

SELF REGULATION SELECT COMMISSION
Thursday, 8th December, 2011

Present:- Councillor Hughes (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Currie, Donaldson, Ellis, J. Hamilton, N. Hamilton, Mannion, Sharman, Swift and Tweed.

Councillor G. Whelbourn was in attendance for Item 9 at the invitation of the Chair.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Foden.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest to report.

29. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

30. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 27TH OCTOBER, 2011

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting of the Self Regulation Select Commission held on 27th October, 2011 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

Reference was made to Minute No. 23 (Housing Revenue Account Balances) where a question was asked about how many properties were still to be updated as part of the Decent Homes Programme. To date no information had been received. This would be followed up and responded to.

31. FEEDBACK FROM THE BUDGET SUB-GROUP

Consideration was given to a report presented by Caroline Webb, Senior Scrutiny Adviser, which outlined the main points arising from discussions with portfolio holders on the 2010/11 outturn position and the current 2011/12 revenue budget.

Issues emerging from these discussions included:-

- Pressures related to the resourcing of Children and Young People's Services, particularly in respect of Looked after Children and the early intervention and prevention agenda.
- Asset management and the disposal of Council properties or land.
- Service restructures – managing continuity and capacity with fewer staff and resources.
- Commissioning – getting better value for money.
- Relationship with voluntary sector and Parish Councils.
- Continuing health care needs.
- Prioritisation of services and impact on service users.
- Completion of strategic partnerships and associated risks.
- Impact of decisions taken by partners on Council services (health, policing etc).

The report set out the areas that had been discussed, timescales for part two discussions and what would be considered in line with the budget timetable.

It was noted that the relationship with the voluntary sector and Parish Councils had been considered on the basis of deliverers of service, but this had not been extended to the private sector.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That any other areas that may inform the ongoing scrutiny of the budget proposals be identified and reported to the Senior Scrutiny Adviser in due course.

(3) That further updates be received.

32. BUDGET 2012/13

Consideration was given to a report presented by Matt Gladstone, Director of Commissioning, Policy and Performance, which provided an overview of the consultation arrangements for determining the Council's budget for 2012/13.

A range of consultations with the public and staff were agreed using an on-line consultation survey, an on-line budget simulator or face to face meetings through community groups.

The Council had a significant budget challenge and in excess of £20 million savings needed to be identified. The budget timetable scheduled three months consultation in line with statutory Best Value guidance and would directly inform the budget which would be agreed by the full Council in March, 2012.

A number of areas had already been consulted upon with the public and these included:-

- Bowling Greens Maintenance.
- Street Lighting Options.
- Home to School Transport – Ongoing.
- Grounds Maintenance.
- Charges in Neighbourhoods and Adult Services.

All the other identified budget savings were internally focused and were still being worked upon at this stage and could not, therefore, be shared in this forum.

The Select Commission expressed its disappointment that information relating to the emerging budget proposals were still not available as they were due to be presented to this forum as per the budget timetable. On that basis an additional meeting of this Select Commission had been arranged for Thursday, 12th January, 2012 to consider the housing rents and it was suggested that the budget proposals be brought forward to this meeting.

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

- Circulation of the feedback results from the survey and information relating to what the Council's priorities should be.
- Analysis of the survey's results and whether this information could be shared with this Select Commission in January, 2012.

Resolved:- (1) That the budget consultation timetable and arrangements for 2012/13 be noted.

(2) That the emerging budget proposals be submitted to the additional meeting of the Select Commission in January, 2012.

33. DRAFT RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON COUNCIL TAX REFORM

Consideration was given to a report presented by Anne Ellis, Financial Strategy, which summarised the Government's proposals for the technical reforms to Council Tax, in particular changes to exemptions for second homes and empty properties, which would generate additional income for authorities from the 2013/14 financial year. Also proposed was the abolition of exemptions for unoccupied repossessed dwellings making the lender (mortgagee) responsible for the Council Tax. Other proposals related to Council Tax leaflets and payment profiles. The changes being proposed by the Government and the possible implications for Rotherham of the proposals were set out in detail as part of this report along with the Council's proposed response to the Consultation paper issued on 31st October, 2011.

The Government wished local authorities to retain locally any additional revenue generated and accordingly the Formula Grant would not be adjusted. However, it was also noted that proposals discussed in the consultation on Business Rates Retention may affect this.

There were no plans to change the rules on Council Tax relief currently available for homes left empty because a person had moved into a hospital or care home, died or moved to provided care.

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

- Reasons for some questions remaining unanswered.
- General vacant properties and their potential impact on communities.
- Rationale of Council Tax relief for persons in care etc. and the relevance to Rotherham.
- Void Council properties subject to review.

Resolved:- (1) That the contents of this report be noted.

(2) That the draft response to the DCLG Consultation Paper on the Technical Reforms of Council Tax be supported and that the response should be amended on the issue of relief for persons in care to suggest that this should be included in the review on the same basis as other exemptions.

34. CENTRAL ESTABLISHMENT CHARGES - UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update on progress of two inter-related pieces of work:-

- Support Services Review (formerly referred to as the CEC Review – but now much broader).
- Savings delivered to date as a result of the Council-wide reviews which have taken place over the last 18 months.

