

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Wednesday, 25th February, 2015

Present:- Councillor Read (in the Chair); The Mayor (Councillor Foden); Councillors Andrews, Atkin, Cowles, Gilding, Lelliott, Roche, Sims, C. Vines and Whelbourn; co-opted member Mr. B. Walker.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gosling.

46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this meeting.

47. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

48. COMMUNICATIONS

Reference was made to Minute No. 97 of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 13th February, 2015, when it had been agreed that, pending any instruction or statement of intent by the Government-appointed Commissioners:

(1) the future meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and of the four Select Commissions shall be considered on a 'case-by-case' basis;

(2) the work that has already started as part of the 2014/15 scrutiny work programme would be completed;

(3) the work on the remaining areas of the 2014/15 scrutiny work programme shall be suspended.

49. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 14TH JANUARY, 2015

Resolved:- (1) That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission, held on 14th January, 2015, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

(2) That, arising from consideration of the minutes of the previous meeting and with regard to the Winter Weather Response (Minute No. 44):-

(a) it be noted that the review of the Winter gritting routes (highways) will be undertaken shortly;

(b) Members are to be provided with the requested information concerning this Authority's unit cost per dustbin, for refuse collection; and

(c) the proposed scrutiny review of this Council's Winter weather response shall be held in abeyance, pending receipt of the views of the Government-appointed Commissioners and Members shall be informed of progress on this matter in due course.

50. YOUNG PEOPLE AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Reference was made to Minute No. 74 of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 15th November, 2013, concerning the Children's Commissioner's Take-over Day and the issues raised concerning young people's perception of safety in the Rotherham town centre and at the Rotherham passenger transport interchange.

Consideration was given to a report, presented by Alan Heppenstall (Anti-Social Behaviour Officer), Carol Adamson (Community Engagement Officer) and Chief Inspector Martin Sheldon (South Yorkshire Police) concerning the issue of young people's perception of safety in the Rotherham town centre.

This item included a presentation specifically about the safety of young people in the Rotherham town centre.

In order to gain a current insight into what it is like being a young person using public transport, in particular the Rotherham Interchange, the following four groups were consulted in January 2015:

- : Rotherham Youth Cabinet
- : Looked After Children's Council
- : Rush House
- : Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans-gender Group

The young people were asked the following questions:-

1. What experiences are young people having in Rotherham Interchange, both positive and negative ?
2. How can young people be involved in influencing decisions concerning transport ?
3. How can safety be improved for young people waiting at passenger transport interchanges, especially late in the evening ?

The responses from the young people's groups were detailed within the appendix to the submitted report. The majority of respondents felt that things had not improved when using public transport or the Rotherham Interchange.

Various statistics of crime and anti-social behaviour, both in the town centre and in the transport interchange were discussed. Reference was made to the 'See Something, Say Something' initiative concerning safety and security on public transport. It was noted that the number of incidents

of concern in the Rotherham town centre was comparable to the numbers Barnsley, Doncaster and Sheffield, when footfall is taken into account.

Information on the views of young people was also now available from the Education Lifestyle Survey (2014) involving school pupils. Members questioned the phrasing of questions in this survey.

Operation Civilise takes place in and around the Rotherham transport interchange, with directed patrols by Police Officers, special constables and Passenger Transport Executive staff, supplemented by CCTV filming and monitoring. There are now more up-to-date statistics showing that the number of incidents of concern are reducing.

Chief Inspector Martin Sheldon (South Yorkshire Police) added the following contribution to the meeting:-

: the desire to reassure the Select Commission that the South Yorkshire Police is taking appropriate action to try and ensure that young people may visit the Rotherham town centre and the Rotherham transport interchange in safety;

: 'Operation Civilise' is concerned with public safety; reducing shop-lifting; prevention of street-drinking and alcohol abuse; dispersing people who congregate and who perhaps may be seen as intimidating; positive action is being taken by the authorities;

: assuring Members that the Rotherham town centre is a safe place to visit and the South Yorkshire Police will work with the Council and with town centre businesses and other partners to maintain that standard;

: emphasis on responding to the views of young people regarding the safety of the town centre;

: the South Yorkshire Police focus is on the whole of the Rotherham town centre, not only the transport interchange; various crime statistics were highlighted;

: the prevention of child sexual exploitation is a priority of the South Yorkshire Police and, having spoken to past victims, the Police are being made aware of places where such exploitation is likely to occur; current intelligence suggests that the town centre and the transport interchange are not places where this type of exploitation is likely to occur; nevertheless, there is no complacency and the Police and the Transport Executive staff remain vigilant in this matter;

: assistance to elderly people to try and reduce the incidence of purse snatching and pick-pocketing (eg: use of bells and chains on their belongings);

: acknowledging the importance of the various public events and

entertainments in attracting people to visit the Rotherham town centre;

: the business crime portal – an information-sharing agreement, to prevent known offenders committing offences in the town centre.

