

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**  
**Wednesday 14 June 2023**

Present:- Councillor Clark (in the Chair); Councillors Bacon, Baker-Rogers, Browne, Cooksey, Miro, Pitchley and Tinsley.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Wyatt and Yasseen.

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

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

**1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 10 MAY 2023**

**Resolved:** - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 10 May 2023 be approved as a true record.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

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

There were none.

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

There were no exempt items on the agenda.

**5. CABINET REPORT - SCHOOLS' ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGY**

The Assistant Director for Education and Skills introduced the report. He highlighted that all schools have a statutory duty to provide reasonable adjustments for their pupils to make sure disabled students are not discriminated against. There were three main categories of adjustments that schools were expected to make for children: improving access to the curriculum, improving physical access to buildings including providing specialist equipment and improving access to information.

The updated Rotherham Schools' Accessibility Strategy identified the statutory responsibilities of schools to support their pupils and the support available to schools from the local authority in relation to their own accessibility planning.

The Assistant Director outlined that consultation had taken place across the sector to co-produce the policy, including Rotherham Parent-Carers Forum, Guiding Voices and other voluntary sector organisations. Schools had been encouraged to self-assess their own provision, develop action plans to improve accessibility to meet the requirements as set out in

legislation to build Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) sufficiency in Rotherham.

It was detailed that there was a matched capital funding stream and schools were encouraged to bid for resources to meet the needs of children and young people to enable them to access mainstream schools. It was noted that while the funding framework would have an immediate benefit to the cohort of children and young people for whom reasonable adjustments had been made, there would be a legacy for the schools to have accessible buildings longer term.

The SEND Transformation Project Lead outlined that officers had worked closely with mainstream and special schools to assess capacity. This included areas offering support through the inclusion service particularly around access to the curriculum and different teaching methods and models.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People to comment. She outlined that the Council had made a commitment to improve SEND provision for children and young people. The funding secured would empower schools to meet the needs of children and young people within their local communities. It was noted that aside from the financial benefits of reducing out-of-authority placements, it was important for children and young people to have local connections and build a sense of belonging, particularly as they move into adulthood.

The report was accompanied by an action plan, which detailed key aims of the strategy and how these would be delivered and evidenced.

The Chair invited questions from the Board Members and a discussion of the following issues ensued.

Further details were sought on the level of funding (£375k pa) and if this was sufficient to meet the access requirements of the school estate. It was highlighted that there was approximately £1.5m allocated over a four-year period. Outline research suggested that the level of funding required to make adaptations for a single school was around £10k. There was also an expectation that this would be matched by academy trusts or maintained schools. The intention was this would be 'seed' funding to provide bespoke spaces to meet individual need. It was noted that the level of engagement with trusts had increased, with more schools coming forward to enhance their SEND provision.

With reference to the national SEND improvement plan, it was outlined that Rotherham closely aligned with priorities articulated in the plan. Of particular note was the partnership and co-production elements in Rotherham's approach which had been cited as best practice.

Clarification was sought if there was flexibility within the scheme to allocate funding. It was highlighted that there was a good understanding

of the types of applications that may be submitted so if a school applies late in the academic year, the application may be brought forward in the early part of the next financial year. It was stated that the key element of this programme was to demonstrate positive outcomes in respect of high levels of inclusion, modifying improvements for individual pupils, including those with autism. It was outlined that the process would be monitored closely.

Further details were requested about how schools were encouraged to apply for funding to meet the needs of children who may not yet have a formal diagnosis. The Assistant Director outlined that where parents/carers had a preference for a particular school, the authority would work with the school to provide guidance on their legal responsibilities.

Clarification was sought how this provision would meet the needs of children who may self-identify as neuro-diverse within a school setting but this was not acknowledged by the parent/carer. It was outlined that work had been undertaken within the secondary setting to make provision for students who may not 'fit-in' with assessment pathways. There would be a small cohort of pupils that the provision would have an immediate impact against the outcomes as set out in education, health and care plan. In addition, school leaders have identified other students that sit underneath that there would also benefit from access to provision.

In relation to social, mental and emotional health, details were sought on what support was given to pupils at times of higher stress and anxiety (e.g. exams). It was clarified that the expectation was that schools would do what was in their power to meet needs.

Details were sought on how the process of determining whether a child was educated in mainstream or special provision. The Assistant Director highlighted that there was a SEN panel who assessed placements.

