

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 8 December 2020**

Present:- Councillor Mallinder (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Birch, Buckley, B. Cutts, Elliot, Jacques, Jepson, Jones, Khan, McNeely, Reeder, Rushforth, Sansome, Sheppard, Taylor and Wyatt.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed online:-
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

106. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 20 OCTOBER 2020

Resolved:-

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 October 2020, be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

107. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

108. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

The Chair advised that no questions had been submitted.

109. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair advised that there were no items of business on the agenda that would require the exclusion of the press or public from the meeting.

110. THRIVING NEIGHBOURHOODS ANNUAL REPORT

Consideration was given to a report regarding progress on the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and the Neighbourhood Working model. It was noted that this report presented information regarding the last year.

In discussion, members requested clarification around budget numbers on the Appendix. A correction was offered in writing.

Members also requested assurances that continuity on neighbourhood working would be maintained following the changes in wards. In response, the Cabinet member provided assurances that this would be part of the induction programme for new members. Officers also provided assurances that as close a fit as possible would be the approach to maintain the knowledge and the level of support. An additional neighbourhood coordinator would also be added in advance.

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Members requested clarification around the Housing Hubs. The response noted that the ward housing hubs came into being at the beginning of the last financial year as a move away from housing panels to more ward-based meetings, each ward with a proportioned budget which is weighted based on the council housing in that area. At the hubs, tenants and housing officers meet to discuss the priorities and issues related to housing in the ward.

Members noted that it was not known by partner organisations such as Rotherfed who or what was involved in these Housing Hubs. In response, the Cabinet member noted that not all wards will be holding housing hubs in the same way currently. An example was provided of how the hubs worked in a specific ward. The decisions around how to use budgets were made based on conversations with as great a number of residents as possible. Members noted that there was insufficient information regarding the Housing Hubs. It was suggested by the Cabinet member that the Cabinet member for Housing and colleagues present more information about Housing Hubs at a later time.

Members noted the strengths in the report and complimented the work that has gone into the progress reflected in the report.

Members noted the historic difficulty throughout the previous year in garnering strong attendance at housing ward meetings. It was noted that it was not a slight on Neighbourhoods staff but sometimes it is just the ward councillor and the Neighbourhoods officer in attendance. It was noted that representatives of housing tenancy were needed as well. Members expressed hope that a review could capture this learning to take forward in the upcoming organisation of ward meetings. Members concurred that often ward meetings are spearheaded by one or two people, and that a strategic overview would be taken in regards to these meetings moving forward to reinvigorate these groups and get them back on their feet after COVID. The response from officers provided assurances that a strategic overview is being taken not just in Rotherham but across the whole of South Yorkshire, in consultation with community organisations, Voluntary Organisations, Rotherfed, etc to find out the pressures and mitigate the problems these organisations have experienced as a result of the pandemic. Neighbourhoods works to support organisations during the pandemic, and it has been seen that new organisations have emerged in the midst of the pandemic. Some have gone online and developed; others have had to 'mothball' themselves for the time being. It was noted that three volunteer coordinators had been recruited for the North, South, and Central areas to help support community organisations. These coordinators will be with us for the next 12 months.

Members expressed concerns that the public avenue into ward housing hub meetings has diminished during the pandemic. Assurances were requested that communities are being consulted regarding budget use. The response from the Cabinet member provided assurances that

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consultation has continued despite the restrictions on in-person public gatherings during the pandemic, because so many other methods of consultation have been leveraged to maintain more diverse communication avenues. Officers concurred with figures of the number of engagements with publications, door knocks, and other types of opportunities for resident engagement. Consultation on priorities had to be discontinued around the middle of March, but that will be continued, and it has continued to expand the ways members of communities have a say in decisions about their ward.

Members expressed positive views about the robust improvisation and hard work that has taken place in order to continue to keep residents involved in decision making throughout the pandemic using a variety of techniques and avenues.

Members emphasised the need for additional inclusion efforts at ward meetings and suggested that councillors be given the opportunity to view publications before these go out to the residents in their ward.

Members also complimented the work reflected in the report as some of the best that the Council has ever done. It was further noted that some ward CAP meetings have very strong attendance. It was emphasised that publicising and attendance and housing budget allocations is the responsibility of members rather than officers.

