

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday 10 February 2021

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Cusworth, R. Elliott, Jarvis, Jepson, Keenan, Mallinder, Napper, Taylor, Tweed, Walsh and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence:- There were no apologies for absence.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

297. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 20 JANUARY 2021

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, held on 20 January 2021, be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

298. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

299. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from the public or press.

300. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items requiring the exclusion of the public or press.

301. BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2021-22 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 15 February 2021 in respect of the Budget and Council Tax 2021/22 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, the Strategic Director – Finance and Customer Services, the Assistant Director - Financial Services and the Head of Corporate Finance attended the meeting to present the report.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Finance, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services for Cleaner, Greener Communities, the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Assistant Chief Executive, the Strategic Director - Children and Young People, and the Strategic Director - Regeneration and Environment were also in attendance at the meeting.

The report provided information on the Council's Budget and Council Tax

for 2021/22 based on the Council's Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2021/22, budget consultation and the consideration of Directorate budget proposals through the Council's formal Budget process, alongside a review of the financial planning assumptions contained within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

In setting the proposed 2020/21 budget, increases of 1.99% in the Council's basic Council Tax and of 1.0% in the Adult Social Care precept were being recommended. The report also detailed the proposed revenue budget for 2021/22, an updated capital programme to 2023/24 and the updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2022/23.

The report stated that the Council had faced considerable challenges during 2020/21 in its response to the global pandemic, with the impact of COVID-19 seeing a significant shift in how the Council had been able to function and provide services to residents. The impact of the COVID-19 emergency had seen significant financial pressures for the Council due to additional expenditure and lost income and the delayed delivery of planned savings and cost reductions. The report stated that whilst these financial pressures would largely be covered in year by financial support grants from Government, the long-term financial impact of COVID19 and financial support available to the Council remained uncertain.

The report stated that since the introduction of austerity measures in 2010, the Council had had to make savings in excess of £200million in response to the significant reductions in Central Government funding. The two-year budget for 2019/20 and 2020/21 that had been set at Council in February 2019 and reviewed during 2020/21 had required £34million of budget savings and cost reductions to be delivered to meet estimated funding gaps over the two years, including savings that had been agreed in previous years for delivery across this timescale. It was noted that over £16million of these savings and cost reductions would have been completed by the end of the current financial year, however £18million of agreed budget savings were still required to be delivered during 2021/22.

The Leader in introducing the report advised that while there would be no cuts to services during 2021/22 it would be essential that the £18million of identified savings were delivered in order to deliver a balanced budget. The Leader also noted the positive position of the Council's reserves, including the budget contingency reserve that were in a more positive position than had been projected. The Leader advised that while ideally no rise in Council Tax would be needed that the proposed 2.99% increase in Council Tax, that was below the 5% referendum threshold, was possible due to strong financial management and the healthy level of reserves.

The Leader noted the significant financial challenges that the response to the pandemic had created for the Council, but advised that the greatest financial challenges were still to be realised as the full level of the

economic impact of the pandemic was not yet fully apparent. The Leader noted areas of Council activity that would address the economic impact of the pandemic on the Borough in areas including employment, food poverty and digital exclusion.

The Chief Executive noted the extensive work that continued to be carried out to manage the ongoing challenges financial challenges of the pandemic in addition to the ongoing challenges of delivering already identified savings and the uncertainty of Government funding streams. The Chief Executive noted that the ongoing uncertainty around Government funding had informed the decision for the schemes that had been identified in the Capital Programme to be limited to activities that could be completed within 2021/22.

Members asked that with residents living longer, and often with ongoing health problems and disabilities, what plans the Council had to respond to the financial challenges that this created. The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health advised that planning activity surrounding the challenges of a growing older population was taking place in consultation with the Health and Wellbeing Board, and noted that the ultimate objective was to support as many residents to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. The Assistant Director - Strategic Commissioning who was in attendance at the meeting advised that some of the planned changes to how homecare was delivered had been impacted by the pandemic, with the more ambitious transformational activity being deferred to future years. The Strategic Director – Finance and Customer Services noted the Council's proposed 2% Adult Social Care Precept on Council Tax for 2021/22 that would generate additional Council Tax income of £2.2m that would then be allocated to the 2021/22 Adult Social Care budget.

