

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL SCRUTINY PANEL

Venue: Bailey Suite, Bailey House, Rawmarsh Road,
Rotherham.

Date: Thursday, 22 April 2010

Time: 3.30 p.m.

A G E N D A

1. To determine if the following matters are to be considered under the categories suggested in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972.
2. To determine any item which the Chairman is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.
3. Apologies and Communications.
4. Declarations of Interest.
5. Questions from members of the public and the press.

For Decision:-

6. Work Programme 2010/2011 (report herewith) (Pages 1 - 5)
7. Scrutiny Review of Debt Recovery (report herewith) (Pages 6 - 57)

For Monitoring:-

8. Financial Inclusion Update (report herewith) (Pages 58 - 88)

Minutes - For Information:-

9. Minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel held on 11th March, 2010 (herewith). (Pages 89 - 94)
10. Minutes of meetings of the Cabinet Member for Community Development and Engagement held on 8th March and 12th April, 2010 (herewith) (Pages 95 - 99)

11. Minutes of meetings of the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee held on 12th and 26th March, 2010 (herewith) (Pages 100 - 114)
12. Minutes of a meeting of the New Arrivals Working Party held on 31st March, 2010 (herewith) (Pages 115 - 117)
13. Minutes of a meeting of the Members' Training and Development Panel held on 25th March, 2010 (herewith) (Pages 118 - 120)

**Date of Next Meeting:-
Thursday, 3 June 2010**

Membership:-

Chairman – Councillor Austen
Vice-Chairman – Councillor J. Hamilton
Councillors:- Currie, Cutts, Dodson, Johnston, Littleboy, Mannion, Nightingale,
Parker, Pickering, Sims and Tweed

Co-opted Members

Joanna Jones (GROW)
Taiba Yasseen (REMA)
Councillor A. Buckley (Parish Council Representative)
Councillor E. Shaw (Parish Council Representative)

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. Meeting:	DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL SCRUTINY PANEL
2. Date:	22nd April, 2010
3. Title:	Work Programme 2010/11
4. Programme Area:	Chief Executive's

5. Summary

This report sets out to the Panel its terms of reference and suggests areas for an outline work programme for the 2010/11 municipal year that includes the key matters for scrutiny known to date and incorporates those areas identified by the Panel at previous meetings

6. Recommendations**That the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel:**

- a. identifies areas for future consideration to be fed into the draft work programme;
- b. identifies areas for review to be undertaken in the 2010-2011 municipal year.

7. Proposals and Details

7.1 Each scrutiny panel must plan its forward work programme on an annual basis structured in line with the Panel's terms of reference. The Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel's terms of reference are detailed below:

- The Safer Rotherham Partnership (as the responsible authority) in connection with their crime and disorder functions (under the powers outlined in the Police and Justice Act 2006).
- Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy and Community Safety;
- Strategic Partnerships linked to above agendas through SRP, LSP etc;
- Democratic and electoral issues;
- Community cohesion and social inclusion and the Council's specific initiatives to promote them;
- Equalities and diversity and the Council's specific initiatives to promote them;
- Responsibility for the Councillor Call for Action in relation to crime and disorder issues (under the powers outlined in the Police and Justice Act 2006).
- Community engagement, involvement and consultation

7.2 Over the previous years, work programmes have also been structured broadly in line with the LSP theme boards of:

- **'Proud'** – focusing on community cohesion, engagement and identity
- **'Safe'** – dealing with housing, crime and community safety

7.3 As the appointed 'Crime and Disorder Committee' as a minimum requirement the Panel must also meet once in every twelve month period to scrutinise crime and disorder issues and will receive an annual report from the CDRP.

7.4 An overview of work covered by the Panel over the 2009/2010 municipal year is attached as Appendix A. A review of the Panel's activities and achievements will also be included as part of the Scrutiny Annual Report.

7.5 In addition to the issues raised by Members, monitoring meetings will be held to examine performance and budgetary issues relevant to the service areas. Issues emerging from inspections and monitoring of related themes in the Local Area Agreement will also be scheduled into the work programme.

7.6 A suggested list of agenda items has been attached below and Member views are invited:

- Fear of crime statistics / evaluation of the PACT process
- Domestic violence
- Duty to involve
- Parish review monitoring
- Community cohesion in schools

- First time voters in Rotherham
- Electoral registration and turnout in local government elections
- Proud Board LAA Indicator progress
- Community Assess Audit/Community Assess Action Plan
- Review of public engagement – update
- Local Democracy Week
- Voluntary services
- Invite partners from the Safer Rotherham Partnership such as NHS Rotherham to present on how they contribute towards combating crime in Rotherham
- Local neighbourhood policing and the new town centre SNT

Also quarterly updates may be considered on:

- PREVENT/Contest Agenda
- Single Equality Scheme
- Connecting Communities

7.7 Members may also find it useful to request a report from the CDRP (Safer Rotherham Partnership) which from April 1st 2010 has included probation as a responsible authority which also saw its duties expanded to include reducing re-offending.

7.8 In terms of Scrutiny Reviews, the panel is currently conducting a review into Participatory Budgeting and, with the Regeneration Scrutiny Panel, into the Perception of Rotherham. Members are invited to suggest any further areas for review.

8. Finance

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. However, recommendations arising from the panel may have financial implications should they be implemented.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The Panel needs to be realistic in terms of its capacity to properly examine issues that come before it. Issues may be referred to the Panel which are not known about at this stage and therefore, the work programme must be flexible enough to re-schedule items as required.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

Scrutiny panels have a key role in scrutinising the effectiveness of services. The areas identified for future scrutiny should complement the authority's priorities.

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ben.knight@rotherham.gov.uk

Appendix A:

**Summary of Items Covered by the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel:
2009/2010.**

April 9th 2009– Equalities Themed Meeting

- Equalities and Diversity Performance in RBT
- Local Democracy Campaign
- Single Equality Scheme
- Equality Standard Level 5

June 11th

- The Safer Rotherham Partnership
- Devolved Budgets for Area Assemblies
- Presentation by Councillor Hussain, Cabinet Member for Community Development and Engagement
- Community Leadership Fund 2008-2009

16th July

- Anti-Social Behaviour Update
- 8LAA Serious Acquisitive Crime
- Presentation by Councillor Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhoods
- Update Report to Area Assembly Scrutiny Review

17th Sep

- The Safer Rotherham Partnership – Performance Update
- Scrutiny of Crime and Disorder Partnerships, Police and Justice Act 2006

29th Oct

- Update on the Impact of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders
- Neighbourhood Renewal Transitional Funding Update
- Community Leadership Fund
- Effective Participatory Budgeting
- CONTEST 2 and Prevent Strategy Progress

10th Dec

- Partners & Communities Together Meetings (PACT)
- Area Assemblies Area Plans – Progress Report
- Parish Review/Community Governance Review
- Presentation by Councillor Hussain on Prevent/CONTEST agenda

28th Jan

- 'A Vision for Neighbourhood Partnerships'
- Tackling Alcohol and Substance Misuse in Rotherham

11th March – Equalities Themed Meeting

- Connecting Communities
- Community Cohesion (Hate Crime) Performance Update
- Presentation on Equalities and Diversity Performance in Neighbourhoods and Adult Services.
- The Equality Framework for Local Government – Achievement of Excellent Level

**ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL
SCRUTINY PANEL**

1.	Meeting:	Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel
2.	Date:	22 April 2010
3.	Title:	Scrutiny Review of Debt Recovery
4.	Directorate:	Financial Services

5. Summary

This report provides a copy of a corporate debt policy which has been produced following a scrutiny review of debt recovery arrangements and after consultation with relevant parties. The policy will be submitted to Cabinet for approval, subject to any comments by the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel.

6. Recommendations

The Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel is asked to provide any comments on the corporate debt policy prior to its submission to Cabinet for approval.

7. Proposals and Details

Following a scrutiny review of Debt Recovery arrangements, a report was presented to Cabinet for its consideration on 23 September 2009. The report included 15 recommendations for strengthening the support given to customers who owed money to the Council, developing a more 'joined up' approach to debt recovery and for alleviating some concerns regarding the use of private bailiffs in collecting Council debts.

All recommendations made by the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee were subsequently accepted by Cabinet on 2 December 2009, and an action plan was produced for addressing the recommendations.

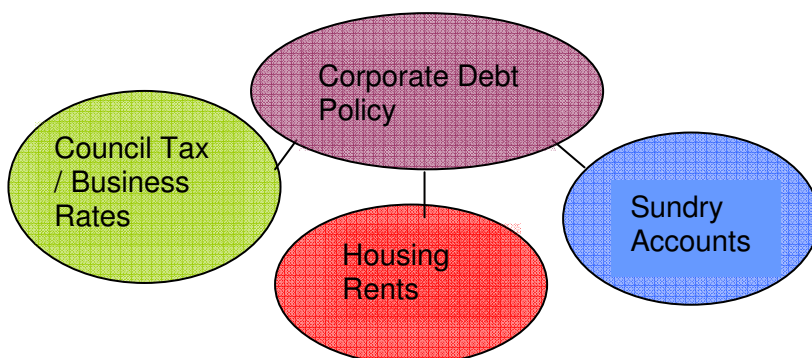
Progress on implementing the action plan was reported to the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee on 12 March 2010. The Committee asked for any further reports relating to the scrutiny review and subsequent action plan to be reported to the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel.

Two recommendations from the Scrutiny Review were as follows:

- *Recommendation 3 – “The corporate debt policy and other related documents are brought together to one, accessible, online policy”.*
- *Recommendation 6 – “Guidance needs to be added to the corporate debt policy detailing when debt can be transferred back to the Council from bailiffs”.*

Attached at Appendix 1 is a corporate debt policy which will be presented to Cabinet for approval subject to any comments made by the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel. The Policy includes information on transferring debts back to the Council, from bailiffs.

The policy is part of a suite of 4 key documents explaining the approach and procedures relating to the collection of debt. The policy states the over-riding principles applying to each area of debt collection. It is supplemented by three additional information notes covering the main areas of income collected by the Council, i.e. council tax and business rates, housing rents and sundry accounts, as follows:



The Corporate Debt Policy explains the Council's principles that will be applied in the recovery of all debt

The additional information notes provide more details on arrangements for collecting debts in each of the specific areas.

The policy covers:

- Introduction and purpose of this policy
- How we will treat residents and businesses
- Ability to pay
- Arrangements for managing multiple debts
- Procedures for using bailiffs
- Standards, complaints and where to find more information

It also provides details of advice and support services available to help residents in debt.

The Policy has been subject to wide consultation. Comments from a range of stakeholders have been taken into account in drafting the policy, including:

- Members of the original scrutiny review panel
- Voluntary Action Rotherham: 'Advice In Rotherham'
- Citizen's Advice Bureau
- Relevant Council services
- Bailiffs

When approved, the corporate debt policy will be included on the Council's website and copies and / or links made available to relevant organisations to publicise its existence.

The Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel is asked to provide any comments on the corporate debt policy prior to its submission to Cabinet for approval.

8. Finance

There are no direct financial implications associated with the production and publication of the corporate debt policy.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

Lack of awareness of the Council's arrangements for recovering debt and, more crucially, the support available to residents in difficulty could result in residents unnecessarily being pursued for debt. The provision of a corporate debt policy with information about where to obtain support helps to minimise this risk.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The Council aims to implement effective and efficient debt recovery proceedings in order to maximise income and minimise the impact of non-collection on Council Tax and rent levels and service provision. The Council also aims to support all residents in financial difficulty, particularly during the current economic downturn.

The Corporate Debt Policy explains how the Council fairly balances these two objectives.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

- Cabinet Report - Debt Recovery Scrutiny Review - 23 September 2009
- Cabinet Report – Response to the Debt Recovery Scrutiny Review – 2 December 2009
- Progress report to Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee – 12 March 2010

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Appendix:

Appendix 1: Corporate Debt Policy

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Corporate Debt Policy

April 2010

Summary of policy:

This policy details the principles to be adopted by the Council when undertaking the collection of debt in Rotherham from both residents and businesses. It explains how we will attempt to maximise debt recovery while treating people fairly and with respect.

CONTENTS

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Annex 3	Sundry Accounts Debt Recovery – Additional Information	

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY

The Council is committed to treating people fairly while collecting income due to it.

The Strategic Director of Finance has responsibility under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 for the administration of the financial affairs of the Council. One such area of administration relates to the collection of monies due to the Council.

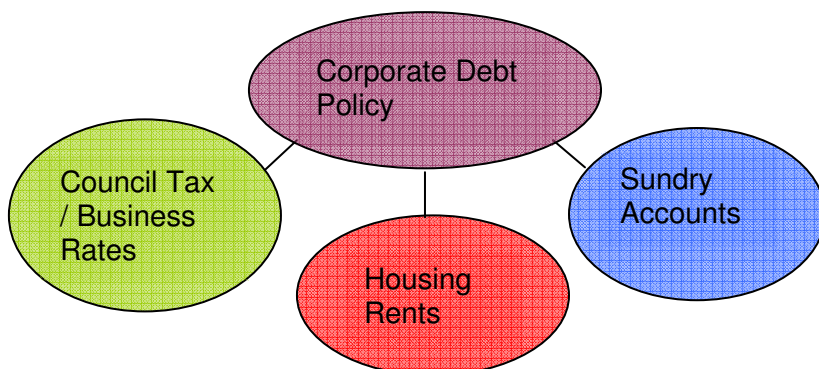
Rotherham Council is required to collect monies from its residents and businesses for a variety of reasons. It is inevitable that the Council will be required to pursue the recovery of arrears from persons and businesses who might experience difficulty in paying some outstanding accounts. An agreed policy of how the Council manages and collects debts is vital in ensuring consistency and fairness in such situations.

This Corporate Debt Policy has been drafted following recommendations made by the Council's Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee and reflects contributions made by advice services in Rotherham and various services involved in the collection of Council debt.

The objectives of the Council's policy on debt collection are:

- To maximise debt collection, ensuring that all income is collected and available to fund the delivery of services to the people of Rotherham
- To ensure people in genuine financial difficulty are supported to claim any benefits they are entitled to and are given fair opportunity to pay any amounts they are liable for
- To ensure the Council supports vulnerable people to manage their financial affairs effectively, including the payment of debt
- To ensure that the protocols governing the use of bailiffs are clearly set out and available to all who need to access them.

The policy covers all debts owed to the Council except penalty charge notices (parking contraventions), which are dealt with under separate statutory arrangements. The policy is part of a suite of 4 key documents explaining the approach and procedures relating to the collection of debt. The policy states the over-riding principles applying to each area of debt collection. It is supplemented by three additional information notes covering the main areas of income collected by the Council, i.e. council tax and business rates, housing rents and sundry accounts:



The Corporate Debt Policy explains the Council's principles that will be applied in the recovery of all debt

The additional information notes provide more details on arrangements for collecting debts in each of the specific areas.

Some residents might have multiple debts with the Council. The Policy explains how the income collection services will work together in relevant cases to ensure the Council takes a co-ordinated, consistent and fair approach to the recovery of multiple debts.

The Policy also explains the circumstances under which the Council will use bailiffs to help recover debt and the protocols we will apply to the use of bailiffs.

Because we recognise some residents and businesses might have difficulty making some payments, and some vulnerable residents might need help managing their affairs, we have built a wide range of support mechanisms into our policy and practices that will ensure people are offered as much support as possible to be able to meet their financial liabilities.

Management controls, regular performance monitoring and independent review processes are in place to ensure compliance with the policy and subsidiary procedures.

The remainder of this policy covers:

- Section 2: How we will treat residents and businesses
- Section 3: Ability to pay
- Section 4: Arrangements for managing multiple debts
- Section 5: Procedures for using bailiffs
- Section 6: Standards, complaints and where to find more information

SECTION 2

HOW WE WILL TREAT RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES

Anyone getting into debt or expecting to face financial difficulties should contact the Council at the earliest opportunity. By doing so, residents or businesses will give the Council and themselves the best possible chance of finding an early and effective solution to any problems.

Principles

- Bills / accounts will be produced and recovery action undertaken in accordance with the Council's legal obligations
- Trained staff will act at all times in a customer friendly and non-judgmental manner, using prescribed procedures
- Every effort will be made by staff to maximise income, benefits and other entitlements for residents and businesses. They will also ensure money and debt advice is accessible
- In cases of hardship, the Council will assist residents and businesses in identifying and maintaining realistic payment plans
- All available methods of customer contact will be adopted, including text, e-mail, and a Council web site that gives advice on debt related issues.

Rotherham Council will try to help residents and businesses avoid getting into debt. When debt arises, the Council will provide as much support as possible to help people to pay off any arrears in a reasonable timescale. The Council will instigate formal recovery action only when all other avenues have been exhausted.

For any amount owed to the Council, the Council will firstly advise residents and businesses of any amount due and options for paying including the timescales for repayment and, where relevant, the availability of instalments. The Council will also advise residents and businesses of the range of discounts, reliefs and reductions available when it issues accounts.

Where any payments are not received by the due date, the Council will send out reminder notices and will try to agree with any person owing any money how to bring payments back onto track. The Council will also advise any residents struggling to manage their finances of the agencies that could help residents assess their financial position and, where relevant, assist them to reach repayment arrangements with the Council and other organisations they owe money to. Details of agencies established in Rotherham for helping residents with a wide range of concerns including debt issues can be found at Appendix 1 to this policy.

Where relevant, we will also advise businesses of the support available to them.

Where any resident or business fails to respond to the Council's reminders or persistently defaults on payment agreements made with the Council, the Council may refer debts to bailiffs for recovery or instigate legal proceedings to recover the debt (See Section 5 for procedures for engaging bailiffs).

Financial Support

Rotherham Council recognises that a significant number of vulnerable people are unable to obtain access to mainstream banking. These and others may require temporary or ongoing help with managing their financial affairs including balancing their income and payments to ensure they can pay their regular bills. Rotherham Council supports the Financial Inclusion Strategy which is designed to help people manage their own affairs and provide them with access to banking facilities. The Financial Inclusion strategy is an important part of the agenda for preventing financial difficulties. Implementation of the strategy is led by Voluntary Action Rotherham and more details can be found from:

The Financial Inclusion Manager
 Voluntary Action Rotherham
 The Spectrum
 Coke Hill
 Rotherham
 South Yorkshire, S60 2HX
 Tel. 01709 829 821
www.varotherham.org

Credit Unions

Credit Unions are community savings and loans cooperatives that help residents to take control of their money. Credit unions have a particular understanding of the needs of people who want to borrow or save relatively small amounts. They encourage members to save what they can, and provide loans at competitive rates that help members avoid very expensive rates charged by some lenders.

The public can apply to be members of the following credit unions located in Rotherham:

Rothersave Credit Union R.A.I.N Building Eastwood Lane Rotherham S65 1EQ Tel: 01709 514 263 www.rothersave.co.uk	LASER Credit Union The Guardian Centre Drummond Street Rotherham Tel: 01709 836500	Ryton Credit Union Middleton Hall Barleycroft Lane Dinnington Sheffield S25 2LE Tel: 01909 567439
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Communication

We will ensure that all written communications use language appropriate to the intended recipient and that plain language is the standard wherever possible. We will explain complex terminology when it is required to be used by law. All documents will be issued in a timely manner, in accordance with statutory deadlines where appropriate and will explain the legal options open to the Council to collect debts in a factual manner, taking into account the stage of recovery achieved.

Human Rights

Our policies and procedures will strive to be fair and equitable, acknowledging human rights and natural justice, in all aspects of debt recovery.

Equalities and Diversity

The Council believes in openness, fairness and equality in the way it provides services to Rotherham's diverse communities, and that every individual is entitled to be treated with respect. When recovering a debt to the Council, there will be no discrimination against any individual for cultural, ethnicity or national origins, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, political or religious beliefs, socio-economic status, appearance or lifestyle.

The Council understands that some customers require additional advice and assistance in order to access services and exercise their rights. All information provided would be available in appropriate languages, Braille or audiotape. When required, interpreters will be arranged as well as practical help provided for people with impaired hearing or vision.

Vulnerable residents

The Council is committed to supporting residents who may be classed as vulnerable to manage their financial affairs effectively, including the payment of debt. Customers may be classed as vulnerable for a variety of reasons. These include, but are not limited to:

- Mental disability
- Serious long-term or acute illness
- Fragility due to advanced age or disability
- Recently bereaved
- Single parent families
- Pregnant women
- Existence of genuine and clear barriers to communication, e.g. language difficulties, hearing impairments, visual impairments and learning difficulties

If you believe that you are vulnerable, or you are acting on behalf of someone who is vulnerable, please let us know. This will ensure we can deal with your case sensitively and appropriately.

SECTION 3

ABILITY TO PAY

The Council will operate a supportive approach to debt recovery which meets the needs of each individual and offers sign-posting to independent support agencies

The Council, in pursuing debt recovery, will act in accordance with statutory regulations and professional standards. We will take practical steps to:

- Raise awareness of debt with customers
- Identify how much / how it has occurred
- Raise awareness of the implications of non-payment.

Ability to pay will be assessed on the basis of the amount of disposable income in proportion to the level of debt overall and debts owed to the Council.

For those who can pay:

We will provide information on how to pay by advising on methods, payment frequencies and at which locations people can pay.

