

Summary Sheet

Cabinet and Commissioner Decision Making Meeting – 15 May 2017

Title

Building Stronger Communities

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Shokat Lal, Assistant Chief Executive

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

All

Executive Summary

Organisations and agencies across Rotherham are working to support stronger, more cohesive and inclusive local communities. The Council's work in this area is a key priority within the Rotherham Improvement Plan, which calls for the development of a corporate policy statement on community cohesion. Dame Louise Casey's recent review of "*opportunity and integration*" in local communities is also having a bearing across the whole of the local government sector.

Other partners, including the police, fire service, voluntary and community sector, and health agencies are all seeking to work in the interests of building stronger communities so that the needs of different areas and demographic groups are better understood and services can be better targeted.

The draft "building stronger communities" strategy appended to this report aims to provide clear direction for a number of workstreams broadly focused on the cohesion/stronger communities agenda. A draft action plan is also attached setting out a range of actions and milestones across the strategy's key themes, which are:

- A strong civic community and pride of place
- Bringing people together
- Our rights and responsibilities towards each other
- Expanding opportunity and economic security

Whilst acknowledging the Council's central role in relation to community cohesion, the strategy has a clear emphasis on partnership working and – critically – on meaningfully engaging with local communities so that they can help shape our approach.

It is proposed, therefore, that a Stronger Communities Forum (SCF) is established. This could be chaired by the Council Leader, reflecting the Council's pivotal community leadership role, but with membership primarily comprised of community representatives as well as partner public service organisations.

The need for a small grants programme is identified in the action plan. An application for external funding has been made to resource this programme. If the external funding application is not successful, then an internal budget has been identified to provide a £5,000 contribution from the council to the small grants programme, which would be overseen by the Stronger Communities Forum. Rotherham Together Partnership has agreed an additional £5,000 for the programme.

Recommendations

- 1) That the draft Building Stronger Communities strategy be agreed, subject to any amendments.
- 2) That the establishment of a Stronger Communities Forum within the structures of Rotherham Together Partnership, to be chaired by the Leader of the Council, be endorsed.
- 3) That the establishment of a Building Stronger Communities small grants fund, to be overseen by the forum be endorsed.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix A – draft Building Stronger Communities strategy

Appendix B – Building Stronger Communities action plan

Background Papers

- Rotherham Improvement Plan – A Fresh Start
http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/2313/rotherham_improvement_plan
- The Casey Review: a review into opportunity and integration
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration>
- The Rotherham Plan – a new perspective 2025
http://rotherhamtogetherpartnership.org.uk/downloads/file/7/the_rotherham_plan_a_new_perspective_2025

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Title: Building Stronger Communities

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That the draft Building Stronger Communities strategy be agreed, subject to any amendments.
- 1.2 That the establishment of a Stronger Communities Forum within the structures of Rotherham Together Partnership, to be chaired by the Leader of the Council, be endorsed.
- 1.3 That the establishment of a Building Stronger Communities small grants fund, to be overseen by the forum be endorsed.

2. Background

- 2.1 Organisations and agencies across Rotherham are working to support stronger, more cohesive and inclusive local communities.
- 2.2 The Council's work in this area is a key priority within its improvement plan, which calls for the development of a corporate policy statement on community cohesion. Dame Louise Casey's recent review of "*opportunity and integration*" in local communities (published in December) is also having a bearing across the whole of the local government sector.
- 2.3 Other partners, including the police, fire service, voluntary and community sector, and health agencies are all seeking to work in the interests of building stronger communities so that the needs of different areas and demographic groups are better understood and services can be better targeted.
- 2.4 Rotherham Together Partnership's annual plan for 2016/17 included a *bringing communities together* theme and the partnership instigated a number of events under the umbrella of "let's get Rotherham talking". The partnership's new long-term Rotherham Plan has a specific focus on *building stronger communities*.
- 2.5 A range of activities and initiatives have been instigated by partners during 2016 to support stronger communities and to bring different groups together. This includes:
 - Coordinated activity around the protests and marches in Rotherham (17 since 2012) to ensure effective service responses, engage with communities and businesses, and lobby government on steps needed to ban such disruption in the town (e.g. last year's "Enough is Enough" campaign)
 - Operation Solar – to improve responses to hate crime and previous under-reporting
 - Safer Rotherham Partnership's strategic focus on "building confident and cohesive communities", including specific measures on tackling hate crime.