Members welcomed the positive focus of the budget with its proposed investments in activities that supported young people and focused on increasing social value. Members asked how the spending plans that had been included in the budget would be communicated to residents in a way that ensured that it was clear that how the money was being spent was the choice of the Council, and not by direction from the Government. The Leader noted that communicating budget plans across the Borough was always challenging and advised that information on spending priorities and budget plans would, as always, be included with Council Tax bills. The Leader advised that the Communications team were working on alternative and innovative plans for the future on how the content of the budget could be communicated with residents.

Members asked what action was being taken to address the projected budget overspend in the Children and Young People's Services Directorate. The Strategic Director - Children and Young People's Services assured members that planned activity in the Directorate was taking place to reduce the overspend including increasing the number of in-house foster carers and focusing on how support for looked after children was stepped down safely. The Strategic Director advised that

focussed activity that would enable the right support to be provided at the right time along with a reduction in the number of out of Borough placements for looked after children would help reduce costs.

The Leader noted the severe impact of the pandemic on the Children and Young People's Services Directorate and how delays in the court system had meant that looked after children were remaining in the Council's care for much longer than had been planned and budgeted for. The Leader advised that 97% of the Council's overspend had come from the Children and Young People's Services Directorate. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services noted that the budget for 2020/21 had assumed a 20% reduction in the number of looked after children in the Council's care which had then not been realised due to the unforeseen impact of the pandemic. The Strategic Director advised that the situation regarding delays in the hearing of delayed court cases was now improving.

Members noted with concern the low number of responses that had been received to the Council's budget consultation with residents. The Leader advised that the late confirmation of the Local Government Finance Settlement had reduced the time available for the consultation and the fact that the consultation was online only due the impact of the pandemic had limited the number of responses received. The Leader advised that consultations regarding specific services or projects tended to get a better response as residents found these consultations more relevant to them and their communities. The Chief Executive noted that as the budget for 2021/22 was in a large part a continuation of the current budget priorities there was nothing significantly new on the Council's spending priorities that residents may have felt they needed to comment on.

Members asked whether that in retrospect the two-year budget for 2019/20 and 2020/21 had been a good decision. The Leader advised that having two-year budget had provided greater certainty and had also enabled better planning as many projects needed more than one year for their implementation. The Strategic Director – Finance and Corporate Services noted that longer term budget planning was always beneficial for forward planning and advised that in the current year with the demands of the pandemic, that the two-year budget had meant that it had not been necessary to start work on the delivery of newly identified savings which could have been problematic given the situation.

Members welcomed the planned investments and public realm spending in town and village across the Borough. The Cabinet Member - Cleaner, Greener Communities noted the significant focus of spending in her area of responsibility on projects that would contribute to a safer and cleaner Borough and that would also address the issues raised by the Council's Declaration of a Climate Emergency. The Cabinet Member reaffirmed the Council's commitment to increased tree planting, and how the requirement to plant trees and improve the natural environment would be part of all new developments in the Borough. Members reaffirmed their

support for the Council's commitment to tree planting but noted that it was essential that consideration was given to ensure that the trees that were planted were suitable for their proposed location.

The Chair asked the Leader how confident he was that the savings that were required to be delivered as part of the budget, including the savings that had not been delivered during 2020/21, would be delivered on time. The Leader noted that as all the easy to deliver savings had already been delivered, the savings that were planned were larger and more complex transformational activities. The Leader advised that despite the challenges of delivering these complex projects, that were also not being made any easier by the demands of the pandemic, that he was confident that the required savings would be delivered on time.

The Board sought assurances that all reasonable measures had been taken in the preparation of the budget, and that the budget took account of the risks and considerable financial uncertainty facing the Council in future years. The Strategic Director, Finance and Customer Services advised that while she could give full assurance on the budget preparation process and could confirm that contingency measures had been built in to the budget to deal with financial uncertainties, it was never possible to anticipate all possible scenarios and remove risk entirely from the budget.

The Chair asked the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Finance on his level of confidence on the soundness of the Budget proposals. The Member for Corporate Services and Finance stated that he had full confidence in the proposed Budget for 2021/22.