Arrangements for repaying debt will be agreed that, as a rule of thumb, ensure that **an individual's indebtedness to the Council does not worsen**. In practice this may mean ensuring that the current or most recent account is cleared, while making the maximum contribution to clearing other debts.

Staff will always seek to make realistic arrangements to clearing outstanding amounts by regular payments, in preference to taking legal action for recovery. A financial statement, identifying a customer's household income and expenditure, may be required to support a request for an arrangement. A financial statement can be completed with the help of an independent agency such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau (See Appendix 1) or on-line.

For those who can't pay:

- We will advise what happens if debts are not paid
- We will inform who can give help / advice
- We will encourage people to get help from a range of sources
- We will make referrals to appropriate agencies.

The Council recognises that certain individuals will require more sympathetic and sensitive treatment e.g. in the case of recent bereavement, major illness or where the customer requires special assistance in handling their financial affairs. We will assist all people struggling to pay their debts to obtain appropriate advice and support.

Irrecoverable debts

The Council recognises that not all debts are collectable and therefore it will be appropriate in certain circumstances to classify debts as irrecoverable, where pre

determined criteria are met. The Council will satisfy itself that one or more of the following apply before it accepts that a debt is irrecoverable:

- All appropriate recovery methods have been exhausted
- The debt is uneconomical to pursue
- The amount is uncollectible due to bankruptcy or insolvency
- The debtor has absconded and cannot be traced
- It is not in the best interests of the Authority to pursue the debt.

SECTION 4

ARRANGEMENTS FOR MANAGING MULTIPLE DEBTS

The Council will adopt a co-ordinated approach to dealing with anyone having multiple debts, taking into account the person's circumstances and the level of debt

In terms of efficiency and effectiveness, experience shows that collection is maximised by pursuing debts on an individual basis in a timely manner. In addition, the existence of different recovery legislation in relation to Council Tax, Housing Rents, Sundry Income etc, tends to support this approach.

Where it is apparent that a customer is unable to pay an account, or a number of like accounts, the aim will be to agree an arrangement to pay (where appropriate)*¹, which takes into consideration the specific circumstances of the customer.

To improve the efficiency of our approach to helping residents cope with multiple debts, staff from the relevant services will liaise closely on cases where debts exceed prescribed levels and advanced stage recovery action is being considered, such as:

Council Tax	-	Consideration of pre-committal summons
Housing Rents	-	Notice to Seek Possession issued
Sundry Accounts	-	Relevant cases considered for referral for legal action

Where any individual reaches the debt recovery stage outlined above in any of the areas, the relevant officer will contact the other services to facilitate a co-ordinated consideration of any multiple debts.

¹ Pre charge registration Penalty Charge Notices (parking contraventions) on their own are excluded from the arrangement process.

SECTION 5

PROCEDURES FOR USING BAILIFFS

The Council will appoint bailiffs to recover debt on its behalf where necessary. Where it does, the Council will apply procedures to ensure bailiffs operate to the highest standards

The Council has the ability to recover debt through a number of statutory remedies, including powers which impact on a person's possessions or, in extreme circumstances, liberty. The Council will pursue the most appropriate remedy available to it in any given circumstances.

Where outstanding debts accumulate, the Council will ask the Court to grant a Liability Order, to enable the Council to take further action to recover sums owed to it. The Council may use bailiffs to collect debts where the Court has granted a Liability Order. The Council will normally consider engaging bailiffs to assist with the recovery of outstanding debt only in cases where other recovery actions have failed or are not considered appropriate.

The work of bailiffs in Rotherham is covered by a Code of Practice which complies with national standards set out by the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation. Further information about bailiffs and their powers can also be found on the Council's website at:

http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/info/200028/council_tax/796/council_tax-recovery/3

Key facts are repeated below:

Bailiffs: Key Facts

Two private bailiff companies are appointed to work on behalf of Rotherham Council. They are both members of professional bodies and employ trained staff who are required to behave in a professional manner. Bailiffs are required to carry official identification at all times, carry written authorisation enabling them to act on behalf of the Council and will issue an official receipt on request for any cash or other payment.

Prior to referring your case to the bailiff, the Council will have obtained a Liability Order from the Court. At this stage you must make a suitable repayment arrangement with the bailiff or make full payment of the debt including bailiff fees, which they are allowed by law to charge. Also at this stage, the Council or the bailiffs will ask you to provide details of your income and outgoings to enable us to establish what a reasonable repayment arrangement might be. You must provide the information requested.

If you make the repayments as agreed, you will not have to pay any further charges apart from those initially incurred. However, if you fail to do so, the bailiffs can recover from you the cost of any further action taken by them.

Once a case has been passed to a bailiff, the bailiff will make a first visit to your property to:

- agree a repayment arrangement which would clear the outstanding debt, preferably within a maximum of 12 weeks, or;

- list goods which could be taken and obtain, where possible, a 'Walking Possession Agreement' allowing the goods to remain at the property and possession to take place at some later date if adequate repayments not made.

On an initial visit the bailiff cannot force entry into a domestic property but may enter through an unlocked door or open window.

If the bailiff fails to make contact with you on the visit to your premises, they will leave contact details. You should contact the bailiff as requested to avoid further fees being added to the amount already owed.

If you are unwilling to agree a repayment arrangement with the bailiff, and do not have sufficient goods that can be taken and sold in auction, further recovery action will be considered. This may include action to commit you to prison or making an application for a charging order to be placed on your property with a view to enforcing its sale. Alternatively, the Council is legally allowed to take steps to obtain a bankruptcy order against you.

If any bailiff comes across vulnerable people, they should contact the council straight away in order that alternative recovery action can be considered.

Walking Possession

This is an agreement drawn up by the bailiff, that you should sign, which allows you to keep the goods listed on the document so long as you make the repayments agreed. If you fail to keep to a repayment arrangement, you will be informed, in writing, of the need to bring your payments up to date within a specified period.

In the event that you sign a 'Walking Possession' agreement and you fail to keep up your agreed repayments the bailiff will call again. Further fees will be incurred for this visit.

On this occasion, so long as prior warning has been given in writing, the Bailiff has the option to force entry into your home and take away the items listed in the 'Walking Possession' agreement.

When engaging bailiffs, the Council will undertake a number of steps to ensure they act fairly in accordance with the Code of Practice. These steps will include:

1. Council staff will have on-line access to Bailiffs' records in order to check progress on any case.
2. Actions will be checked regularly to ensure they are appropriate, are being taken in accordance with the Code of Practice and that fees charged by bailiffs are not excessive.
3. Each Liability Order will be individually checked immediately before any visit is undertaken by the bailiffs with the initial intention of uplifting goods from a property.

4. Liability Orders will be individually checked before authorisation of:
 - The charging of waiting time by the bailiff
 - The removal of goods from a taxpayer or ratepayer's premises.
5. Complaints or disputes regarding bailiff action will be monitored in order to ensure that action taken is appropriate and costs charged are not excessive.
6. Where appropriate, bailiffs will be asked to withhold action in order that:
 - Disputes or appeals regarding benefits or charges may be resolved
 - Advice agencies may deal with a taxpayer's or ratepayer's debt problems
 - Alternative recovery action may be taken including the negotiation of arrangements for payment direct to the authority
7. Where appropriate, bailiffs will be requested to return cases to the authority when:
 - A case has been issued to the bailiffs in error
 - Full payment has been made directly to the authority following referral to bailiffs
 - An alternative recovery option is identified which is considered more appropriate
 - Further action is considered inappropriate due to personal circumstances of the taxpayer or ratepayer such as advanced age or a medical issue.
8. Where the bailiff is requested to return cases to the authority as outlined in point 7 above, correctly incurred bailiffs costs will be paid by the authority and *where appropriate* added to the taxpayer's or ratepayer's account.
9. Regular (usually quarterly) meetings will be undertaken with bailiffs' representatives to discuss areas of improvements or problems.
10. Liaison with bailiff's representatives will be undertaken outside the regular meetings where problems or issues regarding the bailiffs arise.
11. Bailiffs must give advance notice to the Council when they are in the area and must keep in regular contact with Council staff regarding actions taken to recover debt.

If you have a complaint about any bailiff's behaviour or the fees you have been charged, please contact the bailiff company direct or, if you prefer, contact the council directly on 01709 823691 or by e-mail to recovery@rotherham.gov.uk

SECTION 6

STANDARDS, COMPLAINTS AND WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

The Council will adopt a flexible approach, while complying with prescribed standards of service

What Services Will Customers Receive?

In determining how residents and businesses can best be supported and encouraged to address debt issues, our service provision at the first point of contact will be delivered in a sensitive way.

Once a resident or business has made contact it is imperative that they are referred on to the most appropriate source of debt management support.

Residents or businesses presenting with a single debt will be able to make a payment or where the debt cannot be cleared, a realistic agreement to pay via the relevant service.

Residents or businesses presenting with multiple debts need to believe that there is a solution to their debt problems and will be actively encouraged to share with staff, information on all monies owed, in order for the most appropriate referral to be made.

The Policy does not promote a “one size fits all” approach, but rather looks to work with the resident or business to take agreed steps to help address multiple debts.

Each service collecting debt for the Council has established comprehensive procedures they will follow when collecting debt.

Complaints:

In the first instance residents and businesses should make any complaint about any debt recovery actions taken by the Council direct to the service collecting the debt. Contact details are included in the attachments to this policy.

If any complainant is dissatisfied with the response received they should use the Council’s formal complaints procedure. For details please see our website at:

http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/info/200119/customer_services/1081/making_a_complaint/1

Where to find out more:

More details relating to the application of this policy for council tax, business rates, housing rents and sundry debt are attached to this policy. To discuss any matters relating to this document or any debt issues, please use the following contact details in the first instance:

For Council Tax:

Council Tax - Recovery
RBT (Connect) Ltd
Civic Building
Walker Place
Rotherham
S65 1UF

Telephone: (01709) 823691

Email: recovery@rotherham.gov.uk

For Business Rates:

Business Rate - Recovery
Civic Building
Walker Place
Rotherham
S65 1UF

Telephone: (01709) 823691

Email: recovery@rotherham.gov.uk

For Housing Rents:

The Housing Income Service
Eastwood Depot
Chesterton Road
Rotherham
S65 1SZ

Telephone: (01709) 822200.

For Sundry Accounts:

Sundry Account Team
Council Offices
Doncaster Gate
Doncaster Road
Rotherham
S65 1DW

Telephone: (01709) 823208

Email: sundry.accounts@rotherham.gov.uk

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Corporate Debt Policy

April 2010

APPENDIX 1: ADVICE SERVICES IN ROTHERHAM

Are you under 25 and need advice on money?

Shelter Ricochet

Advice given to young adults up to 25 on housing, debt, welfare benefits and community care. In-house solicitor is available.

Times

Drop in: Tues, 9.30am - 12.30pm in the Youth Café

Contact us

RAIN Building, Eastwood Lane, Rotherham S65 1EQ
t 0844 515 2240
www.shelter.org.uk

Are you struggling with debt and over 60?

Age Concern Rotherham

Provide advice, information and advocacy on welfare benefits, housing and general welfare plus other areas for older people and their carers living in Rotherham.

Times

Drop in: Mon - Fri, 9.30am - 3.30pm

Contact us

Unit 15, The Old Town Hall, Howard Street,
Rotherham S60 1GX
t 01709 835 214
www.ageconcernrotherham.org.uk

Do you want access to savings and affordable credit?

Credit Unions are available to help you save money and provide low cost credit when you need it.

Credit Unions

LASER Credit Union

01709 836 500

Rothersave Credit Union

01709 514 263

admin@rothersave.co.uk

www.rothersave.co.uk

Ryton Credit Union

01909 567 430

This Leaflet is available in alternative formats on request.

A Voluntary Action Rotherham hosted project

The Spectrum, Coke Hill, Rotherham S60 2HX

t 01709 829 821

f 01709 829 822

www.varotherham.org.uk



Supported by
The National Lottery
through the Big Lottery Fund



Are
you
in
debt?

We can help you with
free advice.



ⓐ Do you need help to resolve money problems?

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

Helping to resolve legal, money and other problems via independent, free and confidential advice up to specialist level.

Times

Immigration drop in: Thurs, 9am

Appointments can be made Monday to Friday

Reception service: Mon - Fri, 9am - 4pm

Contact us

Wolgata Old Hall, 120 -126 Wolgata,
Rotherham S60 2LN

t 01709 515 660 Mon - Fri, 10am - 4pm

t 0844 826 9680 Mon - Fri, 10am - 3pm

www.adviceguide.org.uk

Ferham Advice Centre (FACE; an outreach of CAB)

Helping to resolve legal, money and other problems via independent, free and confidential advice up to specialist level.

Contact us

118 Ferham Road, Holmes, Rotherham

t 01709 740 050

Shelter

Provide advice on housing, debt, welfare benefits and community care. In-house solicitor available. (The services are subject to a means test).

Times

Drop in: Mon - Fri, 9am - 4pm

Contact us

RAIN Building, Eastwood Lane, Rotherham S65 1EQ

t 0844 515 1577

www.shelter.org.uk

Kiveton Park Independent Advice Centre

Advice given on welfare benefits, debt and general issues. Help given to complete Disability Benefits application forms.

Times

Drop in: Mon, 7.30pm - 8.30pm

or Weds, 2pm - 4pm

Appointments at any other time.

Advice can be given via telephone or email

Free legal Advice: Mon, 7.30pm - 8.30pm

Contact us

Community Library, Wales Road, Kiveton Park

t 01909 773 966

kpiaoc@talktalkbusiness.net

RMBC Welfare Rights and Money Advice Service

Welfare Rights advice on benefits, specialising in advice on benefits for disabled children and their families.

Welfare Rights

t 01709 822 446

t 01709 822 345 for advice in Urdu, Punjabi, Miripuri and Pushto

Money Advice offers free advice to all Rotherham residents with debt problems.

Money Advice

t 01709 822 329

Contact us

Enterprise House, Bridge Street, Rotherham S60 1QJ

www.rotherham.gov.uk

ⓑ Are you disabled and need advice on money and getting the right benefits?

South Yorkshire Centre for Inclusive Living (SYCIL)

Open to disabled people and carers of all ages. Offers information and advice on welfare rights, aids and adaptations and general support. Set RADAR keys. Level access premises and parking.

Times

Drop in: Mon, Tues, Thurs, 9.30am - 12.30pm

Other help by appointment

Advice Line: Mon - Thurs, 9am - 5pm

Contact us

Central Library, Walker Place, Rotherham S65 1JH

t 01709 373 658

www.sycil.org

Ⓒ Do you need help and advice on immigration?

Visit CAB

or

Rotherham Diversity Forum

Advice given on immigration, equality and diversity help. Help given to complete Passport forms.

Times

Drop in: Mon - Fri, 10am - 4pm

Contact us

Guardian Centre, Drummond Street,
Rotherham S65 1HY

t 01709 821 062

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Corporate Debt Policy

April 2010

ANNEX 1

**Council Tax and Business Rates
Debt Recovery – Additional Information**

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Council Tax and Business Rates Debt Recovery Additional Information

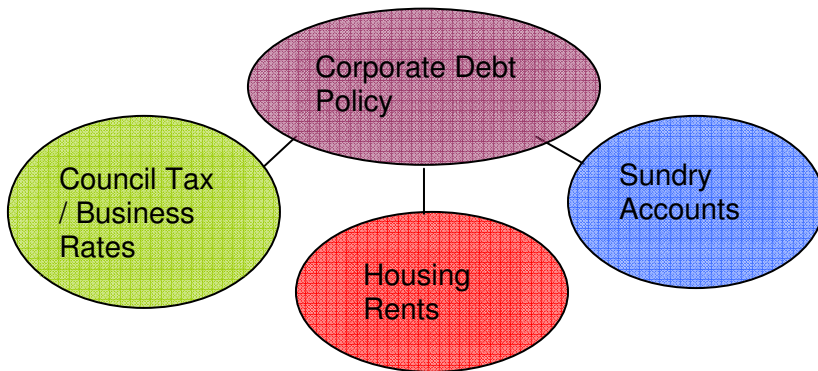
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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 These guidance notes should be read in conjunction with Rotherham Council's Corporate Debt Policy, which sets out the Council's approach to the management and collection of its debt.
- 1.2 The guidance notes are part of a suite of 4 key documents explaining the approach and procedures relating to the collection of debt. The policy states the over-riding principles applying to each area of debt collection. It is supplemented by three practical guidance notes covering the main areas of income collected by the Council, i.e. council tax and business rates, housing rents and sundry accounts:



The Corporate Debt Policy explains the Council's principles that will be applied in the recovery of all debt

The practical guidance notes provide more details on arrangements for collecting debts in each of the specific areas.

- 1.3 The Council's Corporate Debt Policy and these practical guidance notes are made in conjunction with, and form part of, the Authority's Financial Regulations.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE CORPORATE DEBT POLICY

- 2.1 The objectives of the Council's approach to debt collection are set out in the Corporate Debt Policy, which should be read in conjunction with these guidance notes.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES FOR GUIDANCE NOTES

- 3.1 The Council Tax and Business Rates guidance is intended to supplement the Corporate Debt Policy, by identifying the procedures to be applied to recovering income due from local residents and businesses respectively.

4 RAISING ACCOUNTS FOR COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES

- 4.1 Anyone living in or owning a domestic property may be liable for council tax. Anyone owning or occupying commercial premises will be responsible for paying business rates.
- 4.2 Council tax and business rate bills are issued annually prior to the start of the year and payers have the opportunity to pay their account in full or over a number of instalments.
- 4.3 Staff will act in a customer friendly manner at all times, treating customers who owe council tax and business rates in a sensitive way. In particular, in cases of hardship the Council will assist customers in the development and maintenance of a realistic payment plan.
- 4.4 Every effort will be made by staff to maximise benefits and other entitlements for customers.

5 METHODS OF PAYMENT

- 5.1 Payers may make payment by the following methods:
 - Cash / Cheque (payable to Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council) in person at either the Civic Building Cashiers Counter, Walker Place, Rotherham, or any of the Council's Customer Service Centres or District Offices.
 - Direct Debt – To set up payments please ring (01709) 336006 or visit: - www.rotherham.gov.uk/counciltaxdirectdebit
 - Debit or Credit Card payments by phone, over the counter or online at www.rotherham.gov.uk/payments,
 - Cheques by post sent to Revenues & Benefits Service, Civic Building, Walker Place, Rotherham, S65 1UE. (Cheques should be made payable to Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council – Details of account number, name and address should also be provided)
 - Telephone Banking – If you want to use this service you should contact your bank. You should arrange to pay Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council – Co-operative Bank plc Sort Code 08-90-87 – A/C No 61180354 – Please quote your Council Tax Account Number and your name and address
 - Standing Order (Business Rates only).

6 ACCOUNTS COLLECTION & RECOVERY

- 6.1 Rotherham Council will identify and pursue debts promptly.
- 6.2 The Council will consider taxpayers' and / or ratepayers' circumstances and the ability to pay, distinguishing between debtors who won't pay and those who

genuinely cannot pay their accounts. Where genuine hardship exists we will adopt a sympathetic and reasonable approach to the collection of debt.

- 6.3 The Council will, where appropriate, allow for a full appraisal of a customers' circumstances, where appropriate working in partnership with advice agencies.
- 6.4 We will recognise the claims of competing creditors and the need to address the demands of priority debts, as advised by the Council's Money Advice Service.
- 6.5 Where appropriate, applications will be considered to suspend recovery action pending appeals or further investigation of a taxpayer's or ratepayer's circumstances.
- 6.6 Where a taxpayer or ratepayer has engaged with an advice agency, the Council will ensure that regular liaison is carried out by both sides to ensure, where possible, a positive outcome is achieved.
- 6.7 Where appropriate the Council will appoint recovery agents (bailiffs) in line with a detailed code of practice and regularly monitor the bailiffs' performance.

Council Tax

- 6.8 In respect of Council Tax the recovery procedures are as follows:
 - Demand – This can be paid direct to the Council in a variety of ways (see section 5 above)
 - First Reminder - Where the taxpayer falls into arrears a reminder letter is issued.
 - Second Reminder - Where the taxpayer falls into arrears a second time a second reminder will be issued.
 - Final Notice - Where the taxpayer defaults a third time a final demand will be issued.
- 6.9 If the matter is not resolved at this stage then the debt will be referred to the Magistrates Court. A Summons will be issued to the taxpayer to advise him / her of the court hearing. Also at this stage additional costs will be added to the taxpayer's account.
- 6.10 The Magistrates Court will usually issue a Liability Order which gives the following recovery options to the Council (it should be noted that each of these is likely to result in additional costs that will be charged to the taxpayer):
 - Attachment to Earnings – under the Council Tax Administration & Enforcement Regulations.
 - Attachment to appropriate State Benefits - under the Council Tax Administration & Enforcement Regulations.
 - Attachment to Allowances - under the Council Tax Administration & Enforcement Regulations.
 - Referral to Bailiffs – to attempt recovery of goods.

- Charging Order – can be applied for where debt is in excess of £1000.

