

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 25 October 2022**

Present:- Councillor Wyatt (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Aveyard, Browne, C Carter, T. Collingham, Cowen, Ellis, Havard, Jones, Khan, Monk, Taylor and Tinsley.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bennett-Sylvester, Castledine-Dack, Hunter and McNeely, and from co-optee Mrs. Kay Bacon.

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

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

30. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2022

Resolved:-

1. That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 September 2022 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

As a license holder, Cllr Tinsley declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in respect of agenda item 7.

32. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

33. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair advised that there was no reason to exclude members of the press or public from observing any item of business on the agenda.

34. FLOOD ALLEVIATION UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update presentation in respect of reducing flood risk and the Council's six priority Flood Alleviation Schemes (FAS). The presentation was delivered by Regeneration and Environment officers including the Assistant Director of Community Safety and Street Scene and the Head of Highways and Flood Risk. The presentation summarised the background of previous updates to IPSC related to flood alleviation and reducing flood risk, outlining continued progress in line with the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy (LFRMS) and described works undertaken since the 2019 floods. The priorities of the LFRMS were:

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION - 25/10/22

- Community focus and partnership working
- Sustainability
- Risk Based Approach
- Proportionality
- Multiple benefits

The presentation included a description of the Connected by Water engagement programme, which facilitated discussions about flood risk across the region to promote strength and resiliency regionally. Connected by Water worked with Parish councils and in other communities, to consider what could be provided to local areas to help them jump start with flood reduction during an event before the drainage teams arrive. A success was described involving the deployment of hydro-sacks to the location with an action plan in place. Connected by Water also shared good practice. Local events in Whiston, together with Environmental Agency (EA) colleagues, an event was hosted around flooding. Information is very important to communities. Ongoing and future needs for works across the Borough were described. Upcoming actions for work to reduce the flood risk across the Borough were planned, including continuing work on communications and engagement, and ongoing delivery of Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFA) works. Further plans to update the Council's website regarding maintenance works of gullies were also outlined. The practice of the team was to go into areas of the Borough to check gullies ahead of heavy rainfall.

In discussion, Members requested details of how to get in touch with the engineer contact for Yorkshire Water. Details were offered by officers with the invitation that Yorkshire Water is happy to have a conversation with Members.

Members were pleased to see ongoing work on community resilience and the development of collaboration with Parish Councils. Members requested assurances around the frequency of gully clearing, noting that some gullies seem to have the same problem year on year and are reported in between, leading residents to believe that these had been missed. The response from officers noted the possibility of people being able to see when gullies are cleared. Of the roughly 45000 gullies, there was a hierarchy for cleaning, with high priority gullies cleaned four times a year. The Service requested Members to flag any gullies of concern. The Service would provide an indication of when the gullies were last cleaned, and when these would be cleaned again. Mechanical sweepers were regularly deployed. Gullies flagged by councillors were prioritised. Members requested a rolling update of when gullies are being cleaned.

Members expressed interest in the potential to slow the rate of watershed by implementing a tactical scheme of tree planting. The response from the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion noted the representations made to regional bodies leading projects that were far away from the people who get flooded. The opportunity to plan tree planting was all part of the plan to reduce the impact where people live and where businesses operate.

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION- 25/10/22

Members expressed interest in more information around local projects and how joined up was the thinking among all the areas throughout the region. The response from the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion noted the relevancy of the Civic Contingencies Act. The Service worked closely with all partners, including the MET office to respond to incidents.

Can we see where the lorries have been, this is live tracker, can we do this with gritters as well. Will provide live info around gully flushes. Better allegations. The gritters already have trackers. The supervisors checked the system to see where the next destination was. It's available to officers and we can have a conversation around whether than information can be shared with Members to be able to see where the gritters have been,

Further clarification was requested regarding funding secured versus funding identified but not secured. The response from officers noted that, since the previous update, the Service had secured another 7 million pounds. There was a further 17.1 million pounds that sat within all government accounting that Rotherham could receive access to utilise. It was good news that that money was there, because it meant that 17 million of the 19.5 million had been identified. 52 million was the target, but prices were rising so the target could shift.