The Chair thanked the Leader, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Finance and the Strategic Director – Finance and Customer Services for attending the meeting and answering members' questions. The Chair also thanked the other Cabinet Members, Strategic Directors and officers that had also attended the meeting to answer members' questions.

Resolved: -

That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.

302. DIGITAL STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 15 February 2021 that proposed a refreshed Digital Strategy and that also detailed the progress made in the strategy's implementation and ongoing development. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Finance, the Strategic Director – Finance and Customer Services, the Assistant Director - Customer Information and Digital and the Head of Digital Services attended the meeting to present the report.

In introducing the report, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Finance noted that the Council's Digital Strategy had covered the period 2016-2019, and as such was overdue a refresh and refocus.

The report stated that the Covid-19 pandemic had highlighted how integral technology had been in ensuring that Council services could be successfully managed and delivered remotely during the pandemic, as well as in ensuring that residents had been able to continue to access services through non face-to-face channels. It was noted that the refreshed Digital Strategy would underpin much of the work that was being carried out in order to deliver the Council's Customer Access Strategy, providing the infrastructure, software and technology capabilities necessary to realise its aims and objectives, as well as exploring new and emerging technologies that would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the access channels used.

The Strategic Director – Finance and Customer Services noted that as the governance arrangements surrounding the strategy were proposed to be delegated from Cabinet to Officers, only major changes in the focus of the strategy would be brought to Cabinet for approval. The Assistant Director - Customer Information and Digital and the Head of Digital Services noted that while separate, the Digital Strategy was, and would continue to be closely aligned with the Council's Customer Access Strategy.

The refreshed Digital Strategy was attached as an appendix to the officer's report.

Members welcomed the refreshed Digital Strategy and its objectives. Members also noted their support for the approach of utilising existing software solutions, rather than building bespoke systems as these would be better supported technically and would also enable data to be migrated more easily to new systems when systems were updated or replaced.

Members asked how the Digital Strategy would be updated and refreshed moving forwards. The Strategic Director advised that the Digital Strategy would be updated and refreshed annually in order that it remained focused and relevant in a fast changing environment and that reports on its development could be brought to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board they were asked for.

Members asked for further information on the Rotherham Health Record that would provide shared access for health and care professionals to patient data. The Head of Digital Services advised that the initiative would enable some patient data to be shared between health and social care practitioners to ensure a joined up and person-centred service to be delivered. The Head of Digital Services advised that the information that was shared and included in the record would be agreed between each individual and their GP. The Strategic Director assured members that access to the Health Records was strictly managed and controlled with the data stored and managed securely. The Assistant Director noted that

the information held on and each Health Record was high level information and advised that if more detailed information on a patient's case was required then this would be managed through existing channels for the sharing of information between health and social care practitioners.

Members asked what work was being carried out to support those residents who were not able to access digital services to ensure that they did not get left behind by the move to digital access for services. The Head of Digital Services advised that a Digital Inclusion Strategy was being developed that would aim to address the issue of digital exclusion.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Finance, the Strategic Director – Finance and Customer Services, the Assistant Director - Customer Information and Digital and the Head of Digital Services for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

Resolved: -

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That a progress report on the implementation of the Digital Strategy be brought to the February 2022 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

303. AMENDMENT TO THE HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING POLICY (VEHICLE LICENCE PLATES)

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 15 February 2021 that detailed proposed amendments to the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy, 2020-2023 regarding the issuing of vehicle licence plates. The Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety and the Assistant Director - Community Safety and Street Scene attended the meeting to present the report.

The report stated in March 2020 the Council had approved a new Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy where it had also been recommended that additional public consultation regarding the issuing of vehicle licence plates be carried out. It was noted that under the current Licensing Policy all licensed vehicles were required to undergo regular compliance checks with a maximum of three compliance checks per year for vehicles that were over five years of age with licence plates being issued for the duration of a compliance check. It was noted that this policy had been introduced so as to ensure that all vehicles attended their required compliance checks and provided a visible reminder to drivers that their test was due. As a result of this policy across the Borough, 237 vehicles had been issued with two licence plates per year and 639 vehicles had been issued with three licence plates per year.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety noted that the Council had carried out a further consultation on this specific issue between December 2020 and January 2021. This consultation had focused on the views of the public, as the views of trade representatives, licensed drivers and Elected Members had already been captured. A summary of the 149 responses that had been received from the consultation were attached as an appendix to the officer's report.

