

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 20 September 2022**

Present:- Councillor Wyatt (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Aveyard, Bennett-Sylvester, Castledine-Dack, Cowen, Ellis, Hunter, Jones, McNeely, Monk, Taylor and Tinsley. Also present were co-optees Mrs. M. Jacques and Mrs. K. Bacon.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Browne, C Carter, Havard and Khan.

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

20. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 26 JULY 2022

Resolved:-

1. That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 July 2022 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Bennett-Sylvester declared a personal interest as a tenant of the Council.

Cllr McNeely declared a personal interest as a tenant of the Council.

Cllr Wyatt declared a personal interest as a tenant of a Council garage.

Cllr Ellis declared a personal interest as a Parish Councillor.

22. 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.

23. 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.

24. THRIVING NEIGHBOURHOODS ANNUAL REPORT 2021/22

Consideration was given to an annual report in respect of progress on the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and the neighbourhood working model. The Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy aims to put communities at the heart of the Council's work and to make people healthier, happier, safer and proud by:

- Working with communities on the things that matter to them
- Listening and working together to make a difference
- Supporting people from different backgrounds to get on well together

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The period covered by the report was clarified, as this is the fifth annual report on the Strategy to be considered for scrutiny. The timelines were also clarified in terms of the member development programme, which began with the last all-member election. Headlines from the report were highlighted. It was emphasised that the priorities highlighted by Members within their wards have been considered in policy development, strategy development and funding allocation. Neighbourhood working allows Members to deliver priorities using ward budgets. The presentation provided a summary of use of e-bulletins as well as community meetings that have taken place face to face. More focused work in wards with local people with protected characteristics was identified as an area for development. It was noted that quarterly data will be received at CAPS from October.

Risks and Challenges were also summarised in the presentation. The Cabinet Member noted the potential for scrutiny to help minimise risks. Members were invited to consider various work programme items in terms of their relationship to neighbourhoods and ward priorities. The service also was seeking the potential expansion of participation by parish councillors, and Members were encouraged to feed in needs for Member Development.

In discussion, members raised questions in regard to the presentation of data from relevant partners whose work is of interest to the CAP meetings, such as the police. Police representation had not always been knowledgeable and could not always answer questions. Therefore, it was posited that councillors be given the opportunity to become custodians of data so that attendance could be improved. Officers agreed that the strategy could go further, and it was desired that, in partnership with Members, the quarterly information would be distributed to CAPs. System issues with police data being organised by the updated ward boundaries remains a challenge that had been escalated for action and resolution. The request had been made for representation to be at the meetings to interpret the data in the reports. Escalations from CAPS that go on to a tasking procedure will have progress fed back in a sensitive way that preserves confidentiality where data protection is required.

Members requested clarification around the availability of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) money as it related to parish councils. It was clarified that the money not allocated to parish councils comes into ward budgets. It was noted that no CIL money devolved to wards in this way had been spent by wards. The current balances since the devolution in April were offered following the meeting. Members had been advised about these devolutions. A breakdown of the derivation of the devolved funds was also described. Members emphasised that moneys should go to where they are most needed, and Members that desire to be able to explain to residents where the moneys have been spent.

Members also requested a description of how the service utilises the JSNA/Rotherham Data Hub to ensure comparable data from ward to

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ward. The response from officers emphasised the availability of data support from the service. Members were encouraged to seek advice from the team before embarking on a project in the ward, because the amount of available data is vast. The comparable data is available through the neighbourhood coordinator. Furthermore, updated ward profiles will include census data in time for the development of new ward plans. An example of how data could be made more useful to the meetings was offered which described greater cross-ward working and a potential data organisation principle by north, south, and central localities to ensure pertinent information is presented. The result would be a universal offer that could then be customized for the locality being considered.

Members welcomed the dialogue around working with communities with protected characteristics. Members also noted the need for accurate data in any format that is more flexible and relevant. The officers welcomed challenge from Members across the actions taken around communication and engagement. If something more could be done in a ward with communities that Members had identified, Members were entreated to make the service aware.

