

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**  
**Wednesday 14 September 2022**

Present:- Councillor Clark (in the Chair); Councillors Baum-Dixon, Baker-Rogers, Cooksey, Elliott, Tinsley and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors T. Collingham, A Carter, Cowen, Pitchley and Yasseen.

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

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

**72. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 15 JUNE 2022**

**Resolved:** - That with the inclusion of Councillor Wyatt's apologies, the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 15 June 2022 be approved as a true record.

**73. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**74. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

There were no questions from members of the public or press.

**75. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

There were no exempt items on the agenda.

**76. COUNCIL PLAN AND YEAR AHEAD DELIVERY PLAN, UPDATE FOR APRIL TO JUNE 2022**

The Leader of the Council introduced a report which set out the Council's vision for the Borough and priorities for residents and communities. The Plan provided the medium-term basis for targeting resources, informing the budget-setting process and planning cycles, and ensuring that residents can hold the Council to account for delivery.

Formal progress reports were considered by Cabinet every three months, with the first report presented in June 2022. This second report focussed on activities in the Year Ahead Delivery Plan up to end July 2022. It was noted that of the 92 priorities, 83% were achieved or on target with only five being more than three months delayed.

The Leader gave a brief overview of progress and areas of concern in the each of the key themes, drawing attention to the detailed performance narrative contained in the report. It was highlighted that performance was light largely on target and those activities that were delayed would be on

track by year end.

The Chair opened the discussion to Board Members. It was acknowledged that considerable progress was being made, however residents were raising concerns about issues which were not on track and clarification was sought on how these could be prioritised.

It was highlighted that the issues referred to were reflected in the plan, with examples given of enforcement action across a range of measure including environmental crime. Progress had also made in improving the road network although it was acknowledged that this was an ongoing challenge.

Clarification was sought how to balance demand for community hubs to be more accessible against financial and staffing constraints. For example, it was asked if more use of volunteers may support greater flexibility. It was outlined that volunteering opportunities were available however, there was also a commitment to ensuring that facilities were professionally led. The current financial pressures meant that careful consideration had to be given to opening hours.

It was noted that facilities were now open on the same basis as pre-pandemic so groups could utilise facilities as before. It was acknowledged that usage had dropped off across the Borough and work was underway to understand the reasons behind this. It was further noted that because of the rise in energy costs, libraries may be used as warm spaces. It was therefore important that they remained as accessible as possible.

Further details were sought on performance in respect of average call waiting times, with members of the Board giving examples of performance not meeting customer expectations. The Leader outlined mitigations including identify peak times to maximise staffing and piloting call-back in some services. It was recognised that long waiting times could be frustrating so were encouraging customers to call at less busy times or use web-facilities if possible. It was noted that some complex calls could take longer to process which added to wait times.

The wider roll out of the call-back facility was being considered in other services such as Adult Social Care service. However, this was dependent on having sufficient capacity to ensure customer calls can be returned promptly.

It was suggested that a significant proportion of member casework could have been resolved had the customer been able to contact the service more easily by telephone. It was observed that the website was difficult to navigate and some of the service description was not in plain, easy to understand language. An anecdotal example of inappropriate call-handling was given leading to a call being ended before the customer was passed onto the correct services. Assurance was given that there was a commitment to high standards of customer care and an expectation on

staff to be ambassadors for 'one council' regardless of the services area they may work for.

It was noted that while some staff worked remotely, the Council provided a full suite of services, including face-to-face at Riverside House or other service centres. Customers should experience the same standard of service regardless of where staff were located. The Chief Executive reiterated the commitment to visibility of staff and resident engagement.

In response to a query regarding the Town and Villages Fund, it was outlined that monthly meetings should be taking place with ward members to keep them up to date with progress. It was noted that some developments, such as road traffic schemes, may require more time to cost and consult partners.

It was noted that changes to staffing in green spaces would lead to improvements over the winter months. Members should have been contacted by Area Managers to identify priorities and planned work. A greater number of services were now provided at a community level and was anticipated that this would lead to a better understanding of issues in the local areas.

In respect to raising the profile of fostering in the Borough, further details were sought if the local authority was identifying best practice from elsewhere. It was outlined that work was ongoing to develop options for the in-house foster care support offer. It was noted that the recruitment of in-house foster carers was a nationwide issue which had been exacerbated by the pandemic. It was noted that the numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children had risen and a briefing was requested to enable members to understand associated pressures.

The Chair drew attention to some areas of concern, relating to engagement with domestic abuse services, perceptions of women's safety in public spaces and the gender pay gap. She asked that the issue regarding domestic abuse be referred to Improving Lives Select Commission to be considered as part of its work programme. It was outlined that the pay gap did not refer to women getting paid less for the same job as men, however, the disparity may be due to structural inequalities in the labour market such as more women working part-time or assuming caring responsibilities. It was noted that women of South Asian heritage were less economically active in the Borough compared with White British women. It was acknowledged that it would take some time to effect change however, it was noted however, that greater numbers of women were being recruited to middle and senior management positions and work was ongoing to encourage girls to pursue careers in non-traditional areas such as science and engineering.