6.11 At this stage the following options are also considered:

- Contact with the ratepayer by visit, letter, email or telephone call to attempt to make an arrangement for payment and ascertain likely success of recovery proceedings.
- Bankruptcy - where debt is in excess of £750, this will be considered (for a person)
- Liquidation - as above (but in respect of a company)

6.12 Should the above methods prove unsuccessful, but recovery of the debt is still considered appropriate then the following may be used, on the proviso that the bailiffs have certified that goods are unavailable to cover the value of the debt:

- Committal Letter – Letter warning of committal proceedings.
- Committal Summons - Summons for means inquiry hearing, failure to attend will result in a warrant with or without benefit of bail in respect of the debtor.
- Committal Hearing - The court will carry out a means inquiry to ascertain whether the failure to pay is due to wilful refusal or neglect. If found then a committal sentence will be imposed and suspended upon payment of a court order.
- Warrant for arrest where a taxpayer or ratepayer fails to attend a committal hearing.

Business Rates / National Non Domestic Rates

6.13 In respect of National Non Domestic Rates the enforcement procedures are as follows, which may incur additional costs:

- Demand – This can be paid direct to the Council in a variety of ways
- First Reminder - Where the taxpayer fails to pay their instalments a reminder letter is issued.
- Final Notice - Where the taxpayer fails to pay the rates due, a further notice will be issued prior to court action.

6.14 If the matter is not resolved at this stage then the matter will be taken to the Magistrates Court. A Summons will be issued to the ratepayer to advise him / her of the court hearing. Also at this stage additional costs will be added to the ratepayer's account.

6.15 The Magistrates Court will usually issue a Liability Order which gives the Council the right to refer the debt to bailiffs, if payment is not forthcoming.

6.16 At this stage the following options are also considered:

- Contact with the ratepayer by visit, letter, email or telephone call to attempt to make an arrangement for payment and ascertain likely success of recovery proceedings.

- Bankruptcy - where debt is in excess of £750, this will be considered (for a person)
- Liquidation - as above (but in respect of a company)

6.17 Should the above methods prove unsuccessful, but the debt is still viable then the following may be used, on the proviso that the bailiffs have certified that goods are unavailable for the value of the debt: -

- Committal Letter – Letter warning of committal proceedings.
- Committal Summons - Summons for means inquiry hearing, failure to attend will result in a warrant with or without benefit of bail in respect of the debtor.
- Committal Hearing - The court will carry out a means inquiry to ascertain whether the failure to pay is due to wilful refusal or neglect. If found then a committal sentence will be imposed which may be suspended upon payment of a court order.
- Warrant for arrest where a taxpayer or ratepayer fails to attend a committal hearing.

7. STANDARDS, COMPLAINTS AND WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

7.1 All Council services that charge for their work are required to comply with corporate standards of service. These can be found at http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/info/10101/service_performance

7.2 Any customer can contact the Council by a number of contact channels to either make a complaint, to comment about or to compliment the service. These channels include:

- Hard copy Tell Us Your Views Customer Comment form
- On-line Tell Us Your Views Customer Comment form
- Telephone call to the service
- Letter
- By face-to-face during any interview or contact.

7.3 All contacts are then managed within the Council's corporate guidelines of responding to a Stage 1 customer complaint or a customer comment within 10 working days. As part of this process any issue is fully investigated and a response forwarded to the customer to inform them of the outcome. Further details on the process are outlined in the hard copy form and via the RMBC website at: -

http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/info/200119/customer_services/1081/making_a_complaint/1

7.4 For more information please contact:

Local Taxation Service
RBT (Connect) Ltd
Civic Building
Walker Place
Rotherham
S65 1UF.
Telephone 01709 336006.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Corporate Debt Policy

April 2010

ANNEX 2

**Housing Rents Debt Recovery
– Additional Information**

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Housing Rents Debt Recovery Additional Information

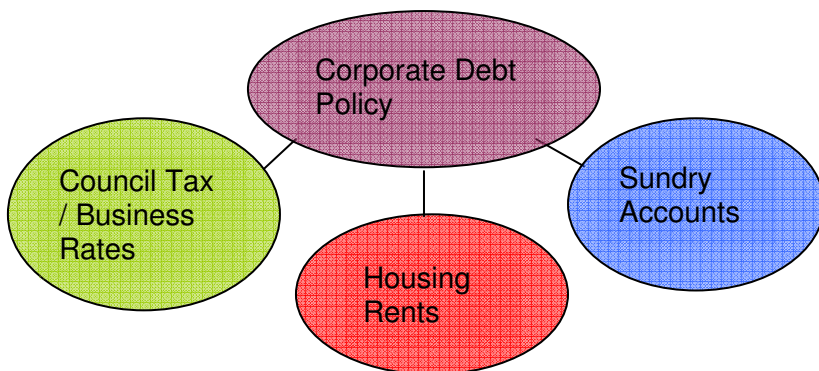
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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 These guidance notes should be read in conjunction with Rotherham Council's Corporate Debt Policy, which sets out the Council's approach to the management and collection of its debt.
- 1.2 The guidance notes are part of a suite of 4 key documents explaining the approach and procedures relating to the collection of debt. The policy states the over-riding principles applying to each area of debt collection. It is supplemented by three practical guidance notes covering the main areas of income collected by the Council, i.e. council tax and business rates, housing rents and sundry accounts:



The Corporate Debt Policy explains the Council's principles that will be applied in the recovery of all debt

The practical guidance notes provide more details on arrangements for collecting debts in each of the specific areas.

- 1.3 The Council's Corporate Debt Policy and these practical guidance notes are made in conjunction with, and form part of, the Authority's Financial Regulations.

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE CORPORATE DEBT POLICY

- 2.1 The objectives of the Council's approach to debt collection are set out in the Corporate Debt Policy, which should be read in conjunction with these guidance notes.

3 RESPONSIBILITIES FOR GUIDANCE NOTES

- 3.1 The Housing Rents Billing & Collection Guidance Notes are intended to supplement the Corporate Debt Policy, by identifying the procedures to be applied to recovering housing rent income.
- 3.2 The notes clarify how 2010 Rotherham Ltd will ensure, on behalf of the Council, that housing rent and other income are maximised, arrears are kept to a minimum, and poverty issues are effectively addressed. The guidance notes cover secure and introductory tenancies and

outline how 2010 Rotherham Ltd will prevent rent arrears accruing and the action it will take if the rent is not paid.

4. CHARGING FOR HOUSING RENTS

- 4.1 Anyone renting a Council house will be charged with rent which becomes due on the Monday of each week. Housing Benefit can help towards paying your rent. It doesn't matter if you are in work, unemployed or retired, or whether you receive other benefits. You can still make a claim and may get some help. For more information or help on Housing Benefits please contact (01709) 336006 or visit the Council website at <http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/benefits>
- 4.2 If you get behind with your rent payments you will be in arrears. If this happens you should contact your Local Neighbourhood Office immediately. If you pay your rent monthly you should do so in advance and not in arrears.

Arrears prevention

- 4.3 2010 Rotherham Ltd will adopt the following principles to prevent arrears from occurring:

1) *Pre-Tenancy Assistance*

When a prospective tenant accepts an offer of a Council house, 2010 Rotherham Ltd will:

- Note any special circumstances eg. If English is not the first language, any disability issues, varying family arrangements etc
- Carry out an income check for all members of the household and advise on Housing Benefits. Particular advice will be given to tenants with variable incomes e.g. Seasonal workers
- Explain how the rent charge is formulated and what is eligible for Housing Benefit
- Clarify the various payment options with the tenant, promoting whenever possible the Councils preferred payment method (Direct Debit)
- Complete a Housing Benefit form and stress the importance of keeping the Benefit Service and 2010 Rotherham Ltd informed of any changes in circumstance
- Advise who to contact if difficulty is experienced paying the rent, including a Housing Income Champion, Money Advice, and the Citizens Advise Bureau.

2) ***New Tenant Strategies***

In addition to pre-tenancy assistance, 2010 Rotherham Ltd will:

- Carry out home visits to tenants owing rent, wherever possible by appointment
- Offer to put tenants owing rent with particular difficulties in touch with appropriate support agencies

5. METHODS OF PAYMENT

5.1 2010 Rotherham Ltd provides a choice of payment methods. However, it has preferred payment options. These are ranked as follows, with the first option being the most cost effective means of collection for both the tenant and the Income Service:

- Office payments – at Civic Building Cashiers Counter, Walker Place, Rotherham, or any of the Council’s Customer Service Centres or District Offices.
- Direct Debit – Forms available at Local Neighbourhood Offices
- Debit/Credit Card – either on-line, by telephone or at an office
- By post – Cheques/Postal Orders payable to Rotherham Borough Council – Send to The Income Section, Civic Building, Walker Place, Rotherham, S65 1UE. Details of rent account number, name and address should also be provided.
- Automated telephone payment on 01709 336810
- Standing Order - Forms available at Local Neighbourhood Offices
- On-line at www.rotherham.gov.uk/payments
- Post Office using Transcash, although there maybe a small charge.

6. ACCOUNT COLLECTION & RECOVERY

6.1 Housing Income Champions will facilitate a multi-agency approach to reducing debt and poverty by working with support agencies such as the Benefits Service, Money Advice, CAB and Social Services. This will effectively contribute towards 2010 Rotherham Ltd’s duty to maximising tenants’ income and ensure they are able to meet their rental obligations to the Council.

6.2 2010 Rotherham Ltd will work with all other appropriate agencies to support vulnerable tenants at each stage of the recovery process. A vulnerable tenant is anyone who has restricted access to the Income Service due to age, infirmity, disability, literacy or ethnicity. Families with young children and the recently bereaved will also be regarded as potentially vulnerable.

- 6.3 A case review system will be put in place to examine any situation that is likely to result in the eviction and consequent homelessness of any vulnerable tenant.
- 6.4 2010 Rotherham Ltd will take action when more than two weeks net rent is outstanding, to minimise arrears and prevent debts from accumulating. 2010 Rotherham Ltd will utilise all methods of communication - in writing, by telephone, e-mail, text messaging, or by visiting the tenant or debtor at their home.
- 6.5 When recovering arrears, 2010 Rotherham Ltd will explain to the tenant the consequences of failing to make and adhere to agreements to reduce and clear their debts. This clarification will include comprehensive advice about our arrears procedures, the sanctions that are available to the Council to recover the debt, and the implications these actions may have for that person.
- 6.6 If the tenant does not pay in full any arrears due, or keep to an arrangement to reduce the arrears or debt, 2010 Rotherham Ltd may take action through the County Court to recover possession of the property. Before it does this, it will advise the tenant to seek independent advice about the costs associated with a court referral and the effects a judgement may have on future credit ratings.
- 6.7 2010 Rotherham Ltd will:
- Complete and take into account a full appraisal of customers' circumstances, wherever possible working in partnership with advice agencies, before initiating any repossession proceedings
 - acknowledge the claims of competing creditors, and the consequent need to address prioritisation of debts including housing rent, as advised by the Councils Money Advice Service
 - Appoint recovery agents (bailiffs) in line with a detailed code of practice and regularly monitor the bailiffs' performance.
- 6.8 2010 Rotherham Ltd will arrange for a tenants' ability to pay to be assessed. 2010 Rotherham Ltd recognises that where a tenant is receiving Income Support or Job Seekers Allowance, this will usually restrict the ability to pay the debt to no more than the amount recognised by the Department for Work and Pensions. Where any accounts goes into arrears as a result of housing benefits changes, consideration will be given to other options for recovery, including claw-back from ongoing benefit rather than placing a tenancy in jeopardy.
- 6.9 Where appropriate, 2010 Rotherham Ltd will consider suspending recovery action pending any appeals or further investigation.
- 6.10 2010 Rotherham Ltd will consider any repayment proposals made to it by the independent money advice services, such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau and Rotherham's Money Advice Service, to further develop our joint working approach.

- 6.11 An information pack on dealing with debt and sources of independent advice will be made available to customers.

Former Tenants arrears

- 6.12 If you are no longer a current Council tenant, but still owe arrears, we will pursue this debt. We may use any of the methods below:

- Letters sent to your new or last known address
- Telephone calls to your home, or your mobile telephone, including texting;
- If we have details, we may contact a family member or your employer
- Debt Collecting Agencies, who will visit you at your new address
- Use tracing agents if we do not know your new address

- 6.13 If you fail to respond or do not adhere to a repayment agreement, we will pursue this debt using, but not limited to, any of the methods below:

- Deductions from state benefits
- Attain a court order to:
 - Make deductions from your earnings
 - Obtain a share in any property you own
 - Seek payment from others who owe you money
 - Engage the services of a bailiff
- Your debt will be pursued until it is cleared so please contact our Former Tenants collection team on Rotherham 382121, who will make a repayment agreement with you, in order to avoid further action being taken and further costs being incurred.

7. STANDARDS, COMPLAINTS AND WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

The service you can expect from us

- 7.1 This service standard provides information on our response to customers accessing the Housing Income Service

- 7.2 If you do fall behind with your rent, we will:

- Send a letter to you if you owe two weeks rent, we will try to contact you and send another letter if you owe three weeks rent
- Try to reach a satisfactory agreement with you to repay any arrears, taking into account your income and expenditure
- Refer you for independent advice if you agree

- 7.3 Before taking any legal actions, we will ensure advice is always available, and we have given sufficient warnings. (This involves sending letters telling you the situation, and also visiting you at your home)
- 7.4 We will treat vulnerable tenants sensitively, and try to resolve any issues affecting payments before legal actions are taken.

Remember that any debt could affect you in the following way:

- Prevent you from being rehoused in Rotherham Council property;
- Will be passed to a mortgage company/Housing association whenever a reference is requested;
- Affect your credit rating;
- Affect your right to buy your Council House;

Our Commitments to You

- 7.5 We will:
- Listen to and respond to all enquiries promptly, fairly and consistently;
 - Send a rent statement to all current tenants every 13 weeks;
 - Refund credits on rent accounts within 15 working days, upon receipt of a request for refund;
 - Carry out home visits if you ask us to;
 - Provide information in different languages, braille, large print and on audio tape if you require it.
- 7.6 *We will also monitor our standards by:*
- Regularly quality checking our work
 - Staff dealing with rent arrears will be trained to a high standard and will listen to your comments, in order that our service can be reviewed and improved where necessary.
- 7.7 So that you know if we are keeping to these standards we will:
- Publish performance targets and results in council publications
 - Display this information in our public offices.
- 7.8 The range of information available will include:
- Details of rent arrears performance set against Best Value performance indicator targets. For example in 2006/7 Rotherham was placed in the upper quartile of Local Authorities when compared to other Councils in its performance relating to rent collection and arrears recovery
 - The number of tenants that have been served with a Notice of Seeking Possession (NOSP), taken to Court or evicted for rent arrears.

Putting things right

7.9 All complaints will follow 2010's formal complaint procedure. An information leaflet, which explains the process, is available at all 2010 Rotherham Ltd offices.

7.10 If you are not happy with the service you have received, please contact the staff at one of the Neighbourhood Housing Offices. If you continue to be dissatisfied we would encourage you to make a complaint. You can pick up a complaint form from any 2010 Rotherham Ltd or Council Office or through our web site. Alternatively, you can contact the Neighbourhoods Service Quality Champion at:

The Performance Manager, Business Support
Eastwood Depot
Chesterton Road
Rotherham
S65 1SZ
Telephone: 01709 822216

7.11 We always try to provide the best services that we can. We want to get better and provide a better service to you. We do this by using customer feedback to improve the quality of our services to you.

Where to find out more:

7.12 More information on housing rent collection and recovery can be obtained from:

The Housing Income Service
Eastwood Depot
Chesterton Road
Rotherham
S65 1SZ
Telephone: 01709 822200

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Corporate Debt Policy

April 2010

ANNEX 3

**Sundry Accounts Debt Recovery
– Additional Information**

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Sundry Accounts Debt Recovery Additional Guidance

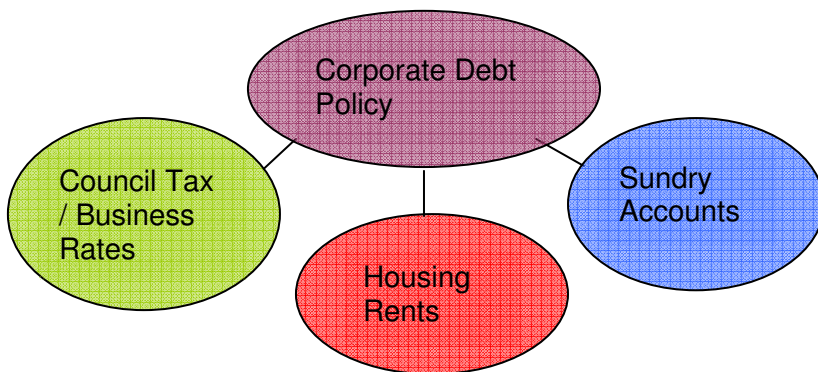
April 2010

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 These procedures and guidance notes should be read in conjunction with Rotherham Council's Corporate Debt Policy, which sets out the Council's approach to the management and collection of its debt.
- 1.2 The procedures and guidance notes are part of a suite of 4 key documents explaining the approach and procedures relating to the collection of debt. The policy states the over-riding principles applying to each area of debt collection. It is supplemented by three practical guidance notes covering the main areas of income collected by the Council, i.e. council tax and business rates, housing rents and sundry accounts:



The Corporate Debt Policy explains the Council's principles that will be applied in the recovery of all debt

The practical guidance notes provide more details on arrangements for collecting debts in each of the specific areas.

- 1.3 The Council's Corporate Debt Policy and these practical guidance notes are made in conjunction with, and form part of, the Authority's Financial Regulations.
- 1.4 Whilst these are corporate guidance notes, they may be personalised for each service, to reflect the services' billing and collection needs.

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE CORPORATE DEBT POLICY

- 2.1 The objectives of the Council's approach to debt collection are set out in the Corporate Debt Policy, which should be read in conjunction with these procedures and guidance notes.

3 RESPONSIBILITIES FOR GUIDANCE NOTES

- 3.1 The Sundry Accounts Billing & Collection Guidance Notes are intended to supplement the Corporate Debt Policy, by identifying the procedures to be applied to recovering income due as a result of the provision by the Council of a range of general services.

- 3.2 Sundry accounts covers any services provided by the Council for which it charges, except council tax, business rates, housing rents and car parking charges.

4 RAISING INVOICES FOR WORK DONE AND PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS

- 4.1 When a service has been provided by the Council an invoice will be raised to charge the user with the appropriate fee.
- 4.2 The standard terms for payment of non-consumer (commercial) debts is 28 days and for consumer (private individuals) debts is 14 days unless agreed with the Senior Officer Sundry Accounts.
- 4.3 The Sundry Accounts Team may authorise extended credit to customers experiencing a temporary cash flow problem i.e. make an arrangement to pay by instalments. In such circumstances the Sundry Accounts Team has the discretion to set a maximum credit period by which the debt should be paid in full. Late Payment Interest may be applied to all non-consumer debt as laid down in the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Act 1998. Similar interest may be applied to consumer overdue debt providing the consumer has received prior notification of such charge.

5 METHODS OF PAYMENT

- 5.1 Invoices may be paid by any of the following methods:
- Cash or cheque (payable to Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council) in person at either the Civic Building Cashiers Counter, Walker Place, Rotherham, or any of the Authority's District offices.
 - Direct Debit or Standing Order must be used to pay debt subject to a recurring charges or a repayment schedule.
 - Credit and debit card in person at the Civic Building Cashiers Counter or any of the District Offices.
 - Cheques by post (as above) sent to the Income Section, Civic Building, Walker Place, Rotherham, S65 1UE.
 - BACS, CHAPS, Direct & Telephone Banking and Standing Order quoting the following details:

Bank Name: Co-operative Bank plc
Bank Sort Code: 08-90-87
Account Name: RMBC Direct Income Suspense Account
Account Number: 61180354

- Telephone Payments (automated line) on 01709 336810 by credit and debit card.
- Internet Payments by credit and debit card at www.rotherham.gov.uk/payments
- Bankers Draft.

6 ACCOUNT COLLECTION & RECOVERY

6.1 The Council employs a pro-active approach to collection, to ensure that any disputes are quickly identified and resolved before the account is due for payment.

6.2 The Council will take prompt action in respect of any customer that:

- Fails to abide by any Terms and Conditions relating to any account or fails to keep any payment promise as set out within any contractual documentation or agreed verbally or in writing in the normal course of collection procedures
- Refuses to pay without a valid reason
- Refuses to pay interest charges on late payments in respect of invoices that have not been subject to a valid dispute
- Refuses to pay collection costs when the services of a third party have been used.

6.3 Invoices will normally be subject to the recovery cycle shown below:

	Consumer Debt (days after invoice issued)	Commercial Debt (days after invoice issued)	Action
Stage 1	15	29 th Day	Reminder notice
Stage 2	22	37 th Day	Final Notice
Stage 3	29	43 rd Day	Further Action (see 6.4)

6.4 Unless there is an acceptable reason for non-payment or a repayment plan is agreed, no account will be allowed to go three months beyond due date without being either:

- Passed to the Sundry Accounts Recovery Officer to visit
- Authorised for action by a bailiff
- Authorised for legal action including attachment of earnings
- Deemed irrecoverable and subject to write off/cancellation procedure.

6.5 No account will be allowed to go six months beyond due date without being written off or credit note authorised unless there is a repayment plan in operation, the debt is being contested in court or it is secured and forms part of the accruals.

