

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
26th June, 2015

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Beck, Cowles, Hamilton, Hughes, Mallinder, Sansome, J. Turner and Whelbourn.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Pitchley.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest to report.

13. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

14. FUEL POVERTY SCRUTINY REVIEW - UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 103 of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 21st February, 2014, consideration was given to a report, presented by Catherine Homer (Public Health Specialist) and Paul Benson (Private Sector Housing Officer), containing a detailed update of activity contributing to the reduction in fuel poverty across the Borough, in response to the Scrutiny Review of fuel poverty which had taken place during 2012.

The report described the progress being made to reduce fuel poverty, with work completed or underway on the majority of the Scrutiny Review's recommendations. The progress had resulted in levels of fuel poverty in the Rotherham Borough falling. The most up-to-date figures from 2013 for 'low income high cost' measures of fuel poverty indicated that 9% of the population lived in fuel poverty, compared to 10.1% in 2011. This figure was less than the national average of 10.4%. Furthermore, the energy use in domestic households in Rotherham had seen a 9% reduction compared to the previous year. Area-based energy efficiency schemes and improvements to the Council housing stock had been significant contributors to this reduction.

The report stated that, in his post-election spending announcement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had signified that the Green Deal policy funding would be significantly reduced or removed completely. This action would have a major impact on the offer to improve energy efficiency of properties in Rotherham. Therefore, it would be increasingly challenging to secure external grant funding. The Government had stated in the Energy Bill (2015) that it would ensure that there would be affordable and reliable energy for businesses and families. However, it was not known at present whether assistance and support would be available to ensure that this objective was met.

Members discussion of this item highlighted the following salient issues:-

: levels of excess Winter deaths (ie: mortality rates, especially of elderly persons) in the Rotherham Borough area were reducing (calculated using the additional deaths in the period December to March, compared to the previous and subsequent quarters); better heating schemes/systems in some households may have resulted in this improvement;

: the need for consistent measurement of the low income and high cost definition of fuel poverty;

: the Government's Green Deal – the previous coalition Government's energy policy (loans for equipment and systems which would result in energy efficiency improvements to residential properties); some 2,000 assessments had been undertaken in the Rotherham Borough area, although only sixteen households had ultimately taken a financial loan under this policy;

: National Energy Action and the Department of Energy and the Climate Change funding regimes - grant applications had to be made;

: examples of loft and cavity wall insulation being undertaken to residential properties, including the Council's own housing stock;

: Public Health grant for capital works to support the most vulnerable private sector householders 2015/2016;

: the effect on fuel bills was discussed (eg: financial savings at the Fitzwilliam estate, Swinton - a specific response was to be provided for Ward Councillors);

: the relatively low take-up of the Green Deal, in part because of the risk to householders of having to pay for home assessment themselves which had been off-putting

: the discussion of changes to Central Government's energy policies and further changes to be announced imminently by the Government (Energy Bill 2015);

: Local Energy Policies which may be developed by local authorities within the Sheffield City Region;

: the overall effectiveness of the response to the recommendations of the Fuel Poverty Scrutiny Review;

: further information required about the impact of fuel poverty on troubled families and child poverty (eg: use of pre-paid (coin) electricity and gas meters which may result in disproportionately expensive fuel costs (eg: higher standard rate tariffs being more expensive than fixed-term arrangements available via the Internet); the impact of the Government's

Welfare Reforms on fuel poverty; Members requested further information of the number of households which still used coin meters for fuel/utility payments; it was noted that low income families and elderly people may sometimes prefer the use of pre-payments as part of household budget management; the difficulty of obtaining such information in respect of individual households was acknowledged;

: the impact of arrears on payments for fuel costs and the use of front-loaded payments; Members requested additional information about this issue;

: engagement of the Authority's Housing Service and Housing maintenance contractors with the fuel poverty issue;

: reports which were submitted to the Health and Wellbeing Board, for example, on training issues for relevant Authority staff and for the Council's partner organisations;

: assistance to households in the private rented sector, with advice given to private sector landlords, in order to improve the energy efficiency of those households (eg: Little London estate at Maltby);

: the Council's Selective Licensing Scheme would target the less-efficient F and G rated properties, so that improvements may be made to their energy-efficiency prior to any future lettings (subject to legislation being introduced by the Government during 2018);

: discussion of the means of ensuring that households, especially those in the private rented sector and those which required energy efficiency improvements, are able to take advantage of schemes which would help in reducing and minimising fuel costs;

: scheme for the fitting of solar PV panels – after a previous investigation, the costs of the proposed scheme were shown to be prohibitive; however, further investigations to consider possible suitable schemes were continuing, both for domestic properties and for business/commercial premises.