- Targeting more joined-up action in particular areas – e.g. Eastwood action plan
- Focusing on perceptions of safety to create a more welcoming town centre through the “masterplan” process
- Various events to bring people from different backgrounds together – e.g. Love is Louder (which won the Celebrating Diversity award at the voluntary arts sector’s Epic Awards in March), Armed Forces Day, Rotherham Show, Holocaust Memorial Day, International Women’s Day, Reclaim the Night, Let’s Drink Tea Together etc.

2.6 There is now a need to draw together a number of inter-related workstreams to form a cohesive programme of partnership activity focused on creating stronger, more cohesive communities.

3. Key Issues

3.1 The draft “building stronger communities” strategy appended to this report aims to provide clear direction for a number of workstreams broadly focused on the cohesion/stronger communities agenda:

- Work within the council to develop a policy/strategy and action plan on cohesion, in line with the improvement plan
- A requirement to develop an action plan for Safer Rotherham Partnership’s “building confident and cohesive communities” priority
- The need to identify actions and milestones to deliver the *building stronger communities* element of the Rotherham Plan

The strategy sets out the local and national context and provides a definition and framework for activity. An action plan is also being developed setting out a range of actions and milestones across the strategy’s key themes.

3.2 The context reflects on both Rotherham’s recent history (e.g. failings identified in the corporate governance inspection report in relation to child sexual exploitation and embedding equalities and cohesion policies; far right marches; and racially motivated attacks) and the national picture. It also acknowledges the particular impact on girls and women, from all communities, across Rotherham.

3.3 Louise Casey’s recent review into opportunity and integration made four clear recommendations:

- Build local communities’ resilience in the towns and cities where the greatest challenges exist
- Improve the integration of communities in Britain and establish a set of values around which people from all different backgrounds can unite
- Reduce economic exclusion, inequality and segregation in our most isolated and deprived communities and schools, and
- Increase standards of leadership and integrity in public office

3.4 The 2007 government commissioned report on integrated and cohesive communities, *Our Shared Future*, stressed the need to recognise that cohesion is not just about race and faith, and that integration is not about assimilation. It defined integrated and cohesive communities as those where:

- There is a clearly defined and widely shared sense of the contribution of different individuals and different communities to a future vision
- There is a strong sense of an individual's rights and responsibilities when living in a particular place – people know what everyone expects of them and what they can expect in turn
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities and access to services
- There is a strong sense of trust in institutions locally to act fairly in arbitrating between different interests
- There is a strong recognition of the contribution of both those who have newly arrived and those who already have deep attachments to a particular place, with a focus on what they have in common
- There are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and other institutions within neighbourhoods.

3.5 These national reviews have informed the strategy, which defines stronger communities as:

“People living and working in harmony, with a shared sense of community spirit - having respect for each other as citizens and respect for Rotherham as a place”.

3.6 Whilst acknowledging the Council's central role in relation to community cohesion, the strategy has a clear emphasis on partnership working and – critically – on meaningfully engaging with local communities so that they can help shape our approach.

3.7 It is proposed, therefore, that a Stronger Communities Forum (SCF) is established. This could be chaired by the Leader of the Council, reflecting RMBC's pivotal community leadership role, but with membership primarily comprised of community representatives as well as partner public service organisations.

3.8 The forum would provide intelligence on local issues; advise partners on potential responses, informed by good practice in Rotherham and elsewhere; and oversee and coordinate activity, in line with the strategy and action plan.