- 6.6 The Council will consider individual recovery needs dependent on specific circumstances. For example certain debts may be of a sensitive nature owed by vulnerable members of the public. In these situations the Council will aim to agree an appropriate arrangement for the repayment of any debt. In extreme circumstances where further recovery is either not appropriate or the debt becomes uneconomical to collect, the relevant senior officer may seek approval for the debt to be written off.

7 STANDARDS, COMPLAINTS AND WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

- 7.1 All Council services that charge for their work are required to comply with corporate standards of service. These can be found at http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/info/10101/service_performance
- 7.2 For any complaints, residents or businesses should in the first instance contact the service identified on the invoice supplied for the services delivered. If this fails to provide a satisfactory solution, the debtor should contact the central accounts team on 01709 823208.
- 7.3 More details on sundry accounts can be obtained from the central accounts team on 01709 823208.

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS
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1.	Meeting:	Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel
2.	Date:	22nd April 2010
3.	Title:	Financial Inclusion Update
4.	Programme Area:	Chief Executives

5. Summary

The purpose of this report is to update the Panel on the progress of the financial inclusion project, its links with the Council's Credit Crunch response and plans for the future of financial inclusion in Rotherham post March 2011.

6. Recommendations

That the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel:-

- Notes this report.
- Endorses the achievements of the Financial Inclusion Project as outlined in the "Quids In" document, in particular, the productive joint work with:
 - RMBC's Credit Crunch response initiative
 - Sub-regionally with the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership.
- Continues to support and promote the activities of the Financial Inclusion Team up to and beyond the life of this current project which has secured funding until March 2011.
- Receives a further update of the Financial Inclusion Project in approximately 6 months when we will be able to present an updated Financial Inclusion Strategy for 2011-2014.

7. Proposals and Details

Context

Financial inclusion has continued to have a high profile recently both at a national and local level. There have been government announcements about making it a legal requirement for banks to provide basic bank accounts, and proposals for the post offices to become central in the delivery of financial services to the financially excluded. Locally concern has been expressed about the low levels of take up of working tax credits in Rotherham. The forthcoming election means that planning longer term especially with regard to identifying and accessing funding and other resources is thrown into uncertainty.

All these factors together reinforce the need for financial inclusion work to continue, in particular in relation to working in partnership with key organisations, sharing information within the financial inclusion network and to the wider public, and more effectively coordinating activities.

Key achievements

The achievements of the Financial Inclusion Team are outlined in **Quids In: A Report on Financial Inclusion in Rotherham (Appendix A)**. This document was produced by the team early in 2010 at the mid point of the project and highlighted the following:

Investment

- Securing and targeting of additional funding (council and external) for advice and credit unions
- Successful establishment of sub regional projects – Champions and RIEP
- Strategic role for financial inclusion in Credit Crunch Partnership

Health and wellbeing

- Promotion – eg Hotspots, and NHS videos tackling illegal money lending and fuel poverty
- Input into complete revision of Corporate Debt Policy

Learning

- Creation of Financial Capability post, programme and delivery
- Promotion of issues, and benefit take-up to members of the public through Rotherham News, Rotherham Show, roadshows

Safety and housing

- Partnership to tackle illegal money lending
- Support for Rent in Advance scheme
- Partnership with 2010 to signpost and to support new tenants

Credit Crunch Partnership

Financial inclusion has had a key role at all levels in RMBC's response to the Credit Crunch. The **One Year Later** document (**Appendix B** see section 10) highlights the following achievements in relation in particular to:

- Employment and training
 - over 600 jobs to be made available through the Future Jobs Fund initiative
 - 800 unemployed people have been given an opportunity to improve their skills levels through the local colleges using arrangements established by Jobcentre Plus, the Learning and Skills Council and colleges.
 - Rotherham has been able to make an offer of learning to over 95% of eligible 16 and 17 year old people not in employment
 - Over 400 people helped into volunteering
- Advice and financial support for residents
 - The Council and NHS Rotherham paid an extra £174,000 to voluntary sector advice services in 2009 to enable them to increase services during a period of intense demand. In the 6 months period from April to September 2009, the advice services helped an extra 5,000 residents who might not otherwise have been supported.
- Housing
 - 26 applications for mortgage rescue are currently being supported.
 - During 2009, 102 'rent-in advance' loans (in partnership with Laser Credit Union) were awarded, helping families to move into private rented accommodation and providing them with banking services, savings facilities, low cost credit for emergencies and support in managing their finances. In total, over 340 families have received assistance to find accommodation under the scheme since 2007. This proactive work has saved over £2m in homelessness costs to use on other services.
- Businesses
 - The Council (RiDO) and Business Link have provided consultancy advice to 81 businesses since April 2009 and helped 20 businesses to secure training support.
 - Additionally, 60 businesses have accessed Business Link support to carry out skills diagnostics
 - RiDO has worked with 38 companies creating or safeguarding almost 1,000 jobs in the district since April 2009
 - RiDO has also actively supported investment at the Advance Manufacturing Park. The Chamber of Commerce's Business Community Support Officers have so far in 2009/10 provided at least 2 days dedicated support to 150 SMEs, designed to help the businesses consolidate and grow
 - 4 businesses have accessed Financial Health Checks, 40 have received Business Development Vouchers and 22 have accessed Innovation Vouchers offered by Business Link.

However, the value of both the work and the model has been recognised in the extension of the life of the initiative from the original 1 year into 2010 and beyond, with a remit to look at priorities for post March 2011 and either mainstreaming the most effective elements or seeking additional resources.

RIEP

We have been involved in two sub-regional initiatives and RMBC is the project lead for one of them, the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership project. This runs to June 2010 and has focussed on improving co-ordination and capacity in South Yorkshire in three areas of work: financial capability, working with offenders and the advice sector. The project has made very good progress in bringing together organisations across the sub-region and we have applied for continuation funding to March 2011.

Future plans

With one year of our current project to run we are working on completing implementation of the 2008-2011 Financial Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan. We can confidently assert that all targets will be met.

We are also making clear progress in developing the strategy for 2011- 2014. Our focus is to continue to ensure that financial inclusion is included in all other major strategies, that we make the case for continued investment in this work on an “invest to save” basis (research in Leeds has shown that for every £1 invested in financial inclusion initiatives £8.40 is generated for the regional economy – *see section 10*), that we continue to use the strengths of partnership working to ensure ongoing delivery of services and that we focus our resources where they are most needed – in deprived communities and with particularly vulnerable groups of people.

8. Finance

There are no financial implications to this report.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

The recession has been deeper and longer, and our emergence from it will be longer and more fragile than anticipated. The consequence for our work in tackling financial exclusion is not only the number of people affected and the severity of their difficulties, but also the fact that many people not previously touched by such issues are now being affected.

However, we have shown that by embracing innovation and working strategically and co-operatively we have both had a significant impact in Rotherham and set an example to others in how to formulate an effective response. This is in large part due to:

- thorough, well-informed planning and effective leadership from the Financial Inclusion Project
- close working between Financial Inclusion and the Council’s Credit Crunch response initiative
- the effective incorporation of sub-regional activity

10. Background Papers and Consultation

- **Quids In** – a report on financial inclusion in Rotherham
- **One Year Later** – a review of Rotherham's response to the economic downturn
- **Economic impact** and regeneration in city economies: The case of Leeds.
Available at:
[http://www.varotherham.org.uk/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=1372
&Itemid=144](http://www.varotherham.org.uk/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=1372&Itemid=144)

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Quids In

A report on
Financial Inclusion in Rotherham



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Chief Executive: Janet Wheatley Chair: Peter Broxham
Registered Charity Number: 1075995
Registered Company Number: 2222190

Sarah's Story

The human cost of credit

Sarah, a single mother of three, has multiple debt problems. She's been struggling with her finances for over ten years and debt and its related stresses have almost become a way of life for her. Almost all her debts are to non-mainstream lenders and total around £10,000. Sarah is a care assistant and relies on her car to get her to work.

“...The impact on Sarah has been vast. Her marriage has broken down, she doesn't have enough money to feed her kids properly and they haven't had a holiday for over ten years. She also suffers from anxiety and depression that is linked to her debts...”

Sarah contacted a lending company through her local newspaper who claimed “instant credit – no credit checks” and who were prepared to lend her money if she used her car as security.

Sarah was so desperate for cash to pay bills and buy food that she didn't pay much attention to the interest rate or conditions. She received the loan in the form of a cash advance of £567. On the first of each of the five months Sarah had to pay £93.38 with a final payment of £510.30 on the first of the sixth month. The total to be repaid would be £977.20 at an APR of 348.1%

Sarah paid for five months but didn't have the £510.30 for the sixth month. Mobile Money insisted that the agreement must be rewritten or the car surrendered, which would mean being unable to work. This rewriting of the agreement has happened between two and four times a year for the last five years. Each time the last payment is set at such a high level that Sarah is faced with the choice of giving up the car or re-signing another agreement. The amount she has paid them is huge (unfortunately lost documentation makes an accurate calculation impossible).

Mobile Money use the Bill of Sale Act 1882 as the basis of these agreements. They make their money from taking as many steps as possible to ensure that the loan is rewritten or “churned” as it is known in the business. Repeat custom is where the real profit is. It is not illegal.

The impact on Sarah has been vast. Her marriage has broken down, she doesn't have enough money to feed her kids properly and they haven't had a holiday for over ten years. She also suffers from anxiety and depression that is linked to her debts.

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Foreword

Rotherham's Financial Inclusion Strategy is being implemented through the Financial Inclusion Project, which is based at Voluntary Action Rotherham, and has been running since July 2008.

Now half way through the project we are producing this report to show what has been achieved so far and what remains to be done to March 2011 and beyond.

The report also sets the context in which financial inclusion work is being delivered in Rotherham and details some of our initiatives.

We are focussing on improving access particularly for Rotherham's most vulnerable individuals and communities to:

- affordable credit and banking services
- face to face debt and money advice
- financial capability training.

The impact of the work rests on the interdependency of each of these three elements. To truly help people out of the cycle of financial exclusion whether immediately or in the longer term, they need effective support in all of these areas.

Our significant achievements in the first half of the project include:

- **Locating the project within the voluntary and community sector** – invaluable in connecting with local organisations through established networks.

- **Embedding financial inclusion in other key policy areas** – essential to generate impetus for financial inclusion activity on the front line.
- **Bringing together key partners in partnership** at local, regional and sub regional levels.

Working Neighbourhoods Fund supports the team of four including a Project Manager, Project Worker, Administrator and Financial Capability Coordinator. Key to our success will be how this report can help determine financial inclusion work post March 2011.



Jane Woodford
Financial Inclusion Project Manager

Achievements

The Financial Inclusion team and partners, working together, have achieved considerable advances in the delivery of services to Rotherham's financially excluded. It's important to recognise the collective efforts of all those involved and to see the picture as a whole. This is a summary of our most significant achievements so far:

Investment

- ✓ £474,336 RMBC Credit Crunch funding for credit unions and advice
- ✓ £260,000 SY Financial Inclusion Champions funding
- ✓ £120,000 Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership funding
- ✓ £20,000 Transformation Fund for increasing learning opportunities for vulnerable people
- ✓ £13,000 Targeted Communities funding for LASER Credit Union
- ✓ Strategic role for financial inclusion in the Credit Crunch Partnership

Health & Wellbeing

- ✓ Promotions, including an NHS promotion video, tackling illegal money lending and fuel poverty
- ✓ Partnerships linking affordable warmth awareness schemes and 60+ benefit checks (Hotspots)
- ✓ RMBC debt recovery review resulting in far reaching recommendations

Learning

- ✓ Financial Capability Co-ordinator post created
- ✓ Financial capability programme for front line workers
- ✓ Financial capability training delivered to over 120 people
- ✓ Partnerships linking financial capability, advice services and affordable credit
- ✓ Promotion of financial inclusion issues through Rotherham News, Rotherham Show

Safety & Housing

- ✓ Partnership with Illegal Money Lending Team to pursue prosecutions, support victims and raise awareness
- ✓ Financial Inclusion training and awareness raising sessions for 2010 Ltd front line workers
- ✓ Partnership to reduce homelessness through the Rent in Advance Scheme
- ✓ Promotion of affordable credit and advice services on letters to tenants
- ✓ Partnerships with the Strategic Housing Partnership group and 2010 Ltd to develop services

A Profile of Rotherham's Financially Excluded

In Rotherham

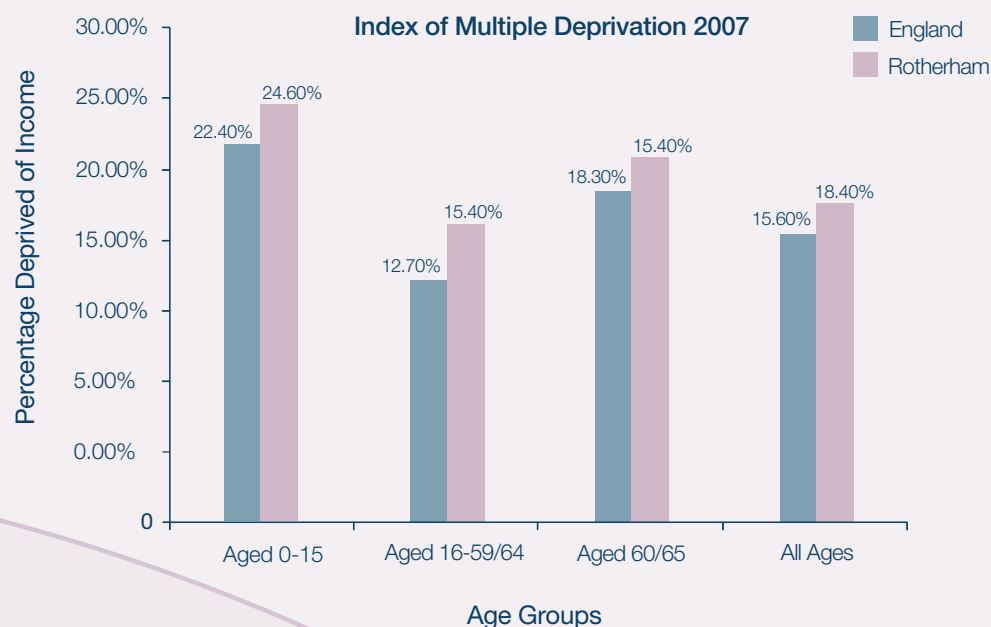
- 24.7% of adults are at risk of financial exclusion
- 14,680 adults have no bank account
- 13 200 children live in workless households¹
- the sub-prime lending market is worth an estimated £50m a year

For many this means increased costs, hardship and disadvantage and loss of opportunities. It creates barriers to employment, increases the risk of ill health and leads to substantial and continued social and financial isolation. It results in money, initiative and self-reliance being drained from our most deprived communities.

- 14 of Rotherham Borough's 166 Super Output Area's have an average annual household income of less than £14k.
- Overall average household income is £26,904 against a national average of £33,384²

Children are those most at risk of income deprivation and the resulting financial exclusion.

"...Rotherham suffers disproportionately in terms of income deprivation..."



¹ NOMIS, December 2009
² Source: Yorkshire Forward/Axicom Lifestyle Data (2008) As of 01.04.09

Investment

Research recently conducted in Leeds shows that for every £1 invested in financial inclusion, £8.40 is generated for the local economy³. This demonstrates the benefits both to the economy and to individuals, many of whom are living in the most deprived communities. It helps to keep money local, supporting businesses, saving jobs, providing opportunities and raising morale and aspirations.

WHAT ARE WE DOING

Advice

VAR has been working in partnership with Advice in Rotherham (AIR) to improve coordination of local advice services. AIR's funding activity has helped to direct an additional £174,336 through Rotherham's Credit Crunch initiative to meet increasing demand for debt advice due to the recession.

Credit unions

Supporting credit unions to lend to people who would otherwise turn to doorstep lenders also has a very direct impact. Legal doorstep lending rates start from 272.2% APR which means that someone borrowing £300 from a doorstep lender over 12 months will pay £140 more than if they borrow the same amount from a credit union.

Working with RMBC's Credit Crunch initiative we have helped to secure an additional £300,000 of capital for Rotherham's credit unions to support people with housing needs. Despite the fact that this is relatively high risk lending, default rates are low and many of those helped have started to manage their money well and even to save for the first time in their lives.

Sub Regional Links

We support strategic financial inclusion activity across South Yorkshire through two initiatives:

- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Financial Inclusion Champions, employing two workers for South Yorkshire to March 2011 working strategically and in partnership to increase supply and demand for financial inclusion services and support key stakeholders

"...for every £1 invested in financial inclusion, £8.40 is generated for the regional economy..."



- Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP) employing two workers in South Yorkshire to:

- Improve financial capability coordination, sharing materials, identifying and filling gaps
- Increase capacity in the advice sector
- Improve and coordinate services for offenders and their families

³ Dayson K., Conaty P., Dawson J., Marchant B., Salt A., Vik, P., Financial Inclusion Initiatives, Economic impact and regeneration in city economics:

Health & Wellbeing

- People with a mental health condition are three times more likely to be in debt⁴. They are also much more likely to experience poverty than people who are not living with mental distress.
- In Rotherham between 2005-2006 there were over 100 excess winter deaths as a result of fuel poverty⁵.
- Nearly one-in-two adults with debt also has a mental health disorder⁶. This debt can undermine recovery for many sufferers⁷.
- Both physical and verbal abuse experienced by loan shark victims has led to cases of prostitution and suicide.

“...People with a mental health condition are three times more likely to be in debt...”

So it is very important that the link between ill health and money worries is recognised and that we co-ordinate activity to ensure that front line staff are alert to the signals and can signpost people to appropriate services.

WHAT ARE WE DOING

- Training for NHS mental health teams.
- Health promotion video on loan sharks and fuel poverty amongst older people.
- Working with SY Champions, energy services and social housing providers on promoting energy saving measures, clarifying options and ensuring fairness in the use of prepayment meters
- Input into and monitoring of RMBC's Debt Recovery Review. Key recommendations include improving and simplifying communications and lines of accountability, considering an in-house bailiff service and taking health issues and ability to pay in to account.



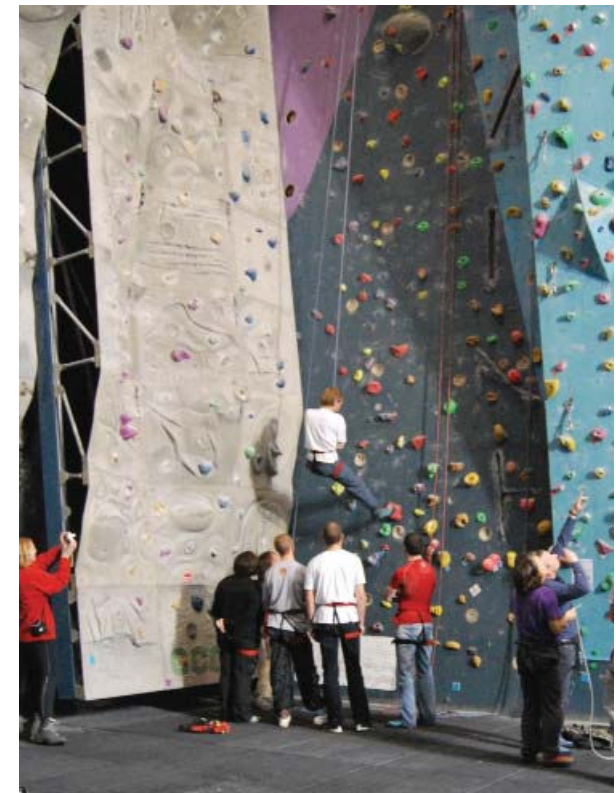
Learning

Financial capability, which is improving people's ability to manage money, keep track of their finances, make informed choices about financial products and plan ahead, is one of the three key components of our overall strategy. Without it the impact of providing face to face advice, affordable credit and other services is greatly diminished.

The appointment of a dedicated full-time Financial Capability Coordinator in July 2009 has given us the foundation for forming new and strengthening existing partnerships for a more co-ordinated, wide ranging programme of training and awareness raising particularly for front line workers.

WHAT ARE WE DOING

- **Learning opportunities** – a successful Transformation Fund bid is to provide training opportunities for hard to reach financially excluded individuals through outdoor activities including rock climbing and white water rafting. This also boosts self confidence, and improves motivation and aspirations as well as providing an introduction to personal financial management.
- **Money Skills** – working with West Yorkshire Trading Standards, we are cascading the use of this interactive training resource helping young people to manage their own finances and develop other skills including team working, communication, leadership, problem solving, creativity, presentation and meeting deadlines.



- **Beat the Money Maze Tent** – in partnership with advice services we organised a tent alongside partners at this years Rotherham Show. Using money quiz games and the enticement of a free, stigma-free benefit check we were able to reach many more people than would have been the case through more formal activities. Over 40 benefit checks were done on the day by CAB volunteers and Welfare Rights and Money Advice workers.