Clarification was sought about the self-assessment process for funding application and if support was available from the authority to assist with bids. It was noted that some of the school estate included older buildings which were more difficult to adapt. There was a strong SENCO network (Special Education Needs Co-ordinator) with a clear emphasis around equality and making sure that all children had access to their local community resources, including schools. There was a high level of due diligence in reviewing applications, and close liaison with colleagues in Regeneration and Environment Services, utilising their expert knowledge on building adaptation. An example was given of a secondary school who had made space for students with social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) within the mainstream provision.

Further details were sought on the school admission process. The Assistant Director agreed to meet with the Elected Member to discuss the concerns.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for the report.

Resolved:

- 1) That Cabinet be advised that the following recommendations be supported.

That Cabinet:

1. Approve the School Accessibility Strategy.
2. Approve the Capital Accessibility Funding Framework and schools' accessibility application process.
3. To provide a future report to Cabinet to approve the outcome of the application for the capital funding.

## **6. CABINET REPORT FINANCE UPDATE JUNE 23**

The Assistant Director for Finance outlined that the report gave the Committee early sight of the outturn position. It was noted that a detailed report would go to Cabinet in July 2023. It was noted that the outturn position of £7.3m was an improvement on the projected overspend in February of approximately £8.3 - 8.5m.

As agreed previously by Council, the overspend would be covered by the use of reserves. It was noted that the financial position had improved significantly from the September's projection of £18.2m overspend. Savings had been made across all directorates, however there had been a notable reduction in the cost to the Council of placements in Adult Social Care which had contributed to the savings.

It was noted that the overspend in Central Services was due principally to inflation, energy price rises and the impact of the pay award. It was noted that planned savings of £4.8m were on target.

Further details were given of support the Borough's most vulnerable residents with over 14,000 households receiving council tax support. Details were given of the household support fund, free school meal vouchers, energy grant payments and pension support payments.

The report also highlighted a feasibility fund given to all South Yorkshire Councils through the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined authority to support future planning for capital delivery and growth.

The Chair invited questions and comments from the Board and a discussion on the following issues ensued:

Details were sought on how pay awards would be factored in in future years. It was highlighted that the pay award has been above what was

anticipated. There were current discussions on a potential pay award and officers were working through models to assess potential impact. This would be built in to budget projections.

Clarification was sought on the reduced call on reserves of £1.1m and if this could be used elsewhere. It was outlined that this would be used to cover budget pressures and risks that may materialise over the next medium term financial period (three to four years). It was noted that £ 7.3m of reserves had still been drawn down.

The Chair of the Audit Committee outlined that the Audit Committee had considered the outturn position and expressed confidence that the authority was in the best position it could be given market uncertainty. Further details were sought on improvements on the treasury outturn position. It was outlined that careful treasury management was financing the Council's capital programme and debt. The Council had taken out long term loans in 2021-22 when interest rates were low, which were yielding favourable returns and meant that the Council did not have to borrow in the high interest market.

Resolved:

- 1) That Cabinet be advised that the following recommendations be supported:

That Cabinet

1. That the update on the revenue budget financial outturn 2022/23 be noted.
2. That the Council's progress on the delivery of the Local Council Tax Support Top Up payment 2023/24 be noted.
3. That the Council's delivery of the Household Support Fund 2022/23 be noted.
4. That Cabinet delegates the decision to allocate and spend the £3m Feasibility Fund to the Strategic Director for Regeneration & Environment in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Assistant Director Financial Services.
5. That Cabinet approve the capital budget variations as detailed in section 2.7 of the report.

## **7. MULTIPLY YEAR 2 AND 3 APPROVAL. CABINET REPORT**

The Chair welcomed the Assistant Director for Planning, Regeneration and Transport, the Economic Strategy and Partnerships Manager and the Multiply Manager to the meeting.

The Multiply programme was a national scheme to improve numeracy skills, focusing on supporting people aged 19+, who currently do not have a Level 2 Maths qualification.

Multiply funding was allocated through the South Yorkshire Mayoral

Combined Authority (SYMCA), to arrange delivery in each local authority area. The Council received £194,000 for 2022/23, which was granted to voluntary and community organisations for local delivery of predominantly engagement and confidence building work. SYMCA was providing a further £408,000 per annum to the Council for each of the years 2023/24 and 2024/25.

The report set out proposals to use grant funding including commissioning organisations such as the college and community groups to deliver the training. It was outlined that there were 5 priority areas to deliver which included:

- Innovative numeracy programmes designed to cover numeracy skills required in the workplace;
- Courses aimed at people unable to apply for certain jobs because of lack of numeracy skills;
- Numeracy activities, courses developed in partnership with community organisations aimed at engaging disadvantaged learners;
- Numerous activities, courses or provision aim to develop numeracy life skills;
- Courses for parents wanting to increase their numeracy skills in order to help their children and help with their own progression.