Members expressed support for the report and noted that often the attendance of the ward meetings often comes down to the same small number of people, but the work reflected in the report is getting to the heart of our communities to involve more people than before. As it is difficult for everyone to turn up to every meeting, it was observed to work well for several members that any decision that is taken at the ward meeting is communicated to all three ward councillors and carried forward from there.

Members noted that not all Members put in the same level of effort.

Members also offered clarification that the desire for improvement was not directed at officers' work but around the Housing Hubs themselves.

Members noted that the current way of operating Housing Hubs had not been efficacious in all wards. It was understood and agreed that the former area housing panels had needed to be improved, and while progress is welcome, the current arrangement of the housing hubs is unsatisfactory.

Members requested information regarding the new ward boundaries. The Cabinet member noted that the boundary maps have been available for the past 4 years.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That ward meetings such as housing hubs be further publicised among the relevant partner and community organisations with a view to improving attendance and communication.
3. That the Cabinet Member and relevant colleagues from Housing be invited to present to a Working Group regarding the development of Housing Hubs.

111. CULTURAL STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Consideration was given to a report identifying how the Borough's Cultural Strategy has been implemented over the past year through the formation of the Rotherham Cultural Partnership Board with its associated partners. The report highlighted the "7 Game Changer" themes that The Cultural Partnership Board has developed in order to deliver its mission, and it highlighted the successes of the reporting partnerships.

The report further provided details regarding a selection of the projects the Strategy has delivered over the past year and noted a number of future action points. The Cabinet member noted the innovative and engaging work that has taken place and introduced the possibility of a potential eighth "Game Changer" related to physical activity.

In discussion, Members asked how the pandemic has affected the existing cultural offer, such as Waleswood, ensuring that attractions were protect and survive for the post-pandemic offer for local residents and those outside of the area. In response, it was explained that the Council had proactively supported cultural and sports bodies to access grant funding opportunities to be able to continue post pandemic.

Regarding the Rotherham show, Members hoped as early a decision as possible would be made to limit the early expenses incurred by participating businesses and individuals.

Members also expressed hopes regarding the Moving Rotherham initiative, that the FA nationally and locally might be consulted, so that grassroots organisations are involved in getting young people connected to these activities. In response, it was acknowledged that this was a hugely exciting project and that the FA was actively involved and working closely with officers. A legacy plan had recently been submitted to the FA, which would include a part-time officer shared between Rotherham and Sheffield to support the Moving Rotherham initiative.

Members provided some very detailed feedback in respect of design improvement and typographical errors in the strategy document, which would be addressed following the meeting. Further commentary was

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provided on the issues of the chairing of the Cultural Partnership Board, with Members stating their preference for the relevant Cabinet Member to continue holding that position in view of their connection to all councillors and other partners. In response, the Cabinet Member indicated that the proposal for a representative of another body to take the Chair had come from her to demonstrate to other partners that the partnership was not all about the Council. It had been her intention for the Vice-Chair position to be filled by the relevant Cabinet Member to continue to provide leadership support to the partnership. Some additional discussion took place with regard to the inclusion of Boston Castle as part of 'Yorkshire's Hidden Gems' and the need to include Rotherfed as a key part of the Cultural Partnership Board. Officers agreed to go away and review that position with a view to including them.

A plea was made to ensure that the Chesterfield Canal Steering Group continued to be a priority for the authority and assurances were provided that the Cultural Partnership Board has included it within its action plan and further work would be undertaken to support the use of the canal from leisure and wellbeing perspective.

Concerns were raised regarding the publication of a report by an organisation called Consumer Research Data which had detailed access to green spaces and leisure, which had not been particularly complimentary about the offer in the borough. Officers indicated that they were not aware of it but would look into it after the meeting. However, it was further noted that fewer than 10% of residents in the borough lived more than 280metres away from a small green space that could be used for recreation or 480metres away from a larger green space area, and in comparison to other authority areas the borough was well served in respect of public green spaces.