3.9 Headline actions and milestones have been identified based on ongoing work but it is envisaged that the forum would develop this further. The actions / milestones are grouped under the following headings, based on the strategy's themes:

- Coordination and overarching activity
 - A strong civic community and pride of place
 - Bringing people together
 - Our rights and responsibilities towards each other
 - Expanding opportunity and economic security
- 3.10 The forum will need to have representation from and/or clear reporting links into both Safer Rotherham Partnership and the wider Rotherham Together Partnership.
- 3.11 The need for a small grants programme is identified in the action plan. An application for external funding has been made to resource this programme. If the external funding application is not successful, then an internal budget has been identified to provide a £5,000 contribution from the council to the small grants programme which would be overseen by the Stronger Communities Forum.
- 3.12 A further suggestion is to hold a series of “roadshows” across the borough, bringing people together for an honest discussion on Rotherham’s recent history and current challenges. The aim would be to promote understanding and empathy, ultimately developing shared Rotherham values that emphasise what people have in common rather than the things that divide them.

4. Options Considered and Recommended Proposal

- 4.1 Do nothing – identified issues within communities would not be addressed effectively, potentially leading to relations within and between communities, and with public agencies, deteriorating.
- 4.2 Continue to develop separate approaches (as outlined in 3.1 above) which risks duplication of resources, poor coordination and a lack of clarity on roles, responsibilities and accountability.
- 4.3 The preferred approach, as set out in the report, is to agree the Building Stronger Communities strategy and establish a Stronger Communities Forum, which would bring the various strands of activity together and enable a genuine community-led approach.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The Leader chaired a community relations meeting with participation from a number of local community members. The new proposed forum will build on this work. Discussions have also been held with the chairs of the thematic boards within Rotherham Together Partnership (RTP) as well as the RTP Board.

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 6.1 The Council’s Assistant Chief Executive has officer level responsibility for this work which will be overseen at the political level by the Leader.

It is envisaged that the timetable will be:

May 2017	First meeting of the Stronger Communities Forum (SCF)
May 2017	Decision on funding for the Building Stronger Communities (BSC) Coordinator
June 2017	BSC grants programme open to applications
July 2017	BSC Coordinator in post
July 2017	Action plan and priorities reviewed by SCF

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 7.1 A funding application has been submitted to the Department of Communities and Local Government. A decision is expected by late April / early May. Subject to the external funding, a BSC coordinator will be recruited.
- 7.2 Should the funding application not be successful and a £5,000 grant be provided by the Council, then a monitoring report on the use of the grant will need to be prepared at the end of each financial year during the grant programme.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 The Council's duties as a public body under the Equality Act 2010 are set out in section 11 below.
- 8.2 The Education and Inspections Act 2006 introduced a duty on the governing bodies of maintained schools to promote community cohesion.
- 8.3 The approach also fits with other reviews, guidance and policy documents issued by the government, such as the Casey Review into opportunity and integration.

9. Human Resources Implications

- 9.1 Subject to funding being secured, a new post of Building Stronger Communities Coordinator will be established.

10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 10.1 Existing work within schools will benefit from effective linkages with community-based work in their localities, which will be encouraged through the proposals set out in this report.

11 Equalities and Human Rights Implications

11.1 The Equality Act 2010 establishes both a general duty and specific duties for public bodies like the Council. The law establishes that the protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex (gender) and sexual orientation.

11.2 By law public bodies must try to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

11.3 The act explains that 'due regard' for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages experienced by people due to their protected characteristics
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low

11.4 The proposals set out within this report are consistent with duties set out in the Equality Act 2010.

12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

12.1 Adopting the proposed approach to building stronger communities will require the participation of all directorates as well as external partners. This work will be coordinated through the Stronger Communities Forum and Rotherham Together Partnership.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 The proposals will help to develop stronger relations between communities. The risks include:

- Funding for the BSC Coordinator not being secured – this has been included in a wider programme of activity for which the post will be critical, thus increasing the chances of securing funding.
- Some communities may feel that resources are being unfairly targeted in other areas. The approach suggested is about understanding the needs of our communities and engaging all communities to help design service improvements and to strengthen inter-community relations.

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Shokat Lal, Assistant Chief Executive

Approvals obtained from:

Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services: Judith Badger, 20/04/17

Assistant Director of Legal Services: Dermot Pearson, 24/04/17

Head of Procurement (if appropriate): not applicable

This report is published on the Council's website or can be found at:

<http://moderngov.rotherham.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?Categories=>