The review of Central Establishment Charges (CEC's) had now been broadened to include all support services and had been widened due to the compliance with CIPFA'S 2011/12 Service Reporting Code of Practice (SeRCOP), the successor to Best Value Accounting Code of Practice (BVACOP) incorporating new reporting requirements in line with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and the significant restructuring across the Council – particularly the creation of the new Resources Directorate which contained most of the Council's 'Support Services'.

The briefing note circulated to the Self Regulation Select Commission set out in detail the support services which had been reviewed, savings identified from the reviews, the work that was ongoing and the work that was to be concluded by mid-March, 2012.

A discussion ensued and questions were raised as to whether any anomalies which (subject to the review outcome), associated with central establishment charges would be addressed between now and April, 2012 to prevent any detriment to those services who may have been affected.

The Select Commission were assured that the overall position would remain balanced as a result of any potential change to the charging methodology, but, subject to the review findings, there may be a degree of support cost redistribution. Budgets would be set for 2012/13 and Directorates notified of any changes in due course.

Further information was sought and clarification provided on when the final report would be submitted to Members for decision, transparency in the charging methodology and whether there had been an opportunity to share best practice with other local authorities.

Resolved:- (1) That the update be received and the contents noted.

(2) That a report be submitted to the Self Regulation Select Commission in April, 2012, detailing a service by service allocation of support costs and charging methodology.

35. CHILDREN'S PEER CHALLENGE

Consideration was given to a report presented by Sue Wilson, Performance and Quality Manager, which set out details of the Peer Challenge facilitated by Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID) from the 3rd to 7th October, 2011. The key focus of the challenge was safeguarding, an additional

focus of looked after children was added as one of the peers had experience in other local authorities of working with looked after children. Four additional discretionary themes were included at Rotherham's request to provide an independent view on progress around these particular areas.

The week concluded with a feedback and prioritisation conference on Friday, 7th October, 2011 where the Peer Challenge Team summarised their findings, identified what they perceived as strengths and areas for consideration.

The actions and recommendations arising from the Peer Challenge were being fed into the existing Improvement Panel action plan that continued to be monitored following removal of the intervention notice in January, 2011.

Further information was requested on the statement made by the Peer Challenge Team regarding the role of scrutiny, which would be taken up further with the Peer Leader and fed back to this Select Commission.

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

- Addressing the type of concerns raised within existing resources.
- Clarification of roles, relationships and leadership of the Children's Trust Board and the various other Boards.
- Need for further training on Strategic Governance.
- Monitoring arrangements.
- Role of the Local Strategic Partnership.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That the actions included in the monitoring arrangements of the Improvement Panel be noted.

(3) That a further report be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board once the confirmation letter had been received.

36. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

Consideration was given to the report presented by Richard Garrad, Performance and Quality Manager, which provided an analysis of the Council's current performance against the twenty-nine key delivery outcomes within the Corporate Plan.

A presentation on the current position was also made, which drew particular attention to:-

- Quarter 2 Scorecard.
- Changes in the Scorecard.
- National Context.
- Making sure no community was left behind.
- Areas of Good Performance.
- Areas for Improvement.
- Recovery Actions.
- Ensuring quality education for all.

- Ensuring care and protection to those who needed it most.
- Help to create safe and health communities.
- Improving the environment.
- Next Steps.

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

- Categorisation of the super output areas.
- Target setting, direction of travel and information sharing.
- Comparison with national averages.
- Green rating for heating costs (No. 4) and whether this could change in the next quarter.
- Failing school classifications due to one cohort and assurances of support.
- Void turnaround times.
- Responsive repairs and the risk analysis undertaken.
- Performance clinics and reviews and co-option.

Resolved:- (1) That the current position against each of the Corporate Plan outcomes, ensuring implementation of the proposed interventions, corrective actions and proposed performance clinics be noted.

(2) That the absence of targets allocated to some of the high level measures and prioritisation of the work across Directorates to fill these gaps be noted.

(3) That the need to ensure high level monitoring of “the way we do business” principles into future reports be noted.

(4) That issues relating to turnarounds and responsive repairs be investigated by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

(5) That expressions of interest be sought from Members of this Select Commission’s for future Performance Clinics.

37. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report presented by Caroline Webb, Senior Scrutiny Adviser, which gave an update on the progress of the work programme for the Self-Regulation Select Commission for the 2011/12 municipal year and views on the work were sought.

It was proposed that the work programme be extended to include self financing for the Housing Revenue Account and proposals for the thirty year business plan.

The report also set out a number of questions that would form part of the evaluation process of the new overview and scrutiny structures.

Discussion ensued on the joint work with the Improving Places Select Commission looking at voids and the strategic role of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

Any further suggestions should be made to the Senior Scrutiny Adviser for inclusion.

Resolved:- (1) That the contents of the work programme be noted.

(2) That any further items be included to the work programme.

38. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING - THURSDAY, 26TH JANUARY, 2012 AT 3.30 P.M.

Resolved:- That the next scheduled meeting take place on Thursday, 26th January, 2012 at 3.30 p.m.