The Cabinet Member advised that response to the consultation had shown broad support for amendments to the Licensing Policy that would enable automatic reminders to be issued to drivers when their compliance check was due and that would also report on whether a vehicle had attended its latest compliance check. The Cabinet Member advised that with such safeguards in place it would in future be possible to issue just one plate a year. The Cabinet Member noted that the proposed amendment would enable the costs surrounding the issue of vehicle licence plates to be reduced for both the Council and also for drivers, as well as saving 112 square metres of used non-recyclable plastic licence plates being sent to landfill each year. It was noted that the proposed amendment had also been supported by the Licensing Board.

Members welcomed the proposals that would lead to more efficient procedures that would benefit the Council as well as drivers. Members sought assurances that the new processes and systems would ensure that if a compliance check was not completed then a licence plate would be removed. The Cabinet Member advised that she was fully confident that the proposed processes, and the systems that managed them would ensure that compliance checks were managed correctly, and that any incidents of non-compliance would result in licence plate being removed. The Chair sought assurances on the robustness of the IT systems to manage the tasks required by the proposed changes to the Licensing Policy. The Assistant Director - Community Safety and Street Scene assured the Chair that the IT systems were robust enough to manage the tasks required to issue reminders and to flag up any issues of concern.

Members asked why the relatively small and specific consultation exercise on the proposed change had taken so long to complete. The Assistant Director noted that the consultation had initially been delayed by the onset of the pandemic when staff resources had been deployed on other activities. The Assistant Director advised that it had also been hoped to use other methods of consultation in addition to online activities, but that when restrictions related to the pandemic had been re-imposed these plans had had to be abandoned and an online only consultation be carried out.

Members asked with reference to the Licensing Policy for further information on DBS Checks. The Assistant Director advised that an Enhanced DBS check was always required for drivers, and that as an extra level of security and safety for the public, staff who worked for taxi firms in support roles were also required to have a Basic DBS check. The

Assistant Director advised that for staff in support roles only, that if a DBS check could not be carried out then the Operator must outline the steps that they have taken to demonstrate how they were satisfied that an individual was a fit and proper person.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety and the Assistant Director - Community Safety and Street Scene for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

Resolved: -

That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.

304. REVISIONS TO THE HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY AND THE STRATEGIC TENANCY POLICY

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 15 February 2021 that detailed proposed amendments to the Council's Housing Allocation Policy and the Strategic Tenancy Policy. The Cabinet Member for Housing and the Head of Housing Options attended the meeting to present the report.

In introducing the report, the Cabinet Member for Housing noted and welcomed the review of the proposed amendments to the Housing Allocation Policy and the Strategic Tenancy Policy that had been carried out by members of the Improving Places Select Commission, the report on which was included later on the agenda.

The report stated that Council's Housing Allocation Policy had been in place since 29 October 2014 and that since its introduction it had been subject periodic reviews and revisions, with the most recent update being carried out in September 2019 to respond to the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

The report detailed the proposed further adjustments to policy that aimed to respond to the lessons learned over the previous 12 months and also from the outcomes of a benchmarking exercise that had been carried out with other local authorities. The Head of Housing Options advised that the information gathered through these processes had helped to refine the policy and had also presented an opportunity to further improve how the Council helped those in greatest housing need. The Head of Housing Options noted that with the increase in homelessness cases due to the pandemic, it was essential that the Council's Allocation Policy was able to deal effectively with the challenges that the increase in numbers of homeless had created.

The Head of Housing Options advised that the proposed amendments would ensure that the Council's policy reflected the Government's taskforce recommendations regarding the need accommodate people

faced with rough sleeping. The Head of Housing Options noted that the proposed changes would also help to prevent repeat homelessness and ensure that rough sleepers did not end up back on the streets. The officer's report detailed the 15 proposed changes to the policy along with the reasons for each change that was being proposed.

It was noted that as the Council's Strategic Tenancy Policy was closely aligned with the Council's allocation of housing stock, the opportunity had been taken to review the policy as part of the Allocations Policy review. The proposed amendments to the Strategic Tenancy Policy were detailed in the officer's report.