The Chair commented on the format of the report and the detailed information therein. For ease of navigation, Board Members asked for a summary sheet to be included in future iterations.

Resolved:

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That consideration be given to the format of future reports to provide an infographic overview of progress and challenges as part of an executive summary.
3. That Improving Lives Select Commission considers the measures relating to domestic abuse referrals.
4. That a briefing is circulated to members of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and Improving Lives Select Commission on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children placed in Rotherham.
5. That further work be undertaken to address the issues raised by members in relation to improving call-handling.

## **77. JULY 2022/23 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT**

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Community Safety and Finance introduced the report, setting out the financial position as at the end of July 2022 and forecast for the remainder of the financial year, based on actual costs and income for the first four months of 2022/23.

As at July 2022, the Council estimated an overspend of £11.4m for the financial year 2022/23. Whilst the core directorates services had a forecast year-end overspend of £7.4m on the General Fund, there was £4.0m of estimated unbudgeted cost resulting from the wider financial impact of the war in Ukraine, inflation, energy price increases excluding the estimated impact of the 2022/23 pay award. This additional financial challenge had been factored into the current forecast following a review of the impact of these pressures on the current year and Medium Term Financial Planning.

Whilst the energy price rises and inflation would have an impact the Council's costs in the provision of services there would be some mitigation in future years by increased core funding as business rates income was indexed to the rate of inflation. It was expected that the period of high inflation will last for around two years before it returned to a more normal level although there this would have a compounding impact. As such the Council faced significant financial pressures that will need to be managed and mitigated through the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and through significant use of the Council's reserves. There was no indication as yet as to whether additional funding will be provided to local authorities as part of the financial settlement for 2023/24. It was noted that a budget update was expected shortly and further financial planning would take place following the announcement from the Treasury.

The Chair invited Board Members to question the report. It was noted that the report also referred to a larger overspend and sought clarification on

the differential. It was noted that the pay award had not yet been agreed, however, figures would need to be revised in future reports to reflect the pressure once it had been finalised. Assurance was given that regular monitoring and planning was taking place to reflect changes and market fluctuations.

It was noted that there was a number of savings to be delivered in children services. Given the changing financial situation were these on track or was there a need to re-profile how they were to be achieved? It was outlined that careful monitoring was taking place however, it was difficult to reduce costs of placements because of demand across the country. It was noted that the Borough was one of few local authorities to reduce the numbers of children in care. Other developments included building in-house residential placements and increase regional working to manage commissioning costs.

Further clarification of the £9m overspend in relation to the market redevelopment project and what steps were being taken to ensure that it was still viable and deliver value for money for Rotherham residents. The Leader outlined that work was underway across all capital projects to examine if savings could be made without making significant changes to the service. In terms of the market project shortfall, approximately £5m could be supported through South Yorkshire Combined Authority funding and alternative grant funding streams could be utilised for the remaining balance. While inflationary pressures were anticipated in budget setting, these were not to the same extent as now experienced. Services were being asked to identify funding from other projects which were a lower priority to enable the delivery of higher priority schemes. It was felt that the market redevelopment scheme was an important part of the wider town centre regeneration and would deliver value for money. The scheme had met all the viability requirements set out by Government to secure external funding streams from the "Future High Streets Fund" and due diligence was being satisfied.

The Chair of the Improving Places Select Commission had undertaken a focussed review of the market service and commented that current provision was reaching end of life. He reiterated the importance of the markets as part of the town centre masterplan.

Clarification was sought about the slippage in relation to fleet management costs and what mitigations were in place. It was outlined that this was not a cost pressure but rather had not yet been spent. It was highlighted that there had not been a robust plan in place to renew the fleet to make best use of green technologies and secure value for money. The service had been tasked to develop an action plan to identify options. It was noted that progress was likely to be made with small fleet vehicles in the first instance. A request was made for an update to be provided to scrutiny on progress.

Resolved:

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That a further update is provided to scrutiny on the fleet management vehicle purchase project.

## **78. SAFER ROTHERHAM PARTNERSHIP PLAN 2022-25**

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Community Safety and Finance introduced the report. The Safer Rotherham Partnership (SRP), of which the Council was a key statutory partner, had agreed a new Safer Rotherham Partnership Plan, setting out priorities and commitments for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2025. The previous Safer Rotherham Partnership Plan 2018-21 was extended for an additional year to 31 March 2022 due to Covid pandemic pressures and impacts on crime and community safety. The plan guided the partnership in delivering significant work to protect vulnerable children and adults, build safer and more cohesive communities and tackle domestic abuse and serious and organised crime.

