

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
8th November, 2017

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Brookes, Clark, Cowles, Evans, Mallinder, Napper, Sheppard, Walsh and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Cusworth and Short.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sheppard declared a personal interest in item 6 (Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Services Review) due to his involvement as a trustee of a voluntary organisation.

31. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

32. TO CONSIDER WHETHER THE PRESS AND PUBLIC SHOULD BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING DURING CONSIDERATION OF ANY PART OF THE AGENDA

The Chair reported that there were no items of business requiring the press and public to be excluded from this meeting.

33. WASTE OPTIONS APPRAISAL - CONSULTATION

Consideration was given to the report which sought approval to carry out consultation on proposed changes to the Council's waste collection service.

Waste collection services in Rotherham have developed over the last fourteen years and currently consisted of a hybrid of previous kerbside sorting regimes and current collection operations.

The Council was keen to consider how the service could be modernised ensuring full consideration was given to maximising recycling and reducing costs and the views of residents on a range of improvements would be sought on:-

- Materials for recycling and the use of wheeled bins.
- Residual waste.
- Garden waste.

The eight week consultation, commencing on 27th November 2018 would ensure customers understood the proposed changes, the reasons for them and communicate how they could contribute to the consultation.

Engagement would take place using a combination of drop-in sessions and online feedback. Communications around the proposed changes and the subsequent consultation would be undertaken using a combination of mechanisms, including social media, traditional media and printed material.

Members sought clarification on the range of options that had been considered prior to establishing an option for consultation. In response, it was confirmed that work had been ongoing for a number of months and those had included reviewing privatisation, but that had been discounted because of the timescales involved.

Reference was made to the Manvers facility where recyclate was sorted and Members queried why sorting was being prioritised at the kerbside, rather than having all sorting done at Manvers and being assured that co-mingling of recyclate would not be an issue. In response, it was explained that the preferred approach was to reiterate the principles of reduce, re-use and recycle and that sorting at the kerbside reduced the likelihood of waste entering the system.

Members queried whether more could be done to deal with leaves through composting. In response, it was confirmed that compost material was not produced at the Manvers facility and it was difficult to be proactive in composting leaves from highways due to the chemicals from diesel vehicles.

Referring to the proposal to charge for green waste collection, Members sought to understand how the authority would police and prevent green waste being deposited in refuse bins. In response, it was explained that the new refuse bin would be smaller and to include green waste would reduce capacity for other waste. The Council would be keen to hear during the consultation how more can be done to encourage composting. In respect of policing, if green waste was identified in a refuse bin, the authority would contact the resident to ask them to sort it out, but it would be difficult to do this if the green waste were at the bottom of a bin in a black bag. It was noted that the Council was not proposing to issue fines in such cases.

Member sought assurances in respect of how the Council would undertake the consultation. In response, it was explained that the intention was to write to every property in the borough with a factual breakdown of the proposals and how residents can engage in the consultation. In addition, drop in events were being investigated in localities, as well as using social media to get the message out that the consultation was underway.

It was explained that the proposals had been developed in response to concerns that had been expressed in respect of the service. There was an awareness of the financial constraints and the need to improve recycling rates. It was explained that the overall cost of the service was £11million per annum and the cost of replacing bins would be £1.4million, which would generate an overall saving of around £1.3million.

In response to a question from Members in respect of having a backup plan, it was explained that the consultation was on the preferred option and how that can be made to work. A great deal of work was still being undertaken to drive improvements and examples were given in respect of reductions in missed bin collections and increased fuel efficiency from some of the changes that had been made. The Council was learning from the experiences of other authorities to improve the service and deliver efficiencies.

Reference was made to the way in which communications could be used to reduce co-mingling and ensure that capacity in bins was maximised. An example was given of plastic bottles containing air which reduced capacity. If the bottle were cut or flattened then that would help to increase capacity in the refuse bin. It was agreed that information and education around recycling and waste disposal was something which could be looked at and improved.

Members requested that the equality impact assessment be brought back to the Board following the conclusion of the consultation. Following on, assurance was sought that the proposed eight-week period of consultation would be sufficiently long enough to inform the decision on what was likely to be viewed as a radical change. It was explained that an eight-week consultation period was longer than normal and assurances were provided that the Council was prepared for the level of response that the consultation was likely to generate. It was noted that no change was proposed in respect of assisted bin collections.

Further assurances were sought in respect of how the Council would enable people whose first language was not English to be aware and participate in the consultation exercise. It was explained that it was proposed for the consultation documents to only be available in English and Members indicated that they would require assurance that work would be undertaken with minority groups whose first language was not English. A commitment was provided that this would be done.

Resolved:-

1. That consultation with the residents of Rotherham on proposed changes to household waste and recycling collection services be supported.

2. That further consideration be given to how newly arrived communