AREA ASSEMBLY CHAIRS
MONDAY, 11TH APRIL, 2016

Present:- Councillor Yasseen (in the Chair); Councillors Beaumont, Godfrey, Jones, McNeely, Sansome, Whelbourn and Whysall.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Buckley, Evans and Hamilton.

34. INTRODUCTION BY THE CHAIR

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

At the previous meeting during the discussion on the Forward Plan, Members had raised issues as to its purpose when there was a review taking place, how Area Assembly Chairs became more involved and driving the next developments of neighbourhood working.

The Chair had raised the issues at a meeting with the Chief Executive where all the documents produced to date had been reviewed including the review undertaken by the former Commissioner Stella Manzie (more financially based), together with the handover letter she had sent to all Chairs which talked about the next phase which they and officers would lead on.

Today's meeting was the first step towards looking/defining/how arrive at Rotherham's new neighbourhood model.

It was not the intention of disregarding everything that was already insitu but building on what was felt to be really good and have a more ambitious plan than previously.

Parish Councils would be having a similar review of their funding and the grant they received from the Council. This would feed into what Area Assemblies did in the future in terms of local communities.

Councillor McNeely reported that she had been asked by members of public in the Rotherham South area if Area Assemblies were safe?

The Chair felt that no-one could give that assurance at the present time. They existed as a structure and the Officers were working towards the Council's outcomes but they would change as a result of the review.

35. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 18TH JANUARY, 2016

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 18th January, 2016.

Resolved:- That the minutes be received and the contents noted.

36. DEVELOPING A NEIGHBOURHOOD STRATEGY

Sharon Kemp, Chief Executive, gave the following presentation:-

Corporate Improvement Plan
- Strong High Impact Partnerships, Section 22 Effective Neighbourhood Working including Community Cohesion:
  - Review of Council and Partnership Team working within neighbourhoods – by end of December, 2016
  - Review of Area Assemblies – by end of December, 2016
  - Proposed future approach to Council Neighbourhood Services – January, 2016

Area Assemblies/Neighbourhood Working
- Staff briefing 14th January
- Commissioner Manzie letter and staff briefing note 29th January, 2016
- Key areas of focus January, 2016:
  - Getting a proper focus on the role of the Service
  - Looking at the role of Area Assemblies
  - Understanding the problems of the current funding model for the Service
  - Understating the need to get the whole Council focussed on working in a way which is tailored to neighbourhoods

National Picture
- Hugely varied approaches to neighbourhood working and fora
- Localism Act enshrined new rights
- Front line Council interaction with neighbourhoods through Ward Councillors
- Public meetings and engagement through social media
- Differing arrangements but a principle of some form of devolved budget
- Ward plans in a number of areas
- Importance of multi-agency problem solving at a 'local' level
- Clarity of what 'neighbourhood working' means and a clear identity

National Picture – Areas for Consideration
- Kirklees Council – Local Government Chronicle Community Involvement Framework
- Wigan Deal for Communities – We will – You will
- Barnsley Council – Local Government Association recommended
- Others?

Local Picture
- 21 Wards
- 7 Area Assemblies
  - Mixed perceptions, differing attendance and little linkage to online

  - Members within each Area Assembly can choose to pool their annual £1k Community Leadership Fund (CLF) allocation
  - 2016/17 each Area Assembly has one-off £20k revenue and £20k capital
- Parish Councils – nearly half of population live in a Parished area
- Rotherham Together Partnership Roadshows 2015/16 and commitment to more in 2017
- Governance Review – proposal for Ward plans
- Emerging locality models – Health, Police, Schools

Agreeing the scope of the work: Are these the 3 right themes to focus on?
- Creating a Council-wide Policy and Approach – Councillor and Officer commitments to fora and neighbourhood working
- Developing a multi-agency approach to neighbourhood working
- Role and funding of the Partnership and Engagement Service
- Proposals by the end of August, 2016?