In concluding the discussion on this item, the Chair referenced that the strategy referred to Rotherham as underperforming but it was not clear in what way the borough was underperforming. In response, it was explained that Rotherham is under the national average for participation in sport and leisure. The strategic intent was to raise participation levels through activities in localities across the borough. Finally, the Chair reiterated the importance of the Marmot principles which had been reported recently to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That future consultation efforts ensure the perspectives of hard-to-reach members of our community are incorporated in the consultation.
3. That clarification notes be provided around elements of the action plan where these have not been provided.

112. ALLOTMENTS SELF-MANAGEMENT

Consideration was given to a report which provided an update on the progress towards the transfer of operational responsibility for the management of the Borough's allotments from the Council to a community benefit company, Rotherham Allotment Alliance (RAA).

It was noted that since October 2019, significant progress had been made on the transfer process, with the key achievements as follows:

- The transfer of all existing tenant data and management information to the RAA.
- Transfer of allotment management software.
- The employment of an Allotment Administrator, seconded to the RAA from the Council.
- Access by the RAA to Capital funding provided by the Council.
- The development of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) and head leases.

Members noted that officers would continue to work alongside the RAA to complete a small number of outstanding operational tasks, such as long-standing encroachment issues and the transfer of utility billing. Whilst the legal transfer of the physical asset was still to complete, it was expected to take place imminently. Completion of the head lease from the Council to the RAA was also expected to be achieved by 31 December 2020. It was reported that the SLA will come into effect once signed by both parties, which was expected to be at the same time as the completion of the head leases.

Members sought reassurance in respect of the ownership of the land on which allotments were based and it was confirmed that the Council retained ownership of the land, whilst the RAA leased it as a limited company and was charged a peppercorn rent. With regard to allotment sites in Whiston, it was noted that the parish council had given notice the Borough Council of its wish to become the Statutory Allotment Authority for sites within the parish. It was confirmed that the Asset Management Service was arranged for the transfer of the allotments, which were currently managed by the Housing Service, to Whiston Parish Council.

Assurances were sought in respect of the financial implications for the Council in the event of a major unforeseen situation impacting the RAA's ability to continue to manage the service. In response, officers confirmed that there was no liability for the Council in respect of the RAA, as it was a limited company in its own right and governed by rules set by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Members referred to the number of queries that they had received during the pandemic regarding the availability of allotment sites for use

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by constituents, as well as the availability of other land to be used for allotments. Having requested information on key contacts on a ward by ward basis, the Chairman of the RAA agreed to circulate a list of sites and contacts in respect of allotments to all councillors outside of the meeting. With regard to surplus land, it was confirmed that the RAA were working with societies to bring land back into use.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the next update be submitted in 12 months' time.

113. OUTCOMES FROM WORKING GROUP: MIP REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report which detailed the outcomes from the Major Incident Plan Review Working Group, which had met as part of the bi-annual review of the Commission's recommendations made in 2017.

Members noted that 12 of the 15 recommendations made in 2017 had been implemented, however recommendations in respect of an "away day" for frontline responder training had not yet taken place and the events of the past twelve months had meant that it had not been possible for such arrangements to be made. It was also noted that the recommendation for the appointment of a Community Resilience Officer had not been implemented, however it was explained that the challenges of the past twelve months had shown how well the community came forward to work to support the response to major incidents.

Resolved:-

1. That the briefing be noted.
2. That the Major Incident Plan be highlighted in the educational programming as part of the induction of new Members following the 2021 Council election.
3. That the Major Incident Plan continue to be reviewed every two years.

114. OUTCOMES FROM WORKING GROUP: FLOOD ALLEVIATION

Consideration was given to a report which detailed the outcomes of the Flood Alleviation Working Group, which provided information about the impact of flooding across the borough in November 2019 and the progress made since that time.

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It was noted that a number of suggestions had been made by Members of the working group, as well as the report setting out the ways in which the Council is able to support residents and communities in responding and preparing for flooding events.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the next update be brought in 12 months' time.

115. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update briefing regarding progress in respect of the agreed work programme. Attention was given to upcoming meetings of scrutiny working groups.

Resolved:-

1. That the updated work programme be approved.

116. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring the Commission's consideration.

117. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT VIRTUAL MEETING

The Chair announced that the next virtual meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 2 February 2020, commencing at 1:30 pm.