⁴ Final Demand, Debt and Mental Health, Financial Services Authority Leaflet (November 2009)

⁵ Yorkshire & Humber Public Health Observatory Death Extracts, ONS

⁶ Jenkins R., Bhugra D., Bebbington P., Brugha T., Farrell M., Coid J. et al. 'Debt, income and mental disorder in the general population', in *Psychological Medicine*, 38, 2008, pp. 1485-1493

⁷ Demos and Toynbee Hall, *Widening the Safety Net: Learning the lessons of insurance with rent schemes* (Royal and Sun Alliance, December 2005)

Safety & Housing

Of the poorest 10% of households in the UK by income, 51% live in social housing. If households are already only just managing, a small change in their circumstances can easily tip them into financial difficulties. For social housing residents, being unable to pay their rent, means they could become homeless.

We believe people who work in the housing sector are ideally placed to support tenants to learn good money management skills.

The involvement of social landlords is essential for us to deliver our objectives. Due to the high concentrations of financially excluded people in the social rented sector they are in a strong position to reach many of those we're aiming to help.

“...Of the poorest 10% of households in the UK by income, 51% live in social housing...”

For example, a tenant may be at increased risk of debt by missing out on benefit entitlement, paying sky-high interest to a doorstep lender, lacking insurance cover to meet unexpected expenditure and not being able to budget effectively. They'll need help in all these areas.

A strong business case exists for investing in preventative measures for financially excluded households.

For instance:

- Evicting a tenant costs up to £6000
- Court action alone costs around £2000
- Failed tenancies cost social landlords around £1300 each (not including staff time)

WHAT ARE WE DOING

Rent in Advance

Since 2007 we have supported the Rent in Advance partnership between Key Choices, LASER Credit Union and Robond⁸. This is to provide homeless families with a bond (Robond) and the advance rent (a loan from the credit union) required by private landlords to secure private rented accommodation.

2010

We are currently working on a pilot in Munsborough to provide budget and money management training for new tenants so that they are better prepared for the responsibilities of managing their own tenancy. For many, problems in managing household expenses can lead to rent arrears and in some cases eviction.

⁸ Robond is a registered Charity in Rotherham set up in 1997 to provide help and support for people who are homeless or about to become homeless

A Way Forward

The Financial Inclusion Project was born out of the absence of a framework for bringing services for financially excluded people together.

The first phase has been extremely successful in establishing a sustainable model for joint working. We have created an active network with new partnerships and initiatives and brought financial inclusion higher up the policy agenda locally and across South Yorkshire.

The credit crunch has highlighted the need to focus on vulnerable communities and individuals, the value of locating financial inclusion activity where strong community networks already exist and strengthened the partnership model.

Our next steps will be:

- **To keep up the momentum.**
The co-ordination role has proved critical in maximising impact. We will need to maintain a strong and enduring infrastructure for sustainability after Mar 2011. Funding or mainstreaming support for this work is critical.
- **To continue to focus activities for vulnerable groups and communities.** This is particularly important as we emerge from economic recession, and begin to deal with the anticipated cuts to local services
- **To continue to drive forward new initiatives,** for example, exploring the potential for expanding the scope of post offices.
- **To build on innovation and co-operation** to increase the capacity of the advice services to meet mounting demand.
- **To build on extending credit union services,** including delivering the Savings Gateway, developing a possible single credit union for South Yorkshire, raising the profile and growing credit union membership.
- **To develop closer links with social housing, health service providers, and employment initiatives.**
- **To continue to embed financial inclusion through education and training, especially of front line workers.**

“...The first phase has been extremely successful in establishing strategic objectives and a model for joint working...”

Finance **Annual** Review





Foreword by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Roger Stone

I am pleased to present on behalf of the Council and our partners this review of our work done in response to the economic downturn.

A year ago we set out our action plan to help the district, its businesses and residents to manage through this turbulent economic period. Local services have adapted to treat the economic downturn as a significant priority and the Council has itself invested more than an extra £1/2 million specific funding to help local people and local businesses.

It has been a difficult time for many. But, this review shows that the investments made and efforts of partners have cushioned the impact for a large number people affected either directly or indirectly by the downturn. In particular, we have:

- Secured funding from the Government's 'Future Jobs Fund' to provide up to 600 jobs in Rotherham over 18 months, starting in October 2009. Over 100 jobs have already been filled under this scheme.
- Provided a wide range of support to people finding themselves unemployed, helping 9 out of 10 people to find new jobs or training within 1 year.
- Provided loans to 340 families*¹ to secure private sector rented accommodation and saved over £2m in homelessness costs to use on other services.
- Provided 300 furnished properties to residents who might not otherwise have been able to afford to take up a tenancy.

- Invested an extra £174,000 in voluntary sector advice services in 2009 to enable them to help an extra 5,000 residents who might not otherwise have been supported and to generate an estimated £2m of additional benefits these residents were entitled to but were not receiving.
- Made £200,000 available through the Rothersave Credit Union to assist residents in greatest financial need. So far the scheme has helped 14 residents to deal with a range of issues including mortgage arrears.
- Provided a host of other ways of helping our residents manage better, including freezing school meal prices, continuing the Rothercard Discount Scheme and extending the period over which Council Tax instalments could be paid, from 10 to 12 months.

We have also helped many businesses to secure inward investment and create and safeguard a significant number of jobs. We recognise that for business owners operating on the most slender of margins and for people still out of work, this continues to be a stressful time. We will continue to help and support these businesses and residents.

Without losing sight of the present, now is the time to think about the future. We want to make sure that our businesses and our residents can maximise the opportunities that will arise as the economy starts to improve.

Some businesses are thriving and prospects look positive in a number of areas. We have a much more diverse and resilient economy that is no longer substantially reliant on a small

number of large industries. A recent announcement of major investment into the Advance Manufacturing Park at Catcliffe by the Secretary of State for Business, Industry and Skills reflects the confidence in Rotherham to support technology companies of a global importance. Our education attainment and training performance continues to improve, although we will need further step change in skills to ensure it is Rotherham people who are filling the jobs created in these technological high skills areas.

This review highlights the various activities we have undertaken over the last year and resulting outcomes. It also reminds businesses and residents in Rotherham where they can get free help and support from the many excellent organisations that have worked hard and will continue to work hard to protect and strengthen our position.

I am sure you will find something in this review that will be of help or interest to you. More details can be found on our dedicated website at www.rotherham.gov.uk/creditcrunch. Finally, if you have any comments, questions or ideas as a result of reading the document please contact us. We have shown during 2009 that we are prepared to adopt a whole range of ideas to help alleviate the impact of the economic downturn.

Please contact Angela Kemp or Colin Earl on Rotherham (01709) 822003 / 822004 if you would like any further information on this area or anything in this document.

Councillor Roger Stone
Leader, Rotherham MBC

¹Since 2007

A Review of Rotherham's Response to the Economic Downturn

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Section I: The Local Impact of the Economic Downturn

Global economic activity was severely affected by the banking crisis, which was exposed in the Autumn 2008. As with everywhere else, Rotherham suffered from the resulting credit crunch and recession. The impact on businesses, jobs, housing and health is summarised in this section of the review.

Jobs

Rotherham lost 4,800 workplace jobs in 2008 according to the annual business survey carried out by the Office for National Statistics, and the trend continued in the first few months of 2009, when the number of people claiming Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) increased by 2,400.

However, improvements were experienced from June 2009 onwards when, with the exceptions of July and August 2009, the number of people claiming the allowance fell. The chart below shows the monthly

changes in the numbers claiming jobseekers' allowance during 2009.

There has also been an increase in the number of jobs made available through Jobcentre Plus*² during the second half of 2009. 8,400 new jobs were made available between June and November 2009, compared with 7,500 for the same period in the preceding year.

Housing

The experience in relation to housing repossessions has been less severe than predicted at the beginning of the economic

downturn. Nationally, the Council of Mortgage Lenders has cut its forecast for the number of repossessions this year to 48,000 from an earlier forecast of 75,000 repossessions. Experts report that Government measures and the beneficial effect of continuing low interest rates are helping most borrowers facing difficulty to keep their homes.

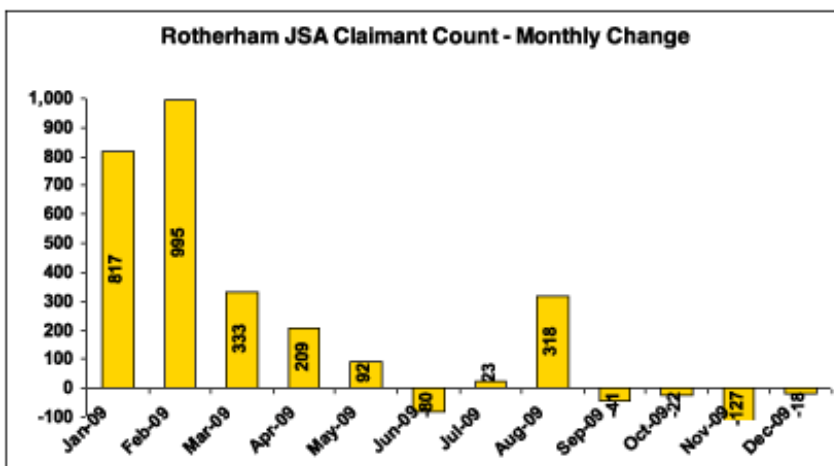
Locally, statistics relating to housing repossessions show that numbers of repossession orders have fallen during 2009 from a peak in late 2008 / early 2009. During the quarter ending September 2009, 251 repossession orders were made in Rotherham, which is 30% fewer than in the same period of 2008*³.

Health

The extent to which residents seek advice is an indicator of their need for help and / or counselling due to current or perceived future problems.

There has been a large increase in referrals to the Citizen's Advice Bureau for each area of advice. This is demonstrated in the following table:

Monthly Changes in the Number of People Claiming Jobseekers' Allowance in Rotherham - 2009.



²Jobcentre Plus deals with approximately one-third of all jobs filled

³Ministry of Justice - Statistics on mortgage and landlord possession actions in the county courts – third quarter 2009

Referrals made to Citizen's Advice Bureau 2008/09 and 2009/10

Area of advice sought	Referrals 2008/09	Referrals 2009/10 *4
Debt	1,192	2,224
Benefits	563	1,480
Employment	208	680
Housing	283	545
Relationships	7	317

Other advice services have reported similar trends.

Businesses

During the second half of 2008 and early 2009, Rotherham suffered a number of setbacks, particularly in its manufacturing sector. High profile job losses were announced with the downsizing of Corus and the closure of the Burberry clothing manufacturer. There was also some downsizing in call centre operations in the Dearne Valley. On the high street, Woolworths, amongst others, closed as a result of lower demand and changing consumer trends.

The situation has not, however, been all negative. While Rotherham still has a substantial manufacturing sector, our economy is increasingly diversifying and, since April 2009, 285 businesses have either started up, taken on new employees or have secured investment to expand or continue trading.

These range from a large number of sole traders / small businesses through to larger employers. Collectively, these businesses have created 1,434 new jobs and safeguarded a further 1,326 during this period.

In particular the technology sector, where Rotherham has a track record of support and inward investment, has bucked the trend. Rotherham's Advanced Manufacturing Park has been chosen as the base for the UK's new £25m Nuclear Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre. This investment will create more than 300 jobs, with more expected to be made throughout industry supply chains across the region.

Also at the Advance Manufacturing Park:

- Rolls Royce will be establishing a new facility at the site
- Drive Management Systems, a business running on-site and

wireless monitoring services for industrial equipment, has relocated to the Advanced Manufacturing Park in Rotherham after outgrowing its base at Sheffield Technology Parks.

- Pulse Tidal is to receive European grant of €8 million to enable the company to develop its first fully commercial tidal energy generator, which is expected to provide electricity for up to 1,000 homes by 2012.
- Struers, an international company providing technical support for manufacturers, is bringing its UK operation from the West Midlands to the Park.

Other examples of Rotherham's successes include:

- Sandvick specialist medical equipment supplier created 100 jobs to meet an increase in demand for its services
- Original granite marble established 60 new jobs
- Manor motorsport, which is involved in high level motor racing, has created 50 jobs
- Rotherham based Pegler Yorkshire Group, the fittings manufacturer, has expanded, creating almost 100 new jobs

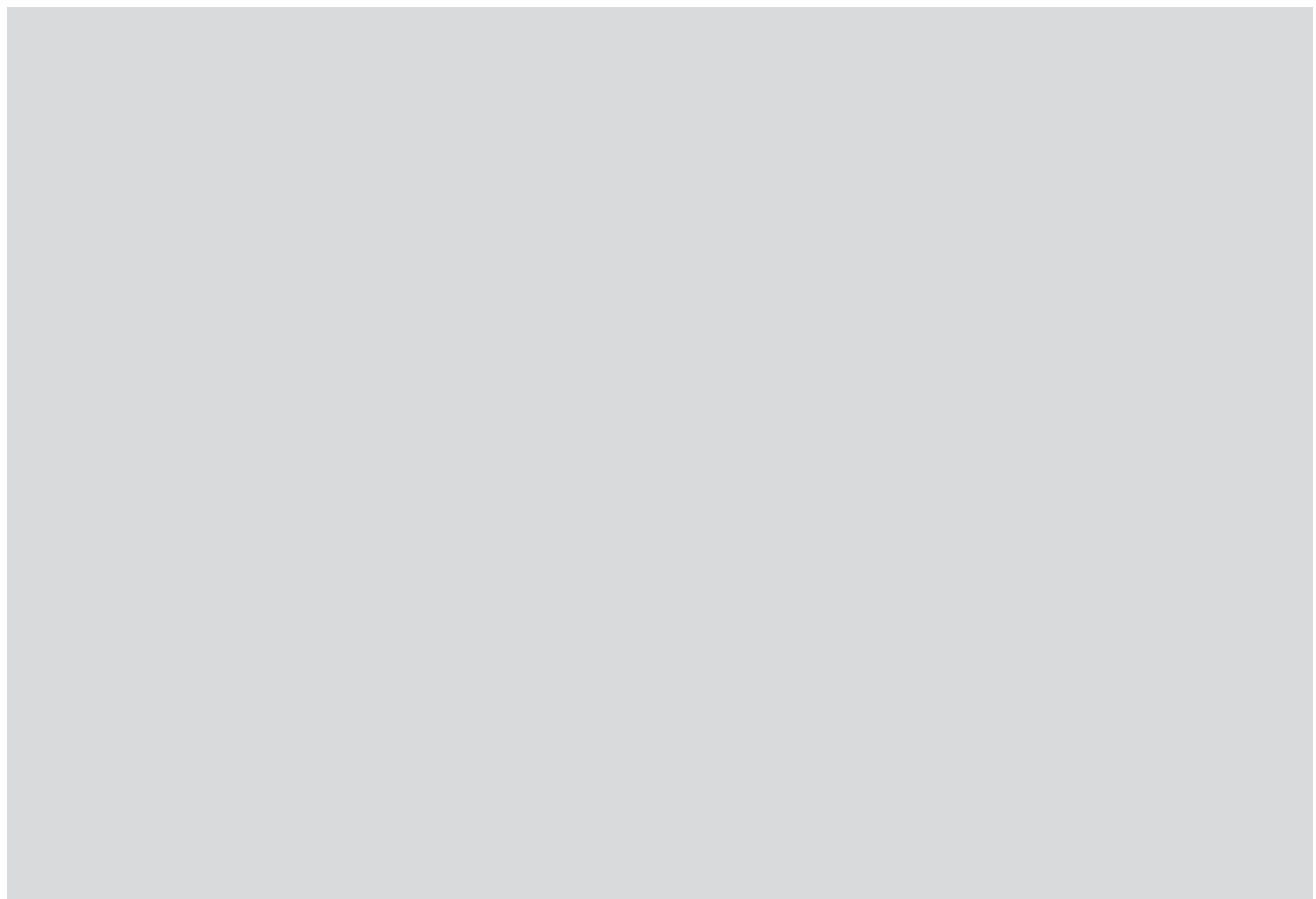
*Extrapolated from figures up to November 2009

Prospects for the future in Rotherham look promising as the economy further diversifies. In 2009, 25 out of the top 100 performing SMEs*⁵ in the Sheffield Region, which includes Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire, were based in Rotherham. This is more than twice as many as in Doncaster and Barnsley. Also in 2009, Rotherham had 99 high growth

SMEs – high growth is defined as an increase in turnover of at least 20% per year for 3 consecutive years.

It is also worth noting that the July to September 2009 Economic Survey conducted by the Chamber of Commerce showed an increase in sales and investment in Rotherham, which have contributed to a significant increase in confidence.

The main part of this review, which follows, shows what the Council and its partners have done to help businesses and residents through the last turbulent year.



⁵Small to Medium Enterprises

Section 2: Employment and Training

This part of the review looks at how residents have been supported when they have found themselves out of work.

Jobcentre Plus has aimed to ensure that anyone unemployed has had the opportunity to:

- See an expert Jobcentre Plus adviser who can support them
- Access a wide range of jobs
- Get help with CV writing and completing job applications forms
- Get help with skills advice and re-training
- Access one-off cash help to improve an individual's immediate job prospects
- Access one day advice and coaching sessions
- Access to Learning and Skills Council funded work-focussed training, to help people to move into a new job.

Rotherham's joint bid with Sheffield and Doncaster for 'Future Jobs Fund' monies was successful and, as a consequence, will support up to 600 jobs in Rotherham over 18 months. Jobs are being targeted wherever possible at our growth sectors and areas suffering from the economic downturn. Over 100 jobs have already been filled under this scheme since it started in October 2009. Claire Wardell

and Daniel Marples are partners who have benefitted from the scheme:

Case Study:

Future Jobs Fund helps partners to enter employment

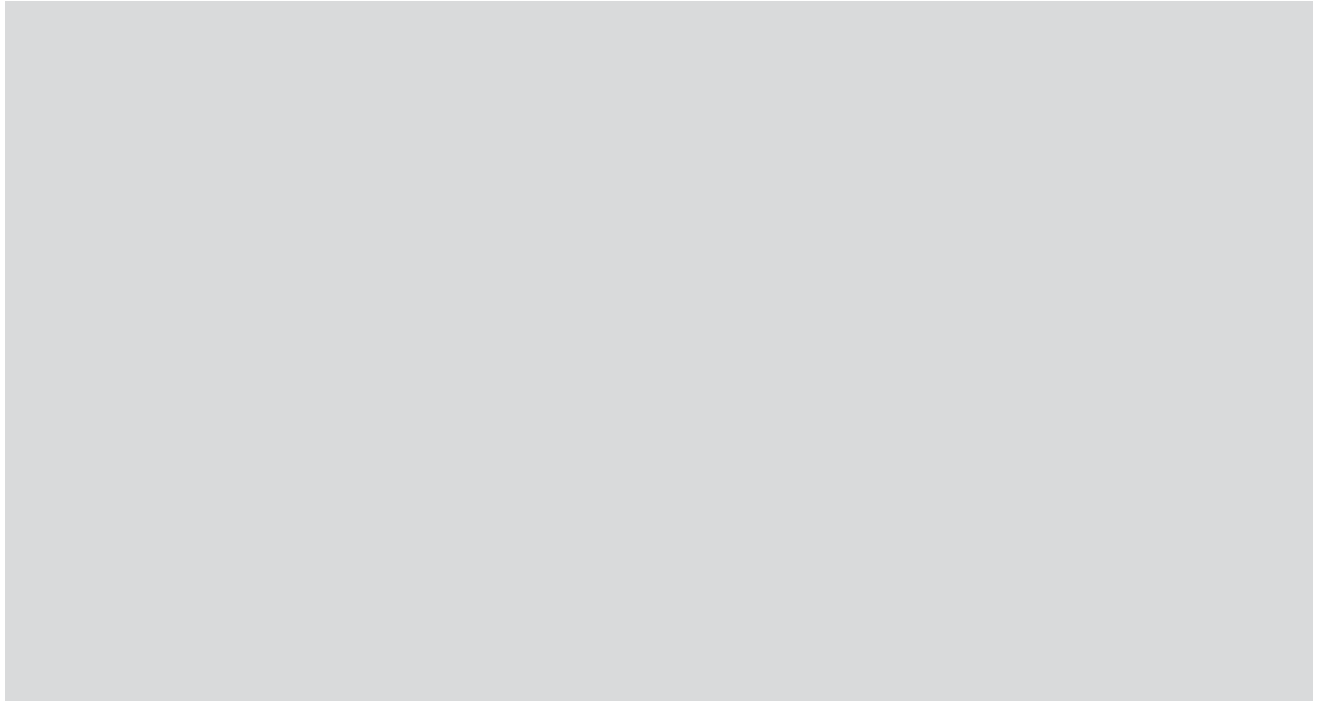
Both Claire Wardell (aged 22) and her partner, Daniel Marples (aged 24), have found work under the future jobs fund scheme. They were both previously unemployed and claiming benefits. It has made a big difference to them.

Claire told us *“ I started on the Future Jobs Fund scheme on the 7th December 2009; the scheme has made a very big difference to me and my partner. My partner is now also on the scheme. The scheme has made a huge difference to all aspects of our lives... the main changes are having a reason to get up in the morning and being financially independent – all we wished to do was pay our way in life.*

Whilst on the scheme I am completing, through my placement a number of training opportunities to forward my career when the scheme ends ”.

Jobcentre Plus can also help with the 'New Deal', which aims to help unemployed people, particularly those who have been unemployed for a long time, people with disabilities and anyone in need of extra help to find work. The New Deal will give residents a chance to train, learn and do work experience.