Members expressed interest in furthering the work to narrow the gaps between areas of most and least deprivation in the Borough. It was noted that the allocation must also be replicated in officer time, as the workloads generated by various areas will be different. An example of unequal distribution was given, based on relative population density. The response from the Cabinet Member noted the difficult but worthy goal of resolving these gaps. Benchmarking with other authorities had shown that other authorities were impressed with the devolved budget system Rotherham implements, and this was seen as something special. It was observed that, to further the principle, mainstream budgets should likewise be divvied up to support the most deprived areas foremost. To overcome inertia, evidencing need becomes very important to initiate those policy decisions. Redirection of funds to the areas of most need was a goal to strive for although not an easy journey as discussions take place.

Members requested further details around attendance of face to face meetings, as it was understood that these may not meet with the same enthusiasm across the board. The response from officers noted that participation is recorded, in terms of the number of meetings but not necessarily the number of people. Face to face meetings functioned as part of a suite of communications and engagement plans which Councillors have the opportunity to shape in their wards. If Members desired a certain service to send representation, officers would certainly be able to attend if invited in a timely way. It was noted that no particular blueprint could be seen as appropriate across the board – as these meetings should be and are responsive to requests. The Housing Hubs were not organised by a one-size-fits-all approach as had been tried in the past, as each ward works differently. There was further work to do in terms of building capacity. The ward housing hubs sought to demonstrate the impact of ward housing hub projects, and applications were

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considered relative to the agreed ward priorities. These applications were turned around within two weeks; projects were agreed and delivered quicker as a result.

Resolved:-

1. That the parish council liaison continue to encourage wider participation in ward meetings from parish councils.
2. That the numbers related to Community Infrastructure Levy money availability be provided to Members.
3. That the monthly newsletters continue to be utilised as an engagement tool.
4. That the service continue to work with SYP to ensure alignment of data to ward boundaries.
5. That the support of members for the continued devolution of budgets to allocate funds based on indices of multiple deprivation be noted; and that support for the service to continue looking for ways to address deprivation wherever possible be noted.

25. DRAFT TENANT ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Consideration was given to a Draft Tenant Engagement Framework. The Cabinet Member noted that the development of the Tenant Engagement Framework is a refresh of the previous framework to reflect recent housing legislation, Council priorities, learning from residents, as well as a desire to involve Members in the development of the refreshed framework at an early stage. The service were seeking to create a thoroughly practicable, usable framework as the finished result. During the presentation, key achievements of the Tenant Engagement Team were summarised, with acknowledgement of the contributions of Members in accomplishing the engagement agenda. Diverse approaches to meetings were described with a view to greater inclusion. Links into new local strategies were also described as they would come to bear on the draft framework. Five new proposed outcomes of the tenant engagement framework were also listed, along with an action plan for delivery of key outcomes.

In discussion, the Chair noted the value of the work of the tenant engagement panels and thanked the panels for providing their insights.

Clarification was requested around the proliferation of neighbourhood centres and whether these could be circulated to Members by Ward. It was noted that RotherFed would pass along the details in respect of specific wards. RotherFed were thanked for coming along to support when asked.

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Members noted that consultations could be better publicised and circulated to Members. The response from officers noted the tenant meetings and estate walkabouts are not the only priorities, as it had been found that residents often do not desire a formalised role or contribution. The feedback from residents within wards suggested that residents want more flexibility to participate in the ways that suit them best. The service noted that conversation with residents when there is a proposal ensures that the resident voice is heard. It was clarified that multiple Tenant and Resident Associations (TARAs) and Community Groups are supported within each ward. Nevertheless, the point was taken that the range of participation was wide.

Members raised concerns that residents could sometimes wait 10 months for an Occupational Therapist (OT) assessment appointment. The response from the service noted that recruitment and national shortage of skills had been a seriously limiting factor. The service had therefore sought to diversify the jobs that could be performed by an apprentice or by workers with special training, for handrails for example. It was noted that small jobs do not need an OT. The Cabinet Member concurred that a robust plan to improve the wait times for appointments was in place, and that these had begun to reduce.