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

(2) That the progress being made against the eleven recommendations identified in the report of the Scrutiny Review of Fuel Poverty and the resources being deployed to tackle fuel poverty in Rotherham, as described in the report now submitted, be noted.

(3) That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board notes that there were to be changes to the National energy agenda which would influence the type and level of work conducted locally.

(4) That the reporting of appropriate issues regularly to meetings of the Health and Wellbeing Board, as described in recommendations 9 and 10 of the Fuel Poverty scrutiny review, shall continue.

(5) That a further progress report about the Fuel Poverty Scrutiny Review be submitted to a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, during October 2015, such report to include information about (i) the Government's Welfare Reforms and the impact upon Child Poverty and the Troubled Families Initiative; and (ii) the arrears of fuel/utilities bills and the rate of increase of such arrears over a relatively short period of time.

(6) That Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be provided with further information about:-

(i) financial savings on fuel bills at the Fitzwilliam estate, Swinton;

(ii) the response from the energy companies and regulatory bodies about the effectiveness of marketing of the new eco-scheme;

(iii) statistical data on the use of pre-paid (coin) meters for gas and electricity payments in households in the Rotherham Borough area.

15. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2014/2015

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Scrutiny Manager concerning the Scrutiny Annual Report for the 2014/2015 Municipal Year. Accordingly, Members considered the contents of the final draft of the Annual Report 2014/15, prior to its submission to the Council meeting on 8th July 2015.

The document included details spanning three Municipal Years: the outcomes and progress of scrutiny during 2013/14, as well as the subject year of the Annual Report, ie: 2014/15. Details of the scrutiny work programme for 2015/2016 were also included in the Annual Report.

Members suggested a number of contextual alterations to the Annual Report.

Members thanked the scrutiny officers for the preparation and quality of this document.

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

(2) That the Scrutiny Annual Report for the 2014/2015 Municipal Year, as now amended, be approved insofar as this Management Board is concerned and forwarded to the Council meeting for further consideration.

(3) That it be noted that the Select Commission membership details for 2015/16 may be subject to change after the Council meeting on 8th July 2015 and any changes would be reflected in the final published version of the Annual Report.

16. ISSUES REFERRED FROM THE AREA ASSEMBLIES

There were no issues to report.

17. YOUTH CABINET/YOUNG PEOPLE'S ISSUES

An update about the Rotherham Youth Cabinet would be reported to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

18. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 29TH MAY 2015

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, held on 29th May, 2015, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

19. WORK IN PROGRESS

Improving Lives Select Commission:-

The Chair reported on the recent activities of the Improving Lives Select Commission:-

: Child Sexual Exploitation – establishment of the Assertive Outreach Hub (to be managed by the Barnardo's organisation) and also the Multi-Agency Risk Panel;

: Delivery Plan for the Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy.

Improving Places Select Commission:-

The Chair reported on the recent activities of the Improving Places Select Commission:-

: the Panel's priority of assessing the impact of the Cleaner, Greener agenda (waste management, waste collection, recycling rates); leisure and community services (grounds maintenance, street cleansing, fly-tipping enforcement); parking services and Rotherham town centre's night-time economy; use of task and finish groups to consider the detail of these matters;

: update reports on the response to scrutiny reviews review updates (grounds maintenance and street cleansing; homelessness strategy; supporting the local economy).

Health Select Commission:-

The Chair reported on the recent activities of the Health Select Commission:-

- : Primary Care update (Rotherham Clinical Commissioning Group);
- : Overview of Adult Social Care Services;
- : Continuing Health Care scrutiny review – update;
- : use of task and finish groups for specific scrutiny review work.

The Chair thanked all Members involved for their contributions to the various scrutiny reviews.

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:-

The Chair reported on the recent activities of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:-

Training for Councillors on the scrutiny process (a year-long programme)

Scrutiny of policy will feature in the forthcoming year.