Next steps for consideration
- Visits to see examples of good practice
- Developments of Member Working Group to oversee the development of the 3 workstreams
- Draft work programme for each workstream by end of May
- Commitment to proposals by the end of August

Discussion ensued on the proposed three themes and the next steps with the following issues raised:-

2016/17 Budget

- Rotherham South Area Assembly had the Town Centre within its Assembly area. There was an awareness that the rest of the Assembly area suffered because of the vast amount of money that had to be put into the Town Centre to make sure that was right. If all Area Assemblies received the same funding then parts of Rotherham South would get nothing because of the concentration in the Town Centre

- Concern that the 2016/17 funding would not be spent. It was already mid-way through the first month, the review would not be completed until August and given the length of time it took for costings etc. would it get to March 2017 with no money spent and nothing achieved?
  W*hilst considering the future of neighbourhood working there would be nothing to stop Assemblies thinking about key priorities and activities they wanted to deliver now. This year would be about piloting the ideas so that when the new plan was ready to be implemented there had been the practice and experience of having a budget. There was £20k Capital and £20k Revenue funding per Area Assembly at the moment with very few conditions other than having to go through the Assembly structure to assist in the decision making with the residents who attended those meetings as well as involving*

all the neighbourhoods.

- The information needed to be made available in plain English so members of the public would understand what the restrictions on spend were

- As it was one-off funding for 2016/17 if it was not spent could it be rolled over into 2017/18? The lack of spend may not be the fault of the Area Assembly
  The funding had been allocated for the current financial year so any rollover would have to be considered by Cabinet. Working with the communities gave more power to demonstrate the impact at local level and if the funding was not spent it could be viewed that it was not required. The question of the timeframe for costings etc. would need to be addressed by Officers

- When Area Assemblies had had a devolved budget previously, an Assembly such as Rother Valley South that had eleven Parishes, had had no problem in either spending or distributing the funding evenly as all the Parishes had been involved. It had been a way of uniting the Assembly area as residents felt they were getting something very specific in their villages and all worked on it together

- Wentworth Valley had very little resident participation at Area Assembly meetings. There would be no problem in spending the money but little confidence that the Area Assembly would be a very effective way of setting the priorities in terms of spend
  There was a difference between participation in an Area Assembly area and participation in actual Area Assembly meetings. There was scope for using the meeting as a vehicle for gathering information but it should not be limited to the meeting; information was gathered every day in many ways. It was a way of using that information and a mechanism for feeding it up into the Area Assembly meeting. Although attendance was low at the actual meeting, participation in the Area Assembly was alive and well

- The Co-ordinating Group model had worked well. The priorities had come through the Area Assembly as something that the communities wanted to see and passed to the Co-ordinating Group who tasked the partners with individual parts of the project and then seen as a delivery model to the actual communities so they could see they had had an influence. The point at which Area Assembly attendance declined was when Co-ordinating groups disappeared

Themes

- Should Area Assembly Chairs/Vice-Chairs attend a theme they were interested in or should they be involved in all three?

- Need to be involved in all three or Chairs/Vice-Chairs would not see what the other options were. Possibly having a taster session on

each?

- Working Groups on all three themes would allow the representatives to feedback to the main meeting so everyone would know where there were any issues without waiting until the end of the review. An agenda item should be included for every Area Assembly Chairs meeting to enable feedback on the work of the Working Groups to allow everyone to consider any gaps that had been missed

- The three themes were interlinked and you could not take one and leave the other two. It was important firstly to agree a Council-wide policy approach which meant everybody had to embrace the function and be committed to a multi-agency approach

- Because of the geography of all the Area Assemblies having three separate Working Groups would miss some areas which was really important for locality working, therefore, all Chairs should be involved in all three Working Groups

Visits

- There was merit in Members going to look at other models as there was a danger of becoming inward looking