Members requested more information around whether there would be any priorities at risk if there were no business case and the funding could not be secured as planned. The response from officers noted that, when the Service started the process in 2019, there was no funding. Then, when Rotherham provided £5.8 M, the Service had schemes ready to go. The government would only give the money if they had confidence that the land application issues were all resolved. The Service had shown that they can deliver projects, which gives confidence. The rail sector had contributed substantially to build defences near a vulnerable rail station. Partners come back to us with what they can contribute, which means we are at a different place than when we started.

Members requested further information around plans to address the tendency during a flooding event for areas of the Borough, such as Brinsworth, to become surrounded by water. The response from officers noted that the river comes over the top of the road network in these areas, causing problems for network access.

Members requested further clarification of the Service's ability to secure these sections of the highway. The response from officers noted that triggered pumps on our network were not out of the question. Soakaways were a useful approach if the land could absorb the runoff. Using the area as a chamber for pumping water away was also a consideration, as this was a well-used area. Further pumps and associated flood reduction apparatus in use were identified by the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment.

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION - 25/10/22

Members requested assurances that the schemes were on schedule. The response from officers and the Cabinet member noted that the Service was speaking with landowners. At next update it was expected that the Service would be able to provide detail about what the 6 projects will look like.

Members requested further clarification around how many smaller projects would also be delivered in the meantime. The response from officers and the Cabinet Member noted that the programme was accessible so that there was funding available to deliver the small and medium sized projects. The Service will continue to do that as these projects become available. Several example projects were given. Catcliffe had been nationally recognised in 2007 after which, much work was done to install a nonreturn valve. Previously, water from the river came backwards, causing flooding. This had been resolved by a telemetry-operated solution. The Council have six large diesel pumps, which pump the surface water that cannot get out to the river over to the river. Solutions in Rotherham Town Centre were designed to give more effectiveness and resiliency than relying on these 6 diesel pumps.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted and that the next update be submitted in 12 months' time.
2. That the work in communities to promote flood resilience be endorsed, particularly emphasising the protection of homes and businesses at risk of flooding.
3. That the projects identified be implemented as moneys become available, and that consideration be given to how best to prioritise delivery amid rising costs.
4. That the publication of real-time data around gully clearance be prioritised for delivery.

35. WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to an updated work programme including a briefing on the terms of reference for the review of selective licensing which had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting. As part of the 2022/23 programme of scrutiny work, Improving Places Select Commission had resolved to review the impact of selective licensing in autumn 2022. In discussions of 10 April, 7 June, 04 August, 1 September, and 10 October 2022, Members had contributed to development of the scope for consideration and endorsement.

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION- 25/10/22

The purpose of the review was to examine how the Council currently uses its various powers to improve living standards in areas of deprivation in the Borough, including but not limited to the use of selective licensing. The review would examine current and recent interdisciplinary work, 2020-2022, to reduce deprivation in selective licensing areas, and the potential to promote greater engagement, awareness and compliance among landlords.

Although the ultimate aim of the review was to maximise the effectiveness of combined efforts to raise residents' feelings of satisfaction and perceptions of safety in their neighbourhoods, this review was focussed primarily on the behaviour and responsibility of landlords rather than tenants. It was noted that a separate piece of scrutiny work by IPSC will consider antisocial behaviour in 2023/24.

It was noted that raising standards of private rented sector housing in selective licensing areas in Rotherham may involve:

- infusing good practice into operations by applying learning from local stakeholders and from other local authorities;
- eliciting buy-in from multidisciplinary partners and the third sector to enhance the offer delivered up by Council services, community organisations, and institutions;
- working across directorates of the Council to ensure a policy-driven approach to raising standards of living in areas of greatest deprivation;
- getting a baseline from residents by finding out what they would most like to see improve;
- and promoting engagement, education, and compliance of landlords to empower them to self-assess and equip them to work proactively and advantageously with Council services such as the homelessness team.

Members felt that a review of selective licensing would add value because in achieving progress in selective licensing areas cascading positive effects could be felt across the private rented sector and throughout the Borough in the medium term.

Several areas of relevant background knowledge for the review of Selective Licensing were identified. Prior to considering evidence, Members would have a working knowledge of

- background of selective licensing locally;
- evolution of the private rented sector in Rotherham's housing market;
- proposed social reforms described in the Government White Paper, *A Fairer Private Rented Sector, 2022*;
- recent proceedings of the National Landlord's Association, which Rotherham MBC has attended and presented.

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION - 25/10/22

- The seven indices of deprivation measured by the Government, which include health but conspicuously do not include housing as a primary element.

The proposed method of the review was to examine evidence in respect of several areas related to Selective Licensing:

- The role of private sector housing in national and in local contexts.
- The Council's powers to raise standards in areas of greatest deprivation, including but not limited to selective licensing.
- Myth-busting around selective licensing in Rotherham.
- Role of partners in raising standards in areas of greatest deprivation, for example, South Yorkshire Police.
- Perspectives of residents via Parish Councils.
- Perspectives of landlords via regional and local landlord associations.

Officers from the Council's Community Safety and Street Scene team and Strategic Housing team were requested to present to a meeting with Members on standards and relationships with landlords, as well as the powers that the Council has in terms of enforcement. Evidence from the service data dashboard would be consulted to demonstrate the ward-level impact of selective licensing and enforcement activity.

A prospective timeline for the review was suggested:

25 October 2022 – Discussion of Work Programme at Improving Places Select Commission Meeting, commencing at 1.30 pm.

15 November 2022 – Scrutiny meeting, Room 2 Rotherham Town Hall, commencing at 1.30 pm.

November to January 2023 – Consultation with key stakeholders, for example,

- 12 December 2022 – Consultation with South Yorkshire Police
- 30 January 2023 – Meeting of Regional Landlord Association

Indicative lines of inquiry on which the officers may be invited to expound were included in the terms of reference. Perspectives would be invited from landlords, Parish Councillors, tenants and South Yorkshire Police partners as appropriate.

Community Safety Team:

- What led the Council to implement Selective Licensing?
- What was the process leading up to establishing Selective Licensing areas?
- What has been the impact of selective licensing?
- What has been the impact of other enforcement powers?
- What is the role of partners and third parties in enforcement in

areas of deprivation?

- What challenges do the service and partners face in improving safety and street pride and in reducing crime?

Strategic Housing Team:

- How do the 7 indices of deprivation figure into the work of the service?
- How has the Council infused good practice into private sector housing operations?
- How does the Council monitor standards in private sector housing?
- How does the Council monitor landlord participation?
- What kinds of support do landlords receive?
- What do landlords tell the service about challenges they face?
- How does the landlord association link in with other partners such as the homelessness team or South Yorkshire Police?
- What strategies and legislation currently guide private sector housing in Rotherham, and when are these due for review?
- How will proposed housing reforms affect private sector housing?

Members of the Commission as well as Members who represent wards which have selective licensing areas were invited to participate in the review. Members who had put their names forward to participate were Cllrs Aveyard, T Collingham, Cooksey, Jones, Khan, Monk, Tinsley, and Sylvester.

In discussion of the work programme, Members noted the need to consider rent arrears and rates arrears, and the use of bailiffs in light of the cost-of-living crisis. The Chair noted the upcoming scrutiny review on cost of living.

Resolved:

1. That the updated schedule of work including the terms of reference for the scrutiny review of selective licensing 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.
3. That the Chair of OSMB be consulted regarding the inclusion of rent arrears and rates arrears and the use of bailiffs in the upcoming scrutiny review regarding the cost-of-living crisis.

36. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring consideration at the meeting.

37. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:-

1. That the next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will be held on 13 December 2022, commencing at 1.30 pm in Rotherham Town Hall.