

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 2 November 2021

Present:- Councillor Wyatt (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Burnett, Cowen, Havard, Jones, Keenan, McNeely, Mills, Sansome, Tinsley and Whomersley.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bacon, Barley, Khan, Pitchley and Reynolds and from the co-optee, Mrs. Bacon.

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

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

28. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 7 SEPTEMBER 2021

Resolved:-

1. That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 September 2021 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

30. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

The Chair advised that there were no members of the public or representatives of media organisations present at the meeting and there were no questions in respect of matters on the agenda.

31. 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.

32. THRIVING NEIGHBOURHOODS - ANNUAL REPORT

Consideration was given to a report comprising updates on progress in delivering the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and the Neighbourhood Working model from May 2020 to May 21. The report forms the fourth annual report to be brought for scrutiny. The presentation highlighted delivery on the 5 key themes of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy: Engage & Develop the Workforce; Councillors as Community Leaders; Communication & Engagement; Asset Based Community Development; and Integrated Place Based Working; which includes collaborative working with our Parish Councils. Initiatives and schemes were highlighted under each theme. The challenges presented during the period of the report were noted, as were exemplary efforts made by the Neighbourhoods service in response, such as in setting up the

Community Hub resource and in refreshing the Ward Housing Hubs interface, among others.

In discussion, Members requested clarification of national housing finance rules, which officers provided, noting that residents who pay a tenant levy are the target recipients of projects funded by that levy.

Members expressed the desire to see increased benchmarking with other authorities in respect of Neighbourhoods Services, to ensure that the service continues to progress. The response from officers acknowledged the place of sharing best practice and affirmed the ongoing advancement of the service and the substantive progress it has made. Members further requested that efforts be undertaken to ensure all Members have a solid understanding of how Neighbourhoods works, so that this service can be leveraged to the maximal benefit of residents in answer to deprivation.

Members further noted the difficulty in accessing crime information ahead of meetings, and the difficulty in holding effective meetings with police representatives. It was hoped that better IT coordination could help.

The request was made for more options in enhancing engagement in Ward newsletters. The answer from officers invited Members to make representations to the Neighbourhood Coordinator in respect of any desired communications changes, whether this involved revised content or mode of distribution, etc. The response noted that provision is available for flexibility in the delivery of ward bulletins to respond to the specific needs and expectations of the individual wards.

The Chair noted ongoing review work into the methods by which information is routed back to Wards, the result of which would be welcomed with interest.

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Neighbourhoods Service benchmark with other authorities to share and collect good practice with a view to continuous improvement.
3. That the outcome of the ongoing review work on information flow around Ward Housing Hubs be reported back when available.
4. That provision for inclusive Ward communications be established whereby the cost of small print runs would not be deducted from Ward project funds.

33. PROGRESS ON LIBRARY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

Consideration was given to an update report in respect of progress against the Library Strategy 2021-2026 and the associated action plan which was approved by Council on 11 November 2020. The report set out how the Strategy and new service offer was enabling the Council to fulfil its statutory duty under the Public Library Act and meet the needs of the community through the delivery of the Libraries and Neighbourhood Hubs Service.

In discussion, Members expressed interest, in respect of the successful Brinsworth Library transition, whether more libraries may follow suit. The response from officers noted that as a result of the success of this test case, there was a possibility for further locations to make a similar transition in future.

Members noted the need for specialised services in person such as for Blue Badge renewal, Job-seekers' assistance, or the upcoming Business and Intellectual Property Advice, and for the availability of these to be publicised to Members so that residents can be directed to the closest service. The response from officers noted that this suggestion would be fed back to officers in Customer Services.

Members requested clarification around the practice of charging fees for the use of space in the building. The response from officers noted that if the proposed use helped achieve the outcomes of the library service, the service would then seek to support the request to use the space for free.

Members also requested an update on some aspects of delivery which had been postponed during the pandemic, such as the Anne Frank exhibition, kickstarter apprenticeships, and after school clubs. The response from officers noted that the exhibition was planned to be delivered soon either virtually or physically. The apprenticeships were also both working with partners and at the Council itself as an employer, with further information on this available from Human Resources. After school clubs were also on the horizon to return soon.

The Chair also wished to record his compliments to the library staff for their resourcefulness, imagination and initiative.

Resolved:

1. That the report be noted.

34. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Chair outlined changes to planned sub group work reflected on the updated work programme.

Resolved:

1. That the updated work programme be approved.

35. URGENT BUSINESS

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

36. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Chair announced that the next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 14 December 2021 commencing at 1.30 pm in Rotherham Town Hall.