Members welcomed the opportunity presented by the framework to be creative in targeting under-participating areas and residents who may be harder to reach. Regarding the Ward Housing Hubs, the flexibility has resulted in a responsive model. The call-back time had been observed to have been greatly reduced, which was seen as a significant improvement. The framework diversified the ways to get feedback from people which added value.

Resolved:-

1. That the draft framework be noted.
2. That the feedback provided by Members on the draft framework be noted.
3. That an update on the implementation of the framework be received at an appropriate time.

26. PROGRESS ON THE HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY 2019-2022

Consideration was given to an update presentation in respect of progress against the Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy 2019-2022. The presentation illustrated the local picture in terms of prevention and crisis intervention. The demand had remained high; people are presenting in crisis when they have lost their accommodation. This created pressure on temporary

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accommodations. Although numbers have reduced, caseloads have increased. A breakdown of open homelessness cases was presented.

The team had implemented a growing emphasis on prevention, proactively working to encourage people to access other options such as going on the housing registry. A breakdown of themes was also provided. Links with other strategies such as the domestic abuse strategy were also noted in the description of the service's focus on prevention. It was noted that stays in hotels for families was a last resort for temporary housing accommodation. An update on the move-on pathway was also provided.

The presentation also included a description of challenges and projected future demands. It was noted that the housing review responded to recommendations issued by past scrutiny, leading to several temporary contracts having been made permanent. The aim of the service to refresh the strategy and the live consultation survey were noted.

Further key aims of the strategy and related actions were illustrated. These aims were:

- Aim 1 - Support people with Complex Needs
- Aim 2 – To prevent homelessness and offer rapid housing solution to get people in urgent need rehoused quicker.
- Aim 3 – To increase support for young people to prevent homelessness
- Aim 4 – End Rough sleeping and begging
- Aim 5 – To improve access to tenancy support, employment, and health support services.
- Aim 6 – A range of options of decent emergency accommodation.

In discussion, Members requested additional information around how people access private housing properties, noting the seriously complex cases. It was clarified that, when it comes to evictions due to private landlords wanting to sell the property, if possible and appropriate, the council does attempt to acquire the property.

Members expressed interest in knowing more about how the service assists families with children of school age who need clean clothing on a regular basis. The response from officers noted that, in temporary accommodation, the service tried to keep laundry processing to a minimum, but in moved-on accommodation, people have their own washing facilities.

Members lauded the service as gold standard, and the work with Shiloh was praised. Clarification was requested around action taken to encourage more options for those who are seeking a private route to tenancy. A detailed answer emphasised signposting to the available services and provision rather than giving funds, and it was noted that lessons learned would be considered in the strategy refresh. It was noted

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that, when the service receives calls, the response is prompt. The street kitchen workers were also effective in the outreach efforts and worked closely with the rough sleeper team. Prevention funds were available to help ensure there were no blocks to helping people access help.

Members noted the benefits of prevention versus helping in crisis after a legal notice has already been served and requested clarification around the provision for veterans who are in danger of becoming homeless. The response from officers affirmed the desire of the service to further enhance prevention and offered clarification regarding the allocated funding for veterans. This funding had been extended to end of March. The current underspend was offered outside the meeting.

Members noted that a timescale of two years seemed protracted in terms of a target timeline for completion of the service review and strategy refresh and suggested that consideration be given to accomplishing the refresh sooner. The response from officers averred this would be taken on board in the ongoing discussions around the strategy refresh.

Resolved:-

1. As the next iteration of the strategy is in development, that early intervention activity to prevent homelessness be prioritised to receive feedback from Members, either in a seminar or scrutiny format.
2. That consideration be given to an earlier strategy revision date.
3. That an update be received on the revised strategy at an appropriate time.

27. WORK PROGRAMME

Resolved:-

1. That the report and proposed schedule of work be noted.
2. That authority be delegated to the Governance Advisor in consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair to make changes to the schedule of work as appropriate between meetings, reporting any changes back to the next meeting for endorsement.

28. URGENT BUSINESS

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

29. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:-

1. That the next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 25 October 2022, commencing at 1.30 at Rotherham Town Hall.