800 unemployed people have been given an opportunity to improve their skills levels through the local colleges using arrangements established by Jobcentre Plus, the Learning and Skills Council and colleges. Rotherham has been able to make an offer of learning to over 95% of eligible 16 and 17 year old people not in employment, education or training.



The Learning and Skills Council and Jobcentre Plus are developing pre-employment training packages for people who are unemployed for more than 6 months. In the future, all 18-24 year olds out of work*⁶ for more than 6 months will be guaranteed a job, work experience or training.

The Council and Jobcentre Plus have arranged job fairs for the unemployed. For example, a Care Sector jobs fair in May 2009 attracted 14 employers and over 100 prospective employees.

Rotherham's Work & Skills Board is promoting the 'Backing

Young Britain' programme*⁷ and encouraging employers to make one of the programme's pledges. Additionally, 89 Rotherham employers have so far signed the skills pledge, committing them to support employees to achieve level 2 NVQ qualifications.

RiDO is working with UK Steel Enterprise through a grant and loan fund scheme to support individuals to develop business ideas. 38 businesses have been helped so far through the scheme.

Partners are promoting volunteering schemes as one way back into employment. Since

April 2009, Voluntary Action Rotherham has:

- Helped over 400 people into volunteering.
- Provided a workshop for 50 people to explore the benefits of volunteering whilst unemployed.

It is worth noting during this period that over 70% of people losing their jobs found work or training within 26 weeks and 9 out of 10 people found new employment or training within 1 year.

⁶Claiming jobseekers' allowance

⁷Backing young Britain is about bringing businesses and public and voluntary sectors together to ensure that the valuable skills and experience of our young people aren't being wasted. Under the programme, organisations are asked to commit to one of seven pledges.

Section 3: Advice and Financial Support for Residents

This section shows what the Council and its partners have done to help residents over the last year:

'Advice In Rotherham' (AIR) is a group of community based support services available to assist all residents in Rotherham with any difficulties arising from the economic downturn or otherwise. The group consists of:

- Age Concern Rotherham
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Kiveton Park Independent Advice Centre
- Rotherham Diversity Forum
- Rotherham Disability Information Service (South Yorkshire Centre for Independent Living)
- Rotherham Advice and Information Network
- Shelter Housing and Homeless Charity
- Shelter Richochet, housing advice for under 25s
- Rotherham Council Welfare Rights and Money Advice

Collectively, these organisations support some of the most vulnerable people in Rotherham on an ongoing basis. Demand for their services has increased substantially during late 2008 and 2009 as a result of the economic downturn. Contact details for

these organisations can be found in Appendix A.

The work of these organisations is demonstrated clearly through a scheme sponsored by NHS Rotherham and delivered by the Council's Welfare Rights and Money Advice Service, to help Macmillan Nurses clients to manage their finances and maximise income at a time when they are more concerned with their health and welfare. This is proving to be a very positive project:

Case Study:

Macmillan Nurses clients are helped to access benefits they are entitled to

NHS Rotherham asked the Council's Welfare Rights and Money Advice Service in 2009 to help very vulnerable residents receiving Macmillan Nursing Care to manage their finances and maximise their income. The scheme has shown that clients were losing out financially at this very crucial time.

During the first six months of the scheme, the Welfare Rights and Money Advice Service:

- saw 265 clients
- undertook 257 home visits
- lodged 358 claims for benefits
- gained an annual income of £606,388 for the clients

The Council and NHS Rotherham paid an extra £174,000 to voluntary sector advice services in 2009 to enable them to increase services during a period of intense demand. In the 6 months period from April to September 2009, the advice services helped an extra 5,000 residents who might not otherwise have been supported. This assistance has helped residents access over £2m of additional benefits they were entitled to but were not receiving.

Credit unions are local not-for-profit savings and loans co-operatives that aim to help you take control of your money. Credit unions have a particular understanding of the needs of people who want to borrow or save relatively small amounts. They encourage members to save what they can, and provide loans at competitive rates that help members avoid very expensive rates charged by some lenders. Rothersave and LASER Credit

Unions operate from the town centre, while the Ryton Credit Union is based at Dinnington. The Council has made £200,000 available through Rothersave Credit Union to assist residents in greatest financial need as a result of the economic downturn. So far the scheme has helped 14 residents to deal with a range of issues including mortgage and rent arrears. Mr Lindsay is one resident benefiting from the scheme:

When Mark Lindsay was faced with the prospect of losing his home, Rothersave Credit Union was able to provide him with a loan that meant he could pay his mortgage.

Mark (41) from Thrybergh has owned his three-bedroom semi-detached house for three years and has always been able to pay his monthly mortgage repayments.

However, as a dry liner subcontractor in the construction trade, self-employed Mark has found it difficult to get work in recent months thanks to the impact of the current recession.

He has been in the industry for 20 years and has never struggled to find work until now.

After hearing about Rothersave, Mark approached them

in July to see if they could help him with his situation. He had fallen into arrears and was being threatened with repossession.

"I'd already arranged an IVA (Individual Voluntary Arrangement) with the lender and had a deadline to pay what I owed but things have been a struggle as I work in a competitive industry," said Mark.

"I contacted Rothersave and they pushed through an application for a loan to help me make repayments. They have been really good.

"They asked me all about my situation and did everything they possibly could to help me."

Initially Mark's loan request was declined as he failed to meet the criteria as he was unemployed at that time but a

couple of weeks later he found work and was granted a £1,500 loan from Rothersave.

Mark said: "The loan is paid back at a minimum rate so it's affordable for me and relieves a bit of pressure so I don't get deeper into debt. It's given me a bit of breathing space and I feel a lot better.

"If I had lost the house it would have been meant going to the council for housing support.

"The credit crunch loan is great, helping people just like me to resolve their debts."

Rothersave offers low-cost loans and has £200,000 to support individuals suffering during the credit crunch.

To find out more information call 01709 514 263 or visit www.rothersave.plus.com

Roadshows held in Rotherham helped around 500 people in a range of issues including:

- Over 80 people were advised on the loan shark initiative and given information on options available to avoid having to resort to illegal lending (see below)
- Various people were advised about redundancies
- A number of council tenants were given advice about their rent accounts and managing their debt
- Over 50 people received advice on travel discount schemes
- Age concern gave advice and information to around 40 older people
- Numerous people were given advice on a range of topics by the Citizen's Advice Bureau
- Several people enquired about becoming self-employed
- Over 30 people received advice on pensions
- Several people enquired about volunteering, as a way back into employment
- Over 20 people were helped with benefits enquiries
- Several people were helped to apply for the Rothercard discount scheme (see below)
- A number of people received information on and had referral details for NHS general health / stress management training
- Over 40 people took away information about training opportunities.

20 community support services had stalls at the Roadshows, which were very well received:

It's good that the communities are being thought about...

(Peter Lapish, Ruskin Close)

I found it very worthwhile...

(Mrs Holden, West Melton)

It was excellent...
We found everything we expected and more

(Nicola Gilroy, Wath)

We are operating a scheme jointly with Birmingham City Trading Standards to help people who find themselves needing extra cash to avoid using illegal lenders (loan sharks). The scheme:

- Increases awareness of illegal lending and the impact it has on borrowers' lives.
- Creates a climate in which people will report the activity of loan sharks
- Helps to identify, arrest and prosecute illegal lenders
- Assists victims to access legitimate affordable credit, face to face debt advice, and other relevant sources of support and assistance.

Voluntary Action Rotherham*⁷ is leading locally on tackling financial exclusion, which affects a quarter of adults in Rotherham. Financial exclusion may include not having a bank account, not being able to access affordable credit, inability to take advantage of cost savings associated with using direct debits or being unable to make informed choices about financial services such as savings and insurance products. It also may mean lack of or limited access to free, face to face advice and not having the skills or the confidence to manage your finances effectively. It often leads to disadvantage and loss of opportunity, and creates barriers to employment and full participation in society and the wider economy. Very good progress is being made on the key

elements of the financial inclusion strategy. To date, 418 people have been helped to obtain credit union accounts, 277 to receive training in financial capability and 76 people have been trained to give financial capability support. In addition 116 organisations are now involved in improving financial inclusion in Rotherham and 14 new initiatives have started.

The Council, Voluntary Action Rotherham and Financial Inclusion South Yorkshire secured £120,000 regional grant funding to improve people's chances across the whole of South Yorkshire, focusing on three areas:

- provision of financial capability training
- developing capacity to deliver financial advice
- working with offenders to improve access to finance.

Financial worries and job insecurities are often a cause of poor mental health. NHS Rotherham is helping the Public, employers and employees to minimise the incidence of mental health problems created by financial pressures, by providing public and work based stress awareness and alleviation projects. The 'Mind Your Own Business Project' provides advice to employers on creating a mentally healthy work environment and training and resources for employees such as Mental Health First Aid and Managing Mental

Health: Skills for Line Managers. This project is helping employers to support employees who may be experiencing stress or poor mental health.

NHS Rotherham is also:

- Providing self help books for common mental health problems. There has been an 80% increase in the number of books issued during 2009
- Holding Public stress control groups to help people manage anxiety.
- Ensuring residents can access mental health practitioners through their GPs. Each GP has a practitioner attached to it
- Facilitating access to Rotherham Occupational Health Advice Service, which provides advice and support to enable people to deal with a range of work related ill health issues.

Rotherham Council kept school meal prices at the previous year's level. The Council decided to absorb cost pressures, rather than ask parents to pay more for the 3 million school meals provided every year. The Council also offers the Rothercard Discount Scheme which provides residents with discounted use of services, eg leisure facilities

The Council extended the period over which Council Tax instalments could be paid, from 10 to 12 months, so that residents could spread the costs over a longer period.

⁷Voluntary Action Rotherham is the lead body for supporting, developing and promoting the voluntary and community sector in the Rotherham borough. Its core activities and associated projects are a keystone for local community engagement and development.

Section 4: Housing

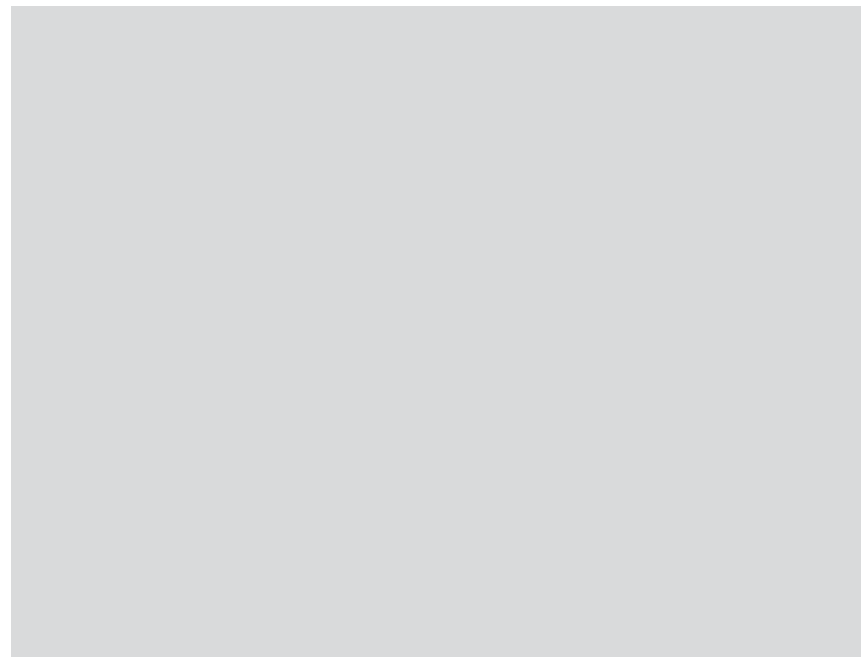
This section identifies the support we have provided to residents to ensure, as much as possible, they can stay in their own homes.

There are various actions people can take to prevent losing their home, but it is critical to seek advice as soon as you think you may need some help with managing your bills. The Council's Key Choices Property Shop brings together a range of advice services to prevent homelessness. Where homelessness cannot be prevented, our Housing Solutions Service will help find alternatives.

Rotherham's proactive work to help avoid homelessness is achieving positive and cost effective outcomes:

- 26 applications for mortgage rescue are currently being supported.
- During 2009, 102 'rent-in-advance' loans (in partnership with Laser Credit Union) were awarded, helping families to move into private rented accommodation and providing them with banking services, savings facilities, low cost credit for emergencies and support in managing their finances.

In total, over 340 families have received assistance to find accommodation under the scheme since 2007. This proactive work has saved over £2m in homelessness costs to use on other services.



During 2009 there have been 294 households prevented from becoming homeless by the Key Choices Housing Solutions team. Of these, 72 were in financial difficulties, including 17 with mortgage arrears.

In November 2009, the Council's housing service attended a "drop in" advice session at Refugee Support. The team were able to answer a range of questions and were able to help with the process of explaining issues relating to housing and employment.

In order to provide an integrated approach, Jobcentre Plus provides

Job Search sessions at the Town Centre Property Shop every Tuesday, where residents can explore and discuss employment and housing issues in the same visit.

During 2009, the Housing Services Team has provided 300 furnished properties to residents who would not otherwise have been able to afford to take up a tenancy. The Team is also encouraging landlords to complete repairs and provide carpets before to enable tenants to move in with minimum outlay of their own.

The Council's Housing Service and Housing Benefits Teams are assisting vulnerable tenants by arranging for their rent to be paid directly to the landlord and to help the vulnerable customers to manage their finances effectively, as demonstrated in the following case involving one tenant with learning difficulties:

Case Study:

The Council's Key Choices Housing Service prevents the potential eviction of a vulnerable tenant

The Council's Key Choices Housing Service took over the management of a block of flats in an area of West Melton as the private sector landlord's letting agents were not managing the property to the landlord's satisfaction.

There was a large amount of arrears on one tenants account and the landlord asked the Council to commence repossession proceedings.

The tenant has learning difficulties and thought housing benefits were being paid direct to the landlord to cover the rent. However, the tenant's housing benefit had been suspended awaiting information on the tenant's income.

Key Choices agreed with the landlord to let the tenant stay in the property until the housing benefits could be checked. The Team helped the tenant to complete a new benefits claim, obtain backdated benefits of £1,900 and organised for future rent payments to be paid to the Council.

Both the tenant and landlord were delighted with the outcome. The landlord is investing the back dated rent into making improvements to the property.

Section 5: Support for Businesses

This section of the review identifies the work we have done as partners to help businesses manage during the economic downturn.

The Rotherham Investment and Development Office (RiDO), the Chamber of Commerce, Business Link and Yorkshire Forward have provided critical support to the Town's businesses during this testing period, including:

- The Council (RiDO) and Business Link have provided consultancy advice to 81 businesses since April 2009 and helped 20 businesses to secure training support.
- Additionally, 60 businesses have accessed Business Link support to carry out skills diagnostics
- RiDO has worked with 38 companies creating or safeguarding almost 1,000 jobs in the district since April 2009
- RiDO has also actively supported investment at the Advance Manufacturing Park
- The Chamber of Commerce's Business Community Support Officers have so far in 2009/10 provided at least 2 days dedicated support to 150 SMEs, designed to help the businesses consolidate and grow

- 14 businesses have accessed Financial Health Checks, 40 have received Business Development Vouchers and 22 have accessed Innovation Vouchers*⁹ offered by Business Link.

We are making local contracts available to local businesses wherever rules allow us to do this. Initiatives include listing contracts due to be tendered in an accessible forward plan and, where appropriate, supporting local procurement in contracts. Additionally, the Council has hosted two 'Meet the Buyers' conferences in March 2009 and in January 2010, bringing buyers

and suppliers together, providing advice to local suppliers and giving information to them on upcoming contract opportunities. These were excellent events attended by over 300 representatives.

A range of business seminars were held during the Summer 2009 and more are planned. For example, a programme of four 'Beating the Recession' events attracted 63 delegates. 87% of the attendees stated the events met their expectations.

The Chamber of Commerce has held a range of other events for its members and other businesses during the year.



⁹Innovation vouchers help small to medium sized businesses (SMEs) in the region, with financial support to engage with Yorkshire's universities and other academic institutions to help their business grow and develop

Jobcentre Plus is achieving its target of offering a 'Rapid Response Service' within 48 hours to any business reporting potential redundancies to it. The service includes a range of partners providing dedicated and tailored support to meet the needs of businesses and employees at risk as a result of the downturn. Most notably, support provided to Burberry, until its closure in April 2009, and to Corus since February 2009 included:

- Jobcentre Plus, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Rotherham Council provided ongoing dedicated on-site support
- Various specific events were held on site involving local colleges, Business Link and Yorkshire Forward offering suggestions and options to employees
- Housing and benefits advice, CV writing guidance and job search support has been provided by the Council's Housing and Employment Solutions Service
- Employers took part in jobs fairs on site, to enable employees to enquire about new careers and, where relevant, make applications for available jobs

- Advice has been provided regarding the possible use of vacant office space and marketing of empty buildings.

Business Link and the LSC have offered a range of options to keep employees in training while operations have been less busy. For example, one company in Rotherham was one of the first two businesses regionally operating a pilot 'Time to Train' project, which provides training whilst during periods of short time working.

The Council has awarded 5 Town Centre Business Vitality Grants and 7 Street Café grants to new businesses or businesses requiring support for development in the town centre.

To encourage retail spending in the Town Centre, the Council has provided free car parking, firstly through the 'Free after 3pm' scheme, which has operated since May 2009, and for five Saturdays leading up to Christmas. The Council has arranged a free bus service between the town centre and Parkgate. And, the Council's Town Centre Manager has arranged a wide range of discount vouchers available for use in town centre shops.

2009 was very challenging for developers, who found it difficult to obtain funding to continue with significant development schemes. Many schemes regionally and

nationally have been mothballed; suspended until economic conditions improve. In Rotherham we have worked with developers and Yorkshire Forward to ensure our flagship schemes have continued. Reasonable progress has been maintained on the Town Centre Renaissance Scheme, using public funding to supplement private investment to keep the various phases progressing. This project is crucial to the town centre's economic prosperity. As a consequence, interest from retailers in the new facilities is increasing.

On the housing front, the Council has been successful in its bids to secure funding to provide much needed new affordable housing:

- The approval of £2.3m to build 36 new homes in a development at Dalton / Thrybergh will lead to the first new council houses built for 30 years.
- The Council has also secured £3.5m investment to build 98 new homes with developers, by 2011.

Delivering these projects will help local businesses and local people.

Our interventions have had many positive benefits. We know, however, the situation remains precarious and we will continue to support all of our businesses throughout 2010 and beyond.

Appendix I: Useful Organisations for Information and Advice

These pages give you details of organisations that can provide advice and/or information if you are having any financial difficulties.