Mapping had been undertaken against the indices of multiple deprivation to target areas with learners with low skills and high levels of unemployment. Engagement activity had also taken place with employers and community groups who could deliver the programme.

The Multiply Manager outlined that the programme was a unique opportunity for learners in Rotherham as funding for non-accredited learning was rare. The benefits of the programme had been identified nationally with participants achieving maths qualifications, improvements to their functional skills level and labour market outcomes. It was noted that anyone in the Borough aged 19 plus would be eligible to apply if they did not have a grade 4 at GCSE level or equivalent.

The Assistant Director for Education and Skills noted that the timescales provided a challenge and therefore community engagement would need to be strong across the different aspects of the programme. There had been a significant gap in community learning and therefore this opportunity should be welcomed.

The Chair invited questions from the Board and a discussion on the following issues ensued:

Clarification was sought on the process for the initial assessment of learners. It was outlined that community providers would have the training and support to enable them to undertake initial assessments to align the needs of the learners alongside the functional skills curriculum. By

aligning the learning alongside this curriculum, community groups were given clear learning aims so that the progression of learners could be monitored. Providers could deliver the learning model flexibly which would be quality assured by the programme manager through performance review meetings to ensure consistency across. In addition, the programme manager would deliver training around the functional skills curriculum.

Further details were asked about how the programme identified potential learners to ensure that people were not left behind. It was noted that the programme was targeting providers that were working within communities as this gave a strong starting point to understand learners and potential target groups. Using the data from year one, post codes were analysed to see where learners were based but also where they travelled from. This enabled a wider analysis of trends, habits and potential barriers. It was clarified that the Multiply Manager was working alongside neighbourhood teams, including developing broad data sets.

Clarification was sought on anticipated take up and how this would be measured. It was outlined that in the first 8 weeks of the programme, 500 learners were engaged. It was felt that this demonstrated that there was a real need for this programme. Once a learner had successfully finished a programme, they would be signposted to other learning, which may include other multiply courses. Data sets would be analysed to review if there were emerging needs or if more provision was required.

Information was requested on how this project could be embedded in the Council's recruitment and selection process. It was outlined that learners will have information, advice and guidance about next steps and opportunities that were available within South Yorkshire. It was noted that whilst this was not an accredited qualification, learners could include details of their achievements on their CV.

Members requested a briefing on the impact of the programme and its rollout.

Further details were requested about family learning and links with secondary schools. It was noted that one of the priorities was to support adults to upskill their own understanding of numeracy and how was taught in school. Schools were encouraged to bid for funding.

It was noted that many English as a Second Language providers were engaged in this programme, with good uptake from ESOL learners.

Resolved:

- 1) That Cabinet be advised that the following recommendations be supported:

That Cabinet:

1. Approve the acceptance and planned spend of an annual Multiply grant of £408,000 from SYMCA, for each of the years 2023/24 and 2024/25.
2. Delegates authority to the Assistant Director of Planning, Regeneration and Transport in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy, to agree grant awards, within the terms and conditions of the funding, to colleges, community organisations and other training providers to deliver the agreed learning activity and outputs for the Programme.
- 2) That consideration be given to how the Council's recruitment and selection processes recognises and promotes successful completion of the Multiply programme as evidence of an applicant's numeracy skills.
- 3) That further updates of the programme's progress be submitted to OSMB.

## **8. WORK IN PROGRESS - SELECT COMMISSIONS**

The Vice-Chair of Improving Places Plect Commission gave an update. The previous meeting had considered the draft Environmental Act and it was highlighted that it was difficult to anticipate its impact on the Council going forward particularly in respect of household waste and recycling. It was noted that there would be a Member update later in the year. The ongoing review on Nature Recovery was scheduled to meet in the forthcoming weeks. The next meeting of the Commission would consider a report on mould and damp and an invitation would be extended to members of the Health Select Commission to attend.

The Senior Governance Adviser gave an update on the work programme, noting that scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs had met to agree in principle the draft work programmes and criteria for selection of items for either review or agenda items. A further update would be provided at the next meeting of OSMB.

## **9. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS - 1 JUNE 2023 - 31 AUGUST 2023**

The Board considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions 1 June 2023 to 31 August 2023.

The Chair suggested that the following items be considered for pre-decision:

- Financial Outturn 2022- 23
- Annual Report on Council Plan and Year Ahead Delivery Plan Progress for 2022-2023
- Equalities Annual Report



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

**10. CALL-IN ISSUES**

There were no call-in issues.

**11. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no urgent items.

**12. 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 5 July, 2023 at Rotherham Town Hall.