Members welcomed the proposed amendments to the Council's Housing Allocation Policy and the Strategic Tenancy Policy and noted how they would ensure that the Council could respond to the needs of those who were homeless or rough sleeping in the most responsive way.

Members sought assurance that the proposed amendments would not stop tenants who were wanting to transfer properties from being able to do so. The Head of Housing Options assured members that this facility would still be available, and that while tenancies required residents to commit to staying for at least 12 months in a property, processes and support were available to enable tenants to move property due to a change in their personal circumstances.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Head of Housing Options for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

Resolved: -

That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.

305. OUTCOMES FROM HOMES ALLOCATION WORKING GROUP

The Chair of the Improving Places Select Commission presented a report that detailed the recommendations that had arisen from a review that had been carried out by a sub-group of the Improving Places that had reviewed proposed changes to the Homes Allocation Policy.

The Chair thanked the Chair of the Improving Places Select Commission and the members who had taken part in the review for their work in conducting the review.

Resolved: -

That the briefing be noted, and the following recommendations be submitted to Cabinet for consideration: -

- a) That the briefing be noted.

- b) That sustained funding for staff on the temporary accommodation and homelessness teams be safeguarded.
- c) That revisions to the policy be undertaken to ensure clarity and readability throughout the document, especially as regards application processes and shortlisting criteria.
- d) That notation about prolific offenders be included in the information provided to the Housing Assessment Panel.
- e) That quality standards regarding the proper completion of housing forms be reaffirmed to officers.
- f) That rent arrears be added to the scrutiny work programme for 2021-22.
- g) That single occupants of larger homes owned by the council be given the opportunity to downsize.

306. OUTCOMES FROM WORKING GROUP ON CALL CENTRE COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair presented a report that detailed the recommendations that had arisen from a review that had been conducted by a sub-group of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board regarding Call Centre Communications.

The Chair thanked the members who had taken place in the review.

Resolved: -

That the briefing be noted, and the following recommendations be submitted to Cabinet for consideration: -

- a) That the Council further promotes a digital-first route for customers to access Council services.
- b) That regular data updates be provided to the Leader and Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on a six-monthly basis.
- c) That the Customer Service Standards of the Council be reaffirmed to officers, in particular, in respect of written communication with customers.

307. OUTCOMES FROM BUILDING USE WORKING GROUP

The Chair of the Improving Places Select Commission presented a report that detailed the recommendations that had arisen from a review that that that had been carried out by a sub-group of the Improving Places

Select Commission regarding the use of Council buildings.

The Chair thanked the Chair of the Improving Places Select Commission and the members who had taken part in the review for their work in conducting the review.

Resolved: -

That the briefing be noted, and the following recommendations be submitted to Cabinet for consideration: -

- a) That the principle be agreed that the future usage of buildings be determined in accordance with the needs of services located therein.
- b) That, prior to buildings being brought back into use by staff or the public, consultation take place with Trade Unions and staff following completion of risk assessments in respect of the building or location concerned.
- c) That any decision to return employees to Council buildings beyond the minimal number that have been required to be present throughout the pandemic be made having regard to advice from the Corporate Health and Safety Team and Human Resources, as well as being subject to Government guidance around the safe use of Council buildings.
- d) That Members be notified when main operational buildings are to be brought back into use, specifically the Town Hall as the civic hub of the Borough.
- e) That, having regard to the positive implications associated with virtual meetings in respect of the Council's carbon footprint, the Leader of the Council lobby the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to legislate for the ongoing provision of virtual meetings beyond 7 May 2021.
- f) That Asset Management and Digital Services work together to identify the necessary changes or solutions required in Riverside House and Rotherham Town Hall, as well as any changes required to equipment or software for Members and officers, to enable continued use of remote working whilst permitting physical presence in a Council building.
- g) That the Head of Democratic Services prepare guidance and training on the procedures and operation of hybrid meetings.

308. WORK PROGRAMME

The Board considered its Work Programme.

Resolved: -

That the Work Programme be approved.

309. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Board considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions 1 February – 30 April 2021.

Resolved: - That the Forward Plan be noted.

310. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no call-in issues.

311. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

312. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board will be held at 11am on Wednesday 24 February 2021 as Microsoft Teams meeting.