- Dates needed to be arranged as a matter of priority

Resourcing of Area Assemblies

- Throughout the life of Assemblies one of the biggest hurdles had been the acceptance of Officers that Area Assemblies had a role. There had been/was a perception that they were an Elected Member's "toy". The suggestion that a Senior Officer be aligned with an Area Assembly had been tried before and failed. Elected Members and members of the public liked Area Assemblies. Everybody understood Parish Councils and how they fit in; Officers did not necessarily understand how Area Assemblies fitted in and had never featured heavily in the Council's Constitution as a theme as being overriding and important to be addressed
  This was true and the message was sent that Area Assemblies were part of the Council's offer. Area Assemblies needed to be clear what their outcomes were, their role and making it happen and needed Officers to support them in a right and proper way.

- The cuts in staff numbers within the Council and partner agencies could not be ignored when talking about a multi-agency approach to neighbourhood working

- Sheffield City Council had made clear the split. They now had Housing/Tenant Involvement (funded by the Housing Revenue Account) and Neighbourhood Partnerships which were completely separate

- Trafford Council's Area Assemblies sat within the Chief Executive's Department and had a real link between what be their equivalent to Rotherham's Strategic Partnership and Neighbourhood Partnership and almost became a delivery arm of the Strategic Partnership

- A governance structure was required for the meetings that stemmed from Area Assemblies e.g. Neighbourhood Action Group, Area Housing Panel and should be part of the review
  It would be part of it. The level of funding was no longer there nor the staff to support them. The review would look at building links in the community. What had happened in the past could not be recreated due to the budget and future savings that would have to be made. However, that did not mean that people could not access the services nor that the delivery of services at a local level could not be shaped accordingly

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

(2) That there be general agreement to the three themes of:-

Creating a Council-wide Policy and Approach – Councillor and Officer commitments to Fora and Neighbourhood Working

Developing a multi-agency approach to Neighbourhood Working

Role and funding of the Partnership and Engagement Service

(3) That Area Assembly Chairs (Vice-Chairs as substitutes) be encouraged to attend future meetings.

(4) That all Chairs (and Vice-Chairs if necessary) be involved in the workshop sessions.

(5) That consideration be given to the future reporting of Area Assembly Chairs minutes.

(6) That a member of the Senior Leadership Team be invited to be part of the discussions.

(7) That the Area Assembly Chairs meet on a monthly basis with feedback on the work of the Working Groups included as an agenda item.

37. FEEDBACK ON CURRENT INITIATIVES

Graeme Betts, Interim Director, Adult Social Care and Housing, reported on the following initiatives:-

- **Adult Social Care -** A strategic approach to developing Adult Social Care and developing people's independence and ability to live independently in the community required the ability to support them in

the community. A key element was the community assets that existed currently and how they might be developed going forward.

- **Community Assets** *(from an Adult Social Care perspective - the broad network of voluntary activity that existed/services/support that were provided by the sub-sector, community groups, faith groups etc.)* - As part of the Adult Social Care Development Programme there was a Community Asset Board which was made up of representatives from the Council (Housing, Community Development, Public Health, CYPS), Health, the 3rd sector and community groups. Part of the work of the Board was to link things together, identify the gaps that needed to be addressed and map services so as to prevent overlapping
  There was a keenness to develop community assets and new initiatives developed

- **Social Prescribing -** This was focussed on approximately 10% of the population but, from the Adult Social Care perspective, there was still the remaining 90%. It had to be connected at a strategic level.
  Two Link Workers had been appointed with a further two to follow to link into what was happening in the formal care setting. The future aim was to ensure that the locality based times linked in the local community assets

- **Community Connectors -** The Directorate had funded Age UK to develop Community Connectors – a pilot initiative. They had been requested to develop a network of Community Connectors who would become the first point of contact

- Investment in the Alzheimer's Society Dementia Cafes and Deaf Groups

- Voluntary Action Rotherham requested to submit a proposal to develop Gizmo. They could also develop more peer networks to engage people