Employment and Training

- The **Learning Skills Council** is responsible for planning and funding high-quality vocational education and training for everyone. It can provide access to a range of training initiatives and funding. Telephone 0845 019 4171, email southyorkshireinfo@lsc.gov.uk or go to the website at www.lsc.gov.uk/regions/YorkshireHumber/
- The **Department for Work and Pensions** provides crisis loans in certain circumstances to help people meet immediate short-term needs in emergencies. The loans are short term and applications have to meet strict criteria. For more information contact **Jobcentre Plus** or see the Jobcentre Plus website at: <http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/WorkingAgeBenefits/Dev013949.xml.html>

Anyone making new claims to benefit can phone 0800 055 6688 or textphone 0800 023 4888

Help for Residents

- Rotherham Council's **Money Advice Service** offers a free confidential debt counselling service to Rotherham residents. The service advises on different types of debt such as rent and mortgage arrears, credit card debts and bank loans. The service can help check you are getting all the benefits you may be entitled to, help you plan your weekly and monthly budget and negotiate with the people you owe money to. Home visits can be made and advisers are available at the County Court for rent and mortgage repossession hearings. Tel 01709 822329 (24 hour answerphone service) Enterprise House, Bridge Street, Rotherham, S60 1QJ
- The **National Debt Line** at www.nationaldebtline.co.uk or 0808 808 4000 helps people to manage their debt
- The **Financial Services Authority** website - www.moneyadeclear.fsa.gov.uk provides independent consumer advice with more than 100 guides available that can be ordered free of charge, including a parents guide to managing money.
- **Housing Benefit** is a national scheme administered by Rotherham Council to help people on low incomes pay their rent. For information and help, contact Benefits Services, RBT (Connect) Ltd, Civic Building, Walker Place, Rotherham, S65 1UF. Telephone (01709) 336006
- To see if you're eligible for help with your **council tax** bills, contact Rotherham Council on (01709) 336006 or Jobcentre Plus on 0800 055 6688, or visit: <http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/WorkingAgeBenefits/Howtoclaim/index.html>.
- **Voluntary Action Rotherham** is the lead body for supporting, developing and promoting the voluntary and community sector in the Rotherham borough. It is a network consisting of over 150 individuals and organisations and is leading locally on tackling financial exclusion. For more information telephone the Financial Inclusion Team on 01709 726896
- **LASER Credit Union** is a savings and loans cooperative offering its members access to affordable savings and fairly priced loans. Contact LASER at the Guardian Centre, Drummond Street, Rotherham, S65 1HY. Tel: 01709 836500

- **Rothersave Credit Union** was established in April 1998 and provides a financial service for anyone who lives or works within the boundary of Rotherham. Contact Rothersave at R.A.I.N. Building, Eastwood Lane, Rotherham S65 1EQ or Tel 01709 514263
- The **Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)** provides help to resolve any legal, money, welfare benefits issues or other problems. See Citizen's Advice at www.citizensadvice.org.uk or www.adviceguide.org.uk for further contacts and information. Rotherham CAB can be found at 120 - 126 Old Hall, Wellgate, Rotherham S60 2LN. Tel: 01709 515680
- The **Financial Services Authority (FSA)** operates a consumer helpline 0300 500 5000. It also operates a website that provides independent consumer advice with more than 100 guides available that can be ordered free of charge through www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk
- For information and advice about **income support and jobseeker's allowance** or the **New Deal**, or to make a claim, contact Jobcentre Plus on 0800 055 6688 or visit www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/index.html.
- For information about the **Working tax credit and child tax credit** call 0845 300 3900 or visit www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcredits

Help with Housing

- **Key Choices** is a scheme that lets you apply for a home of your choice, apply to join the housing register, see existing properties, find out about your 'right to buy', and access properties available through the quality landlord scheme. Telephone on 01709 336565, email keychoices@rotherham.gov.uk or visit or write to Key Choices Property Shop 20/21 Old Town Hall Rotherham S60 1QX
- The Council's **Neighbourhood Investment Service** provides advice on housing shared equity options and on affordable warmth initiatives. Contact the service on 01709 823114
- Help with **Council House Rent** can be obtained from 2010 Rotherham Ltd, which is responsible for collecting housing rents. The Income Collection Section helps tenants to manage their accounts effectively and agrees payment arrangements for those falling behind with their rent. The Section can be contacted on Tel 01709 822250.
- Free housing advice can be obtained from the **Shelter** helpline 0808 800 4444*, open 8am-8pm, seven days a week and includes help on related mortgage debt or welfare benefits issues. Alternatively visit www.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/

For businesses

- The **Rotherham & Investment & Development Office (RiDO)** is the regeneration arm of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. RiDO provides support for new businesses starting up, existing Rotherham businesses looking to expand, or inward investors from outside the borough considering an operation in the borough. RiDO provides a free, professional service that can help with everything from finding the right sites and premises, to planning advice and guidance, finding and training recruits and locating new customers and suppliers. Telephone 01709 254444 or see the RiDO website at www.investinrotherham.co.uk/
- The Barnsley and **Rotherham Chamber of Commerce** can be contacted through 0844 414 5100 or www.brchamber.co.uk/
- Real help for businesses now. **Business Link** is available to offer practical advice and information for saving your business money. Contact Business Link on 0845 6 048 048 or visit www.businesslinkyorkshire.co.uk/

- **Yorkshire Forward** is the regional development agency for the Yorkshire & Humber region. There are 9 such agencies in England, and each is tasked with improving the economy in its own particular region. Yorkshire Forward can be contacted through 0113 394 9600 (8.30 - 17.30) or www.yorkshire-forward.com/
- Rotherham Occupational Health Advice Service, Workplace Health Advice Service, The RAIN Building, Eastwood Lane, Rotherham, South Yorkshire, S65 1EQ. Tel. 01709 428964

For more information on Rotherham's response to the economic downturn and where to get help please telephone Rotherham Council on **01709 822003 / 822004** or look at the credit crunch website at www.rotherham.gov.uk/creditcrunch

If you have any questions or comments about this document please telephone Rotherham Council on **01709 822003 / 822004** or use our online comments form at http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/graphics/YourCouncil/_Onlinefeedback.htm



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DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL SCRUTINY PANEL
Thursday, 11th March, 2010

Present:- Councillor Austen (in the Chair); Councillors Cutts, J. Hamilton, Johnston, Littleboy, Parker and Tweed.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dodson, Mannion and Sims and Parish Councillor E. Shaw and Taiba Yasseen.

75. COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman reported on dates for the scrutiny review into Perception scheduled for 17th March, 30th March and 13th April. Details regarding times and venue would be circulated by email for those Members involved.

76. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest to report.

77. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

78. CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

Consideration was given to a report presented by Asim Munir, Principal Community Involvement Officer, which set out how the Department for Communities and Local Government was working with Government Offices and local partners in looking to deliver a new and intensive programme of activity in some of the wards and neighbourhoods suffering most from the effects of the recession and from low levels of civic engagement. The focus would be on the neighbourhoods which were likely to suffer particularly sharply from the recession and where residents felt that they were not being listened to or having their needs responded to.

The launch of Connecting Communities took place on 14th October, 2009, by John Denham (Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government), where he announced a £12 million plan to reinvigorate and connect with those communities that were feeling the pressure from recession most acutely and to ensure they were well placed to share fully in future prosperity and emerge stronger and more cohesive.

The programme had three key priorities:-

- Leadership.
- Giving People a Voice.
- Increased Opportunities.

Rotherham's NI1 and NI4 scores were low against the Place Survey and, therefore, been identified by Government Office Yorkshire and Humber as an area which needed resources and support. Government Office Yorkshire and Humber have been working with local authorities in the region including Rotherham and their Local Strategic Partnership partners to bring qualitative and quantitative intelligence to bear on the selection of places.

East Maltby and Dinnington were selected as the two areas as they are unlikely to benefit from related initiatives such as Neighbourhood Management Intensive Schemes and were deprived communities with a high majority of disaffected indigenous white communities and areas which suffered from:-

- High Worklessness.
- High Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Low Educational Attainment.
- Low Adult Skills.

The Chief Executive Directorate had been working closely with the Area Partnership Managers from Wentworth Valley, Rother Valley South and the Manager from Rother Fed (Rotherham Federation of Tenants and Residents) to identify interventions and what support was needed from Government Office Yorkshire and Humber to ensure local needs were being met. The evolving proposals for East Maltby and Dinnington have been approved by Government Office Yorkshire and Humber and the Department for Communities and Local Government and the initiatives were now 'live'.

Rotherham began their delivery of the project in the second wave from January, 2010 and this would be up to March, 2010. It was envisaged that there would be a third wave to sustain the work, but this was subject to the procurement process.

Discussion ensued on the unfavourable conclusions that could be drawn from this report by some into the Council's attitude towards the democratic process. Also discussed was the amount of Area Assembly participation, the lack of Ward Member or Parish Council involvement, the amount of funding made available and the delivery of outputs.

It was, therefore, suggested that evaluation of this initiative be submitted to this Scrutiny Panel in three months following its completion at the end of March, 2010 or in six months time should a bid be successful into the third wave.

Resolved:- (1) That the update on the Connecting Communities areas relating to East Maltby and Dinnington be noted.

(2) That regular update reports be submitted to this Scrutiny Panel on

progress in due course.

79. COMMUNITY COHESION (HATE CRIME) PERFORMANCE UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report presented by Steve Parry, Safer Rotherham Partnership Co-ordinator, and Gail Wilcock, Community Cohesion Officer, which provided a further update on the progress and work of the Service with key outcomes to date including:-

- Development of intelligence and information sharing on Hate Crime and Community Tension via the formation of the 'ACT' (Action on Community Tension) group bringing together a number of key statutory and Voluntary/ Community groups in order to provide action planning within communities.
- Increased accessibility for Victims of Hate Crime with the commissioning of a free 24 hour Hate Crime reporting and advice line through Stop hate UK. South Yorkshire Police have since took over (since October, 2009) the commissioning of Stop hate UK to deliver this service across South Yorkshire as a result of Rotherham having led the way with this initiative.
- Improved Council Capacity for understanding and response.

In order to assist in the formulation of actions in relation to tension reports it was necessary to complete a mapping exercise to identify sources of remedies and proactive responses which could be called upon in the promotion of cohesion. There were a number of services and organisations that could be drawn upon and it was important that these were identified and mobilised appropriately. This is a task for the cohesion officer for 2009/10 which is being supported by partners.

The Community Cohesion Service continued to develop extensively as show in the report with proposed completion dates ongoing.

A discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and subsequently clarified:-

- Safer Neighbourhood Team call monitoring and how "hate crime" related calls were accessed, filtered and responded to.
- Statistical data and how this could be broken down into crime target groups and areas.
- Definition and differentiation between incidents and tensions.
- Awareness raising and the increased reporting and timescales for this to level off/plateau.
- Need for continued resources to promote cohesion.
- Use of the "hate crime" term.
- Adoption of the Community Cohesion Strategy and Action Plan.

Resolved:- (1) That the continued positive progress made by the

Community Cohesion (Hate Crime) Service be noted.

(2) That further information be sought on the call monitoring for Safer Neighbourhood Teams and this be reported back to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of this Scrutiny Panel.

(3) That a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Area Assembly Chairs on the performance of "hate crime" and that statistical data be broken down into relevant categories per Area Assembly.

(4) That a further report on performance on the Community Cohesion Service be submitted to this Scrutiny Panel in six months time.

80. PRESENTATION ON EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY PERFORMANCE IN NEIGHBOURHOODS AND ADULT SERVICES

Caroline Naylor and Shiv Bhurtun from Neighbourhoods and Adult Services gave an update presentation on equalities and diversity within the Directorate.

The presentation drew specific attention to:-

- Illustration of good practice across the five areas of the Equality Framework for Local Government.
- Knowing your Community and Equality Mapping
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- Joint Strategic Intelligence Assessment
- Area Assembly Profiles.
- Area Plans.
- Joint Improvement Partnership.
- Consultation with LGBT Community.
- Fair Access Design Protocol.
- Safer Food Better Business.
- Personalisation.
- Single Conversation.
- Community Engagement and Satisfaction.
- Fairs Fayre 2008 and 2009.
- Carers – "Who Cares Wins".
- Responsive Services and Customer Care.
- Meals on Wheels – Consultation Café.
- Blue Badge Application Process.
- Park View Day Centre.
- Assessment Direct and Rothercare.
- Louder than Words Accreditation
- A Modern Diverse Workforce.
- Accolades and Awards.

A discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and subsequently clarified:-

- Assistance provided with the theory section as part of the driving test for those suffering with a hearing impairment and whether this was a Council initiative.

Resolved:- (1) That Caroline Naylor and Shiv Bhurtun be thanked for their very informative present.

(2) That the information contained and the progress made to date be noted.

(3) That the Hearing Impaired Service be contacted regarding the theory test initiative and for information to be provided to the Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel.

81. THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT – ACHIEVEMENT OF EXCELLENT LEVEL

Consideration was given to a report presented by Myriam Berrada, Equalities Officer, which updated this Scrutiny Panel on the Council's achievement of the Excellent Level of the Equality Framework for Local Government.

The focus of the Equality Framework for Local Government was based on the equality outcomes that have been making a real difference to the communities most in need and demonstrated narrowing gaps in inequality.

Progress against the levels of the Equality Framework for Local Government was measured through self-assessment. Councils were required to produce documentation covering all Directorates to demonstrate achievement at each level claimed. Assessment was based on the whole authority, so the authority was only as good as the lowest performing department or service.

Rotherham was awarded the IDeA Equality Mark for achieving Level 3 in 2006 under the old Standard. Since then, the Council have achieved Level 5 under the old Standard. A self-assessment against the new Equality Framework for Local Government was completed and submitted in October, 2009 and the on site peer review challenge took place over three days (10th -12th November, 2009).

Following the on site assessment Rotherham was accredited as Excellent under the Equality Framework for Local Government and in doing so became the first Council in the country to attain this level. The Peer Review recognised good practice and highlighted the areas of improvement that required further work, which were set out in the report.

A discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and subsequently clarified:-

- Peer Review Challenge and rigorous assessment process.
- How the Council would benefit from achieving “Excellent” at a national level.
- Progression of complaints and links to equality and diversity impact assessments.
- Equalities and diversity training for Members.
- Proposed revisions to the report template to include a section on equalities and diversity.
- Ensuring documents were in plain english.

Resolved:- (1) That the Council’s achievement of Excellent Level of the Equality Framework for Local Government be noted and those involved be thanked for their hard work.

(2) That a progress report be submitted to this Scrutiny Panel against the Equality Framework for Local Government improvement plan in six months time.

82. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON 28TH JANUARY, 2010

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel held on 28th January, 2010 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

83. MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT HELD ON 8TH FEBRUARY, 2010

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Community Development and Engagement held on 8th February, 2010.

Resolved:- That the contents of the minutes be noted.

84. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE HELD ON 19TH FEBRUARY, 2010

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting of the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee held on 19th February, 2010.

Resolved:- That the contents of the minutes be noted.

**CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT
8th March, 2010**

Present:- Councillor Hussain (in the Chair) and Councillor Burton.

E55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no Declarations of Interest made at the meeting.

E56. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 8TH FEBRUARY 2010

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 8th February 2010 be approved as a correct record.

E57. TOGETHER FOR REGENERATION

Joanne Archer, TfR Director gave a presentation in respect of Together for Regeneration.

The presentation drew specific attention to:-

- What TfR does
- How they do it
- Funding
- Groups supported in Rotherham
- Partnership work
- Future Plans
- Opportunities to work with RMBC

A question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and discussed:-

- Whether TfR were a member organisation. Confirmation was given that they promoted their work through partners and by going out into the community. Their overall aim was to support small groups and groups in crisis
- Concern was raised that there may be duplication of work which was currently being undertaken by VAR and Rotherfed. It was confirmed that Rotherfed had requested that TfR work with them and that VAR were not concerned about any duplication of work. Joanne confirmed that the role of TfR was to look at the needs of people/community and help them to achieve it.
- The Cabinet Member commented that he was supportive of the church kitchen and luncheon clubs as these were an ideal way for people to meet up and have a chat.
- It was suggested that TfR needed to work closely with the "one town, one community" project. It was agreed that the Cabinet Member and the Community Engagement Cohesion Manager

would meet with Joanne to discuss this further.

- It was suggested that work also needed to be undertaken with young people and it was agreed that some thought needed to go into how this could be done.

Members thanked Joanne for her informative presentation.

E58. CONNECTING CLASSROOMS

Bev Booker, Service Leader for Ethnic Minority Children presented the Project Plan in respect of Connecting Classrooms for the Academic Year 2009-2010.

She confirmed that 4 schools from Rotherham were connecting with 5 schools in Kotli. A meeting had taken place with the Head teachers from 3 of the schools in Kotli, but arrangements were still being made to meet with the other 2.

The schools involved from Rotherham were:

Sitwell Infants and Juniors
Canklow
Oakwood.

A survey was being done on the children with the aim of changing their perceptions.

The Cabinet Member commented that 2 of the schools were in his Ward and he would therefore like to be involved in the work being undertaken. He confirmed that he had been in working with a welfare organisation in Kotli and the Director from this organisation would be visiting Rotherham in April and this could be a good link for the project.

He also confirmed that he had met with Professor Mike Hardy, from the British Council, who could also be a good link for this project.

The Cabinet Member queried how this project linked in to the "one town, one community" project and it was suggested that a meeting take place between himself and the Community Engagement Cohesion Manager to discuss how Professor Hardy could assist with this.

It was suggested and agreed that a further report be presented to the Cabinet Member on progress made in October 2010.

Resolved:- (1) That the content of the project plan be noted.

(2) That a further report be presented to the Cabinet Member on progress made in October 2010.

E59. JOINT WORKING WITH PARISH COUNCILS

Jan Leyland, Neighbourhood Partnership Team Manager presented the submitted report which provided a summary of the joint activities undertaken by the Area Assembly teams and Parish Councils across Rotherham.

It was suggested and agreed that the information be taken to the next meeting of the Joint Working Group with a view to getting it on to their website.

Resolved:- (1) That the information be noted.

(2) That the report be taken to the next meeting of the Joint Working Group.

E60. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended March 2006) (information relates to financial or business matters).

E61. 2010/2011 INFRASTRUCTURE AND CORPORATE INITIATIVES FUND (ICIB) - GRANT AID FOR COMMUNITY LEGAL ADVICE & INFORMATION SERVICES (ALL WARDS) (HEREWITH)

Zafar Saleem, Community Engagement and Cohesion Manager presented the submitted report which sought approval to enter into grant aid contracts with a number of advice and information providers for the financial year 2010/2011.

Resolved:- That ICIB grant aid funding be agreed for the listed voluntary and community sector organisations as set out in the report.

E62. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING - MONDAY, 12TH APRIL, 2010 AT 11.30 A.M.

Resolved:- That the next of the Cabinet Member for Community Development and Engagement take place on Monday 12th April, 2010 at 11.30 am.

**CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT
Monday, 12th April, 2010**

Present:- Councillor Hussain (in the Chair) and Councillor Burton.

E63. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no Declarations of Interest made at the meeting.

E64. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 8TH MARCH 2010

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 8th March 2010.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 8th March 2010 be approved as a correct record.

E65. ONE TOWN ONE COMMUNITY - UPDATE

John Simons and Marina Wood from Dragonfly Public Relations reported on their proposed campaign in respect of One Town One Community.

Their work would involve:-

- Supporting events already planned and developing new event ideas
- Assisting in raising the profile of One Town One Community to all communities
- Encouraging partners to engage with the principles of One Town One Community and to become actively involved
- Responding to national and regional issues around Prevent requiring a local response
- Drawing up a PR plan and reporting back on progress made

A question and answer session ensued and the following issues were discussed:-

- So far consultation had been undertaken with people in the town centre of Rotherham to seek their views. It was felt that consultation needed to be widespread across the entire Borough to gain a more balanced view across all communities
- Reference was made to the One Town One Community logo and it was felt that this may need to be refreshed.
- Communication was needed with partners in order for them to buy into the project and give them a better understanding of how they could contribute.
- Promotion of the project
 - Utilising the Council website to engage with local

communities. This could be done by the use of video clips and photographs. It was felt that there should be a dedicated section on the website which would be easily accessible

- How would progress be reported and how often?
 - An initial meeting to take place by the end of April between the Cabinet Member, Dragonfly Public Relations and Head of Communications to discuss the project detail and timescales – further work to be carried out on the existing proposals to reflect discussions at this meeting.
 - Progress would be fed into the Proud Board for information.
- It was suggested that local celebrities could be approached to get them to engage and promote the project. It was confirmed that Rotherham United Football Club and Rotherham Rugby Club were already fully behind the project.

Resolved:- That the information be noted, and that progress be reported to the Cabinet Member.

**E66. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING - MONDAY, 14TH JUNE, 2010
AT 11.30 A.M.**

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Cabinet Member for Community Development and Engagement take place on Monday 14th June 2010 at 11.30 am.

PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
12th March, 2010

Present:- Councillor McNeely (in the Chair); Councillors Austen, Barron, Gilding, J. Hamilton, Jack and Swift.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Boyes, License, G. A. Russell, P. A. Russell and Whelbourn.

151. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at this meeting.

152. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

153. REVIEW OF LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Colin Earl, Director of Internal Audit and Governance, presented the submitted report indicating that it was good practice to review the Local Code of Corporate Governance annually.

The report proposed changes to the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance to bring it up to date with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's "Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Public Service Organisations" which was launched in June, 2009.

The report set out the amendments to CIPFA/SOLACE guidance "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework" resulting from the Statement on the Role of the Chief Finance Officer in Public Service Organisations covering the following standards:-

1. - Focusing on the purpose of the authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area
2. - Members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles
3. - Promoting values for the authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour
4. - Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk
5. - Developing the capacity and capability of members and officers to be effective

- 6 - Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability

The proposed revised Local Code of Corporate Governance 2010 was appended to the report.

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were covered:-

- aim to make the financial strategy as user friendly as possible
- responsibilities of the Chief Finance Officer
- training for members on financial matters

Resolved:- (1) That the updated Local Code of Corporate Governance be noted.

(2) That it be noted that the Code would be used to help test the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements in order to inform the production of the Annual Governance Statement.

154. SCRUTINY REVIEW OF DEBT RECOVERY

Colin Earl, Director of Internal Audit and Governance, presented the submitted report updating progress on the action plan resulting from the scrutiny review of debt recovery arrangements. Overall, positive progress was being made.

Two of the recommendations related to the provision of improved information to the public about debt recovery and the support available to help residents in debt.

A revised 'Advice in Rotherham' leaflet had been drafted and was appended to the report.

Three significant recommendations required detailed work and had been targeted for completion by 31st March, 2010 and were progressing according to the timescale. They were:-

- Recommendation 7 : The Council considers for those individuals who repeatedly fall into debt or are on the verge of having their debt passed to bailiffs, that a more proactive approach via home visits or phone calls might be more successful in recovering debt
- Recommendation 9 : The Council considers examining the business case of an in-house bailiff service where there could be clearer lines of accountability,

performance monitoring and charges to clients

- Recommendation 13 :The Council has one debt collection service for council tax, sundry debts and 2010 rents

Specific progress on each recommendation contained within the action plan was appended to the report.

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were covered:-

- 'amalgamation' of advice bureaus
- textual amendments to the leaflet
- loan shark scheme
- sharing of information and raising awareness of loan shark scheme initiative and help/advice available to anyone in debt
- private landlords
- potential for one debt collection service

Resolved:- (1) That the positive progress being made on the implementation of recommendations resulting from the scrutiny review of debt recovery be noted.

(2) That, subject to the textual amendments now raised, support be given to the production of the leaflet.

(3) That the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel take ownership of this issue.

155. QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2009/10

Julie Slatter, Head of Policy and Performance, in presenting the submitted report, gave a presentation which covered:-

- Focus of Presentation
- Performance/Improvement
- Areas of Good Performance
- Areas for Concern
- Local Area Agreement
- Children's Services

- CAA Update
- Performance Clinics
- Priorities for Quarter 4

The submitted report focused on the new national indicator set and key local indicators.

The report addressed the main areas of performance across the Council and examined issues relating to the Corporate Plan and Local Area Assessment (LAA).

The position at the end of Quarter 3 was that, of the Corporate Plan indicators that could be rated, 68.09% (32 of the 47 indicators) had achieved their target and improved or maintained their best score.

The performance against LAA targets, as at Quarter 3, was that, of those that could be rated, 47.83% were on target. However the direction of travel overall had dropped.

The report covered:-

- Corporate Plan performance
- LA 2008-11 performance
- Direction of Travel
- Performance Clinics
- Corporate Health
- Awards

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were covered:-

- outcomes from the information
- geographical breakdown of the statistics
- training for members on information available on line and its accessibility
- Ofsted inspections
- Chlamydia
- teenage conceptions comparisons within South Yorkshire
- implications of poor inspection results
- restructuring of social work

18D PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE - 12/03/10

- ownership of indicators NI163 and N164 – proportion of population aged 19-64 for males and 19-59 for females qualified to at least level 2 or higher and level 3 or higher respectively
- NI032 : repeat incidents of domestic violence
- award winning advertisement regarding domestic violence
- clarification of the report format regarding colours and symbols
- NI132 : timeliness of social care assessments
- NI99 : children in care reaching level 4 in English at key stage 2
- NI100 : looked after children reaching level 4 in English at key stage 2
- serious case reviews

Resolved:- (1) That the overall position and direction of travel in relation to both overall performance and to the requirements of the Audit Commission's CAA framework be noted.

(2) That the performance clinics to be conducted in Quarter 4 be noted.

(3) That the areas of concern now raised be referred to the appropriate scrutiny panels for consideration.

156. PAYMENT OF INVOICES WITHIN THIRTY DAYS - FORMER BVPI8

Further to Minute No. 106 of the meeting of this Committee held on 4th December, 2009, Sarah McCall, Performance Officer, presented the submitted report which detailed BVPI8 and how it measured the payment of undisputed invoices within thirty days.

The Council had agreed the following average annual target for performance of BVPI8 with RBT:-

2009/10 97.5%

Outturn performance for recent years had achieved:-

2006/07	91%
2007/08	94%
2008/09	92%

Recent performance for the new financial year had achieved:-

April	95.65%
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May	96.44%
June	93.47%
July	94.37%
August	93.78%
September	92.46%
October	92.00%
November	95.58%
December	95.49%
January	93.71%
February	97.69%

Year to date performance currently stood at 94.62%.

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were covered:-

- penalties for poorly performing directorates and companies
- performance clinic

Resolved:- That the information be noted.

157. PROCUREMENT STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

Further to Minute No. 110 of the meeting of this Committee held on 4th December, 2009, Sarah McCall, Performance Officer, presented the submitted report, together with the strategy action plan which was mapped to the following nine themes:-

Theme 1 : Supporting the Local Economy

Theme 2 : Voluntary and Community Sector

Theme 3 : Equality and Diversity

Theme 4 : Fairtrade and Trade Justice

Theme 5 : Environmentally Friendly Procurement

Theme 6 : Legal Procurement

Theme 7 : e-Procurement

Theme 8 : Achieving Value For Money

Theme 9 : Building Capacity

The action plan detailed the current position against each action assigned to each of the above themes.

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following

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issues were covered:-

- working with the Voluntary Community Sector
- Fairtrade and trade justice : use of fair trade products

Resolved:- That the current position in respect of the Strategy Action Plan be noted.

158. PROCUREMENT LOCAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Sarah McCall, Performance Officer, presented the submitted report setting out details of the indicators, targets and performance for quarter two of the current financial year.

Of the seventeen indicators (details of which were appended to the report):-

- three were status green
- five were status amber with performance on target
- three were status red with performance below target
- three were to report in quarter four
- one would report from April, 2010
- two had no targets and were reported for information only

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were covered:-

- definition of the 'S' postcode
- clarification of position regarding LPI3 : % of spend on electricity to continue to be procured from green sources

Resolved:- That the current performance against the indicators be noted.

159. RBT QUARTER 3 - PERFORMANCE

Mark Gannon, Transformation and Strategic Partnerships Manager, presented the submitted report summarising the performance of RBT against contractual measures and key service delivery issues for the third quarter of the current financial year across the areas of Customer Access, Human Resources and Payroll, ICT, Procurement and Revenues and Benefits. Also submitted were the customer satisfaction results relating to the Maltby Leisure and Service Centre.

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued and particular reference was made to the following issues:-

- Aston Joint Service Centre : security arrangements for receipt of monies
- VOIP
- Business Continuity Planning
- Tell Us Once site visits

Resolved:- That RBT's performance against contractual measures be noted.

160. MINUTES

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meetings held on 19th and 26th February, 2010 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

161. WORK IN PROGRESS

Members reported as follows:-

(a) Councillor Austen reported that the latest meeting of the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel had been equalities themed and the Panel considered:-

- Connecting Communities
- Community Cohesion (Hate Crime) performance update
- a presentation on Equalities and Diversity performance in Neighbourhoods and Adult Services
- a presentation on The Equality Framework for Local Government – Achievement of Excellent Level

The Panel had requested:-

- progress on analysis of complaints received from an equalities and diversity perspective
- member training on equalities and inclusion of equalities and diversity in the reporting template

(b) Councillor Jack reported:

- the breastfeeding review was expected to be submitted to the Adult Services and Health Scrutiny Panel on 1st April, 2010
- the assisted technology review was ongoing
- the review regarding diabetes was due to take place before the end of the month
- the latest meeting of the Adult Services and Health Scrutiny Panel had considered:-
 - health screening programmes in Rotherham
 - Ministry of Food evaluation
- she had visited the new Community Health Centre
- concerns regarding funding for the Rotherham Women's Council Services

(c) Councillor McNeely reported:

- that a half day review was to take place in April relating to the Local Authority's response to climate change
- consideration was to be given to approaching the Rotherham Older Person's Forum about a representative being co-opted onto the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Panel in the new municipal year

It was also felt that scrutiny panels should consider inviting members of the Forum to their meetings when relevant matters to the elderly were being discussed.

162. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no formal call-in requests.

PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
26th March, 2010

Present:- Councillor Whelbourn (in the Chair); Councillors Austen, Barron, Boyes, Jack, License, McNeely and G. A. Russell.

Also in attendance was Councillor Kaye for Item 165 below (Proposed Transfer of Bar Park)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gilding, J. Hamilton and Swift.

163. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made at this meeting.

164. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

165. UPDATE ON PROPOSED TRANSFER OF BAR PARK, THORPE HESLEY

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Kaye (Ward Member) and Phil Gill, Green Spaces Manager.

Further to Minute No. 39 of the meeting of this Committee held on 24th July, 2009, Phil Gill presented the submitted report updating on the situation regarding the proposed transfer of Bar Park, Thorpe Hesley from Sheffield to Rotherham.

The report covered:-

- estimated legal and other professional costs of Sheffield City Council
- estimated legal and other professional costs of Rotherham MBC
- Cabinet Member for Cultural Services and Sport deliberations
- funding position

Councillor Kaye outlined the position regarding the Friends of Bar Park Group, their attempts to secure grant monies and frustrations that the Park had not yet been transferred.

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were covered:-

- Cabinet Member position

- funding position
- management arrangements
- budgetary situation
- officer meetings with Sheffield City Council
- Sheffield City Council costs and clarification of fees element
- boundary change implications of this and other areas in the borough
- costs to make the site good due to lack of maintenance
- area assembly support
- possibility of establishing a community trust
- barriers to securing grant monies
- guidelines covering impact of such changes to boundaries
- potential review of similar areas within South Yorkshire affected by boundary changes

Resolved:- (1) That the information be noted.

(2) That Phil Gill investigate the following points raised and report accordingly to the Cabinet Member for Cultural Services and Sport:-

(a) clarification of Sheffield City Council's costs/fees etc., and further discussions with them regarding revising said costs downwards

(b) survey of park and updating estimates to make good any liabilities

(c) potential for establishing a community trust – discussion with Friends of Bar Park about their willingness/ability as a group, or another local group, to take responsibility for the site (including insurance and maintenance)

(d) review of 2010/11 service budgets to try to identify possible funding to cover the transfer costs

(3) That arrangements be made for a sub-regional review of shared assets covering such cross border pockets of land within the four local authorities and a further report be submitted in June, 2010.

Carole Haywood, Partnership Manager, presented the submitted report which set out the renegotiation of Local Area Agreement indicator targets which formed part of the completed refresh element of the annual review and was now pending approval from Central Government.

The performance picture was very mixed with a significant number of indicators on target and performing well. However a substantial number also appeared unlikely to reach the target set for 2011. The review focused on those areas.

As the more detailed analysis revealed performance to be varied, this was compounded by the number of indicators where the Council was unable to assess accurately the current position, or project future performance. Examples of good and weak performance existed across all of the five themes. There was a concentration of 'red' rated indicators under Alive, although several of these were closely linked. There were also a significant number of indicators where current performance was unclear, particularly under Proud and Safe, although in some cases data was imminent, which would help to address this. The report set out in detail the current performance for each of the themes.

There was up to £2 million of Local Area Agreement Reward Grant available under the terms of the current Local Area Agreement 2008-11. The way in which Reward Grant was calculated had changed and was significantly more complicated than in the previous round. The Rotherham Partnership Team was working currently with colleagues at the Council to estimate the level of Reward Grant the Partnership would be likely to secure under different performance scenarios. Although it had been delayed, the Government was set to release a 'Reward Grant calculator' in April, 2010 which should assist with this and make clearer the full financial implications. Although the detailed work referred to had not yet been undertaken the sense was that on current performance we would be unlikely to secure very much of the available £2 million.

Details of performance on the indicators were submitted as an appendix.

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were covered:-

- awareness of Breathing Space
- recommendations from the Breastfeeding scrutiny review
- NI056 'Obesity in primary school age children in year 6' : need to develop more effective way of measurement rather than BMI
- Obesity scrutiny review findings
- NI120a All age all cause mortality rate – males

- concerns regarding reduced school lunchtimes and effect on activity
- concerns regarding Government's rationale for leisure activity that counts
- ongoing review on the image of Rotherham
- need for an assessment of what we need from the Partnership
- need for clarification of roles and relationship of the Safe Theme board and Safer Rotherham Partnership
- NI135 ' Carers receiving needs assessment or review and a specific carer's service or advice and information'
- 2008 Place Survey
- elected member involvement in Partnership performance clinics
- need to liaise with ward councillors and area assembly chairs, area partnership managers and parish councils to help ascertain what is happening in local areas
- NI136 'People supported to live independently through social services (all adults)'

Resolved:- (1) That the review process be noted.

(2) That the revised LAA targets, agreed with Government Office as part of the review process, be endorsed.

(3) That Carole Haywood and Cath Saltis liaise regarding the presentation of future reports.

(4) That a mechanism be devised to:-

(a) invite partners to scrutiny

(b) refer relevant indicators to respective scrutiny panels

(5) That Andy Buck and Brian James be invited to a future meeting of this Committee to discuss health issues.

167.

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS

Rachel O'Neil, Customer Access Client Manager, presented the submitted report detailing the final position on the implementation of the recommendations from the scrutiny review of corporate complaints undertaken in May, 2008.

The report covered:-

- performance and response rates across directorates
- formal definition of a complaint
- expertise for officers with complaint handling roles
- improving intelligence from information received by customers

Discussion and a question and answer session ensued and the following issues were covered:-

- website accessibility
- navigation of the website
- VOIP
- "you said – we did" principle : feedback to the customer on what we did not do was just as important

Resolved:- (1) That the actions taken to implement the recommendations from the scrutiny review of corporate complaints be noted.

(2) That future reports be submitted annually.

168. MINUTES

Resolved:- (1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th March, 2010 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

(2) That, arising from the minutes regarding VOIP, the Committee felt that it should be a requirement that, wherever possible, staff should be on a 'hunt' group and the viability of this be looked into.

169. WORK IN PROGRESS

Members reported as follows:-

(a) Councillor Jack reported she had attended the following events-

- health event in York
- event in Sheffield regarding the reconfiguration of the Northern General and Royal Hallamshire hospitals
- South Yorkshire Trading Standards event last Friday regarding tobacco issues and links to quit smoking

- Mind the Gap event on Tuesday regarding immigrant health

(b) Councillor Austen reported that the devolved budget review was ongoing and the corporate parenting review would be submitted to the next meeting.

(c) Councillor Boyes reported that meetings had been held and were scheduled regarding the review of the image of Rotherham.

(d) Councillor G. A. Russell reported that the latest meeting of the Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Panel had considered:-

- Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy
- Young Carers' Strategy
- School Meals Research
- CYPS Performance Indicators – Quarter 3

170. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no formal call in requests.

(The Chairman authorised consideration of the following item to enable arrangements to be made.)

171. CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY ANNUAL CONFERENCE - LONDON - 30TH JUNE, 2010

Resolved:- That the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, or substitutes, be authorised to attend the above.

NEW ARRIVALS WORKING PARTY
Wednesday, 31st March, 2010

Present:- Councillor Doyle (in the Chair).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sharman and S. Wright.

13. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 22ND JULY, 2009

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 24th November, 2009, were agreed as a correct record.

Arising from Minute No. 8 (New Contract), it was noted that details would be known in July, 2010. There was an option for the Local Authority to become contractor of services instead of being a direct provider of services.

14. LOCAL AUTHORITY DUTY TO SUPPORT VULNERABLE 16 AND 17 YEAR OLDS

Brian Wood, Locality Manager, was not in attendance due to sickness.

The report stated that the House of Lords had clarified that the responsibility for the care of any child over 16 years of age who presented as homeless or any unaccompanied children was with Children and Young People's Services.

Agreed:- That the report be noted.

15. NEWLY ARRIVED CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS

Martin Fittes and Bev Booker gave a verbal update on newly arrived children in schools highlighting:-

- The numbers of Roma children
- Particular needs of the Roma community
- Safeguarding issues
- Work of the Education Welfare and Children Missing From Education Teams
- Engagement with the National Strategies Programme and the EMA Team
- Work of the Clifton Action Zone with local schools
- Discussions with DCFS

Agreed:- (1) That the report be noted.

(2) That a report be submitted to the Cabinet in the new Municipal Year.

16. GATEWAY PROTECTION PROGRAMME

Andrew Crowley reported that the above Programme was operated by the UK Border Agency in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. It offered a legal route for up to 750 refugees to settle in the United Kingdom each year and was completely separate from the standard procedure for claiming asylum.

The Home Office ensured that the lead agency (local authority or voluntary sector) would have the costs of resettlement met for the first 12 months of the refugee's life in the UK. The Programme had the advantage of support being provided to people who had had their needs assessed and who had been given full refugee status as opposed to asylum seekers who were awaiting a decision as to their refugee status.

At present there was no requirement for the local authority to undertake this role.

Agreed:- That the report be noted.

17. DRAFT IMMIGRATION BILL - CONSULTATION

Andrew Crowley submitted a briefing paper on the consultation document issued by the Home Office on the draft Immigration Bill, comments on which had been submitted in accordance with the February deadline.

The draft Bill presented an opportunity to streamline and reform the asylum support system ensuring that those seeking asylum were effectively and comprehensively supported during the determination of their claim and the system for achieving it was as simple and efficient as possible.

Agreed:- That the report be noted.

18. MANAGING THE CAP FOR DISPERSED ASYLUM SEEKERS IN ROTHERHAM

Andrew Crowley reported that following the agreed cap of asylum seekers per head of local population by the Strategic Migration Group in June, 2008, there had been a reduction in the numbers of asylum seekers in Rotherham during the period December, 2009 to March, 2010.

Progress on the decision making rate by the Home Office on the backlog had been slower than anticipated and it was likely that the June target date for completing the decision on the 'Legacy' cases might not be reached.

Agreed:- That a further report be submitted in 3 months.

19. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

3F

There was no other business to report.

20. DATE OF FUTURE MEETING

Agreed:- That a further meeting be held on Wednesday, 2nd June at 9.30 a.m.

**MEMBERS' TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL
THURSDAY, 25TH MARCH, 2010**

Present:- Councillor Smith (in the Chair); Councillors Austen, Cutts, Dodson, McNeely, Parker, Pickering, G. A. Russell, Sangster, St. John, Whelbourn and Whysall.

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Gosling, Hughes, Lakin, Littleboy, Sharman, Turner and Wootton.

43. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 21ST JANUARY, 2010

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 21st January, 2010 were agreed as a correct record.

44. MEDIA TRAINING - FEEDBACK

Further to Minute No. 33 of the meeting of this Panel held on 17th December, 2009, a report on media training feedback would be made available at the next meeting.

45. UPDATE ON "A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A COUNCILLOR" DVD

Further to Minute No. 39 of the meeting of this Panel held on 21st January, 2010, consideration was given to the report presented by Sioned-Mair Richards, Scrutiny Adviser, which asked to note the progress of a DVD which will be designed to promote greater understanding of the democratic process in Rotherham.

The idea of producing a DVD to be used as a borough wide resource to inform citizens of the work of elected members originated from the Rotherham South Area Assembly and was then agreed by the Members' Training and Development Panel. A small sub-group of the Panel lead the project.

Timescales outlined in the original report changed in order to avoid the pre-election/election period and as a result the DVD would now be completed and made public in late May, 2010 subject to endorsement by Members' Training and Development Panel and approval by Cabinet.

It was envisaged the DVD would run for approximately 20 - 25 minutes starting with Mags Evers, Chief Elections and Registration Officer, followed by Councillors Gosling and Fenoughty discussing the changing role of the locally elected Member.

There would then be three short films about local councillors. Councillors Fenoughty, Falvey and Hussain have been identified as the three Members to provide this, but a host of elected members, officers and

residents would also feature in the DVD as part of the various meetings and activities that the three main members would attend.

The DVD would be a valuable resource, alongside existing materials such as the leaflet "So you want to be a Councillor," in supporting the Council's duty to promote democracy.

Discussion ensued on the script and content of the DVD and whilst it was noted that this was not about individuals, but about the role of a Councillor, it was suggested that this Panel's Members have sight of the proposed script and detail with some discussion about what could be covered.

Agreed:- (1) That the contents of the report and the progress made by noted.

(2) That the key content of each Day in the Life of nominated Elected Members be noted and the proposed "script" be shared with Members of the Training and Development Panel.

(3) That the proposed project timescales be agreed.

(4) That this report be referred to Cabinet for approval.

46. SAFEGUARDING ISSUES

Consideration was given to a report circulated by Sioned-Mair Richards, Scrutiny Adviser, which proposed training around the issues of safeguarding and corporate parenting of looked after children in order to support the improvements for its Children and Young People's Services.

To assist Members in developing their knowledge further of Children and Young People's Services, in particular with regard to their safeguarding and corporate parenting responsibilities, training was suggested with the aid of:-

(a) A toolkit "Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice", identifying three levels of responsibility, with a session being arranged around Universal Responsibility – Level 1, allowing for Councillors with specific roles and responsibilities having additional development events specific to their needs.

(b) IDeA training programme in conjunction with the NSPCC delivery jointly and tailored to suit local need. The first session would be for Members and co-optees of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel and seven Locality Champions. This would be open to any Member to attend, but would be rolled out to all Members, co-optees and parish councillors in due course.

Reference was made to the Scrutiny Review "Corporate Parenting", which

was to be submitted to the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee and Cabinet shortly.

Discussion ensued on the criteria and requirements for CRB checks and the need for exact details to be clarified. It was, therefore, suggested that the Council's Assistant Chief Executive for Legal and Democratic Services be contacted, guidance sought and the requirements made clear.

Agreed:- (1) That a training and development programme for all Members be set up around the issues of corporate parenting and safeguarding in order to support the Council's work towards improving Children and Young People's Services.

(2) That the requirements for CRB checks for Councillors be investigated and a report be submitted to this Panel.

47. MEMBERS' INDUCTION

Consideration was given to the draft Members' Induction Programme circulated by Sioned-Mair Richards, Scrutiny Adviser, which would commence from Monday, 10th May, 2010.

Reference was made to the need to include a session with the new Mayor who would introduce a guide to the way the special Council meeting worked, what the rules were, etiquette and how to understand Standing Orders. It was anticipated that this would take place on a day or two before the Annual Council Meeting.

Some suggestions were already included in the programme, but a session on Local Authority Finance would form part of the Autumn programme, with consideration to some sessions during August.

Agreed:- That the information be noted and the draft programme be approved.

48. COMMUNITY COHESION WORKSHOPS (ICOCO)

Sioned-Mair Richards, Scrutiny Adviser, reported that the recent Community Cohesion Workshops had been well received by those who attended.

One further session was to be arranged during June, 2010 to facilitate attendance of newly elected Members and those Members who were unable to attend previously.

49. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Agreed:- That the next meeting scheduled to take place on Thursday, 22nd April, 2010 be cancelled and Members informed accordingly.