Community Safety Partnerships have a statutory responsibility to prepare an annual strategic assessment to identify community safety priorities across the local area, develop a partnership plan and co-ordinate activities to address the priorities. There was also a requirement to consult and engage with communities, ensuring that their views are taken into account when identifying local priorities.

The plan outlined a number of key priorities based around the following four themes:

- Protecting vulnerable children;
- Protecting vulnerable adults;
- Safer and stronger communities; and
- Protecting people from violence and organised crime.

It was outlined that the process and priorities were intelligence led and was informed by data and risks identified using the Management of Risk in Law Enforcement (MoRiLE) thematic tool and Joint Strategic Intelligence Assessment.

The Chair invited questions from Board Members. Clarification was sought on the consultation process and how groups were selected and what consideration had given to consult with other groups of disabled people, for example people with autism. It was outlined that groups were identified through Voluntary Action Rotherham and other established networks. Whilst it was welcomed that two groups had been consulted with, it was felt that future consultation should be wider to capture the views of under-represented groups including black and minority ethnic communities and young people. It was noted that a consultation plan had been drawn up and activities were delivered to try and capture views, including speaking to students from a special school to inform the Hate

Crime Panel and engagement with Rotherham United to address mental health issues. The plan also utilised findings from Council Plan consultation and information from ward plans.

Further details were asked about consultation on rural crime and engagement with individuals across different locations. Examples were given of engagement with the Parish Council Network and the use of ward plans to better understand local issues and inform priorities.

It was stressed that tackling serious violence was a priority regardless of the gender of the perpetrator or victim. However, it was acknowledged that violence against women and girls was largely committed by male perpetrators and therefore the Partnership was developing strategies to address this and women's safety. It was noted that there had been reports of disabled people experiencing hate crime and some made be vulnerable to criminal exploitation such as modern slavery. Assurance was sought that the partnership was aware of these issues.

An issue was raised about vulnerable adults with poor mental health and a history of substance misuse and if there was a clear pathway for them to access services. A review was underway to ensure that the right support was in place at the right time and comments from members on what works well/gaps in services were welcomed.

Assurance was given that quantitative data was monitored to ensure that services demonstrated continuous improvement. This would be reported on when the Board considered the Annual Report at its November meeting.

The Chair asked for clarification about the risk of online radicalisation and how this is prioritised in the Prevent action plan. The Assistant Director for Streetscene and Community confirmed that the Partnership had good oversight informed by intelligence and South Yorkshire Police had developed a local profile in line with its duties. It was noted that as with other areas of online crime, online radicalisation had increased over the pandemic.

The Chair asked what was different in this plan compared with previous iterations. It was outlined that some previous priorities continued to feature however there were some changes to priorities to reflect legislative changes such as serious violence and domestic abuse. The plan would also be delivered over a three-year period.

The continued focus on child sexual and criminal exploitation was welcomed. Clarification was sought about of the threat of acquisitive crime and if this impacts negatively of an individual's perceptions of safety and well-being. The MoRiLE assessment looked at the impact on the wider community and how the Partnership responded so there was confidence that this would be picked up. The Cabinet Member also cited ongoing engagement with health partners and voluntary sector organisations. In

addition, there would be a light touch refresh of the plan each year there would be an opportunity to review actions in light of developments.

Resolved:

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That wider engagement takes place to inform future and refreshed plans, including rural communities, disabled people, minority ethnic communities and those with other protected characteristics.

## 79. WORK PROGRAMME

The Senior Governance Advisor gave an update on the Board's work programme, drawing attention to the following areas:

- Items for the pre-decision scrutiny meeting to be held on 12 October 2022 and future agendas
- Modern-slavery spotlight review
- Monitoring arrangements of recommendations arising from Operation Linden
- Cost of living crisis – scrutiny activity
- Nature emergency – Improving Places Select Commission would undertake this work

**Resolved:** - That the Work Programme be approved.

## 80. WORK IN PROGRESS - SELECT COMMISSIONS

**Improving Lives Select Commission** considered the Rotherham Local Area Special Education Needs and Disability – Written Statement of Action Update and Looked After Children Draft Sufficiency Strategy. The Board was advised that the Commission would be considering the Draft Early Help Strategy at a workshop meeting to be held on 21 September 2022.

**Improving Places Select Commission** would be undertaking a focussed review on the effectiveness of selective licencing scheme.

**Health Select Commission** future work programme would include scrutiny of medicine management and child and adolescent mental health services.

## 81. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS - 1 SEPTEMBER 2022 TO 30 NOVEMBER 2022

The Board considered the Forward Plan of Key Decision 1 September 2022 to 30 November 2022.



**Resolved:** - That the Forward Plan be noted.

**82. CALL-IN ISSUES**

There were no call-in issues.

**83. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no urgent items.

**84. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

**Resolved:** - That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board will be held at 10.00am on Wednesday 12 October 2022 at Rotherham Town Hall.