Members questions highlighted the following issues:-

: the success rate of apprehending / detection of offenders and the impact of measures already in place to reduce crime (eg: closed circuit television has been in place in the town centre for many years); are there any new measures to be implemented ?; it was noted that the Police will actively 'move people on' so as to prevent crime happening;

: 'Operation Civilise' in the Rotherham town centre – Members suggested that this initiative should include a 'zero tolerance' to both people spitting and people dropping litter (Members will be informed of the number of penalty notices issued to people who drop litter in the Rotherham town centre);

: discussions with the South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive about the implications of the views expressed by the young people;

: levying a small charge for the use of public toilets, as a means of improving security; it was noted that the public toilets at the Doncaster transport interchange are free to use;

: the safety of the public when travelling on public transport (as well as waiting in the interchange);

: the misuse of alcohol and illegal substances and the effects upon the level of crime; (reference was made to a recent joint action by the South Yorkshire Police and Trading Standards, to try and prevent the supply of illegal and other substances);

: the application of the 'Belfast law' in respect of the misuse of substances;

: are there any specific measures to try and prevent child sexual exploitation in and around the Rotherham transport interchange ?;

: a suggestion that the South Yorkshire Police should issue a press release regarding the perception of public safety in the Rotherham town centre; it was noted that the Police already have a regular dialogue with all forms of local media;

: Members asked whether there were any issues of crime and disorder as a consequence of the opening of the new Tesco supermarket, off Drummond Street; it was noted that a number of anti-social behaviour issues were already being addressed in the vicinity of the store;

: the percentage of crime in the transport interchange, in terms of the numbers of people using this facility;

: comparisons with public safety in the Wath upon Dearne town centre;

: the proposed future development of the Rotherham transport interchange and the provision of information to the public about bus services;

: the joint working between the South Yorkshire Police and the town centre businesses should include licensed premises (eg: effectiveness of the 'Pub Watch' scheme);

: the specific concerns of elderly ladies who do their shopping within the Rotherham town centre; whether there has been any dialogue with victims of theft and/or anti-social behaviour within the town centre; the use of the Victims Support service was mentioned;

: whether there are any incidents causing specific concern which affect people of minority ethnic communities.

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

(2) That the current position and action taken to improve the safety and overall perception of young people visiting the Rotherham town centre and including the Passenger Transport Interchange, as detailed in the reports and presentations now considered at this meeting, be noted.

(3) That a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission, in twelve months' time, describing the work being undertaken to ensure the safety of the public, especially young people, within both the Rotherham town centre and the Passenger Transport Interchange, such report to detail the progress made in the intervening twelve months and also providing statistics of the rates of detection of crime.

(4) The members of the Improving Places Select Commission be provided with up-to-date statistics of the rates of detection of crime in respect of incidents occurring within both the Rotherham town centre and the Passenger Transport Interchange.

(5) That every endeavour be made to ensure that the phrasing of questions within the Education Lifestyle Survey is sufficient to obtain the specific views of young people accurately.

(6) That the visible presence of Police Officers, special constables and of Passenger Transport Executive staff within the Rotherham Passenger Transport Interchange be welcomed and the appropriate authorities encouraged to continue this method of regular patrol.

51. DRAFT COUNCIL HOUSING ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Further to Minute No. 14 of the meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on 23rd July, 2014, the Select Commission received a presentation from Mr. David Potts (Programme Manager, Strategic Housing and Investment Service) and Mr. Andy Lumb (Partnering Manager, Contract and Service Delivery) concerning this Council's draft Housing Asset Management Strategy.

The presentation highlighted the following issues:-

- the purpose of the Housing Asset Management Strategy is to set out how the Council will deliver housing asset management services in Rotherham;
- the strategy prioritises how investment is made and how to achieve greater value for money;
- the hierarchy of strategies, relating to asset management;
- key principles of the strategy (eg: reducing 'void' times and provision of energy efficient properties);
- key priorities of the strategy (eg: to ensure that Council housing properties meet and exceed the Decent Homes Standard);
- Housing stock – maintaining data on all housing stock and the proposed re-survey of properties (future implementation of the Keystone computerised asset management system);
- striving to achieve 70% planned and 30% reactive repairs to Council housing;
- timescale for approval of the strategy by the Council (or by the Government-appointed Commissioners) and eventual implementation;
- the next steps – other housing estate investment plans; implementation of a 'scoring' system, identifying priorities important to tenants and to elected members;
- the Strategy is intended to last for thirty years and will be subject to regular review
- the repairs and maintenance service, provided by means of the Council's contractors;
- the annual budget for housing repairs is approximately £19 millions;
- performance indicators and the current performance of the repairs and maintenance service;

- priorities for the future, eg: to develop a Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy; and planning a future procurement strategy for Repairs and Maintenance, post year 2020;
- implementation of the Integrated Housing Management System for repairs and maintenance.

After the presentation, Members' discussion raised the following issues:-

: the effectiveness and fitness for purpose of district heating schemes; it was noted that there will be further investment in such schemes in the future, although a number of schemes have been problematical in the past, they have been decommissioned;

: the annual safety inspection of gas appliances; ensuring that any required remedial works and/or repairs are promptly notified; recent improvements to the repairs service were noted, although it was acknowledged that sometimes delays would occur because of the need to order spare parts;

: the importance of heating repairs being carried out promptly during periods of very cold weather; the use of temporary heating is offered to tenants;

: the occasional business use of the garages on Council-owned garage sites; this issue is being reviewed;

: a suggestion that the Council Housing Asset Management Strategy should be the subject of a scrutiny review;

: reference to previous scrutiny reviews on (i) Council-owned garage sites; (ii) void properties; and (iii) district heating; and whether such issues should be reviewed again in the future;

: monitoring the cost of parts supplied as part of the repairs and maintenance contracts; it was noted that quantity surveyors undertake the bench-marking, comparison and scrutiny of such costs; there is also the use of a schedule of rates by local housing authorities on a national basis; large contracts (eg: roofing schemes) are procured separately on an individual basis; Members will be informed individually of specific items raised.

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

(2) That a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission concerning the eventual implementation of the Council's Housing Asset Management Strategy.

(During the course of this item, Members placed on record their sympathy

to the family, friends and colleagues of Housing Officer Mr. John Brayshaw, who had recently passed away. Mr. Brayshaw had worked extensively on the preparation of the Council's draft Housing Asset Management Strategy).