Plan presented both risks and challenges. Suggestions put forward for savings may not be acted upon due to Elected Members having other views.

Savings targets had been identified against these properties. The final decision about the properties rested with other Directorates within the Council, however, this placed a pressure on savings target.

It was a postcode lottery as location did impact upon property value. Certain areas were more proactive and encouragement was given for the Council to work with the community and voluntary sector to improve the capacity of the residents.

Councillor Jayne Elliot would prefer to see when services/people needed to be relocated that this was completed with fewer moves as possible. Damien Wilson stated that in previous years the services had suffered from lack of investment and lack of management. The new structure included management and ownership by the Director and Cabinet Member.

Paul Woodcock highlighted that over the next two years, significant revenue savings have to be achieved. The current position was that the Council could not afford to run the amount of buildings in its ownership.

There were limited funds available for maintenance of buildings and the results of the condition survey would require significant decisions from the Council.

Other recommendations were in the Asset Management Improvement Plan

83. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That a further meeting take place on Wednesday, 15th November at 1.30 p.m. with a pre-meeting at 11.00 a.m.