- Locality working – The Health Services were adopting the locality-based approach and was organising its Community Nurses as well as RDASH

- It was important to ensure that it all fit together with Area Assemblies and the Council and it could not afford separate streams of work. It needed to be clear what the desired outcomes were and what the problem was that you were trying to solve

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised:-

- At the recent Children's Commissioner meeting with young people the main focus had been mental health issues. The Health sector had their localities and the Council had its own with the question raised

when would they sit together?
The programme was moving forward. The two Chief Executives had requested that an event be convened to identify how Health and the Council worked together. It would be an opportunity for front line staff to engage and ascertain what the services would look like. Mental Health was a big issue as the bulk of the funding was spent in the Acute section so if more efforts went into Preventative, particularity with regard to children, there would be much to achieve

- What it did show was that so many of the groups were run on a voluntary basis which fed into it which demonstrated the importance of tie-in with the Area Assembly structure particularly the work of the Community Development Workers of which there was a very small number. As the move to work with the voluntary sector increased they had to have the capacity within those areas for someone to support the groups and help them to develop and extend
There had to be a different way of working and joining up the budgets that were already out in the community to achieve better outcomes

Dave Richmond, Director of Housing, Asset Management and Neighbourhood Services, reported on the current issues facing Housing Services:-

- The Housing Service was performing well; last year's Local Government inspection had given a rating of good and was getting better. All Indicators were in the top quartile with the exception of Income Collection. Lettings had also been knocked off target due to the changes to the Data Protection Act. 170 lettings across the Borough at present (0.8%.)

- The nationally driven changes on Welfare Reform and the implications of the Housing and Planning Bill would impact upon the Service. From a financial perspective, it would take out a minimum of ¼ of the income stream that came into social housing. The Chancellor of Housing suggested that over the next four years there would 370,000 less social housing in the country. Rotherham currently had 20,640 properties

- It was not only the financial impact but some of the issues with regard to the Housing and Planning Bill would have an impact on family life. The Local Government Association had written an open letter across the board expressing concern about elements of the Housing and Planning Bill which was in the House of Lords today for the first day

- The introduction of fixed term tenancies for all housing, currently proposing 3-5 years. If a property was let to a family with young children it could not be guaranteed that that child would see out its primary school years in that property

- There was also the issue of also the issue of high value levy which

would affect the Right to Buy

- Younger people (under 35) and single would only be allowed £58 per week housing benefit. There were currently only seventy properties in the Borough where the average rent was £58 per week

- The Housing and Planning Bill also provided opportunities for Rotherham e.g. Starter Homes

- A number of Services had now transferred to Streetpride – Community Protection Unit, Corporate Asset Management, some of the Community Engagement Services leaving Social Housing and Area Management

- The new Tenancy Agreement contained major changes in terms of how the Service managed some of its tenancies including anti-social behaviour and would have an impact on the tenancies

- The joint scheme with Age UK to help older people claim PIP had resulted in an additional £650k being claimed in its second year

- Private Rented Sector – there were issues in some areas which need a more radical approach

Councillor McNeely stated that it would be helpful knowing who was the lead Officer of each Directorate and their contact details etc. because of all the recent changes.

The Chair stated that work was taking place on that issue as part of the Members' Induction as well as pictorial diagrams available on the internet. It had also been agreed that as part of the Year Book there be information as to how to report issues and what the escalation policy was.

The Chair thanked Graeme and Dave for their reports.

38. NEXT STEPS AND TIME FRAME

Given the tight timescale, once the May election had taken place, meetings be held on a monthly basis with the purpose of the next meeting to populate the key actions for the three themes and arrangements be made for the site visits.

It was also suggested that Members of the Opposition be invited to take part in the review and that consultation take place with Parish/Town Councils.

Resolved:- That the proposals above be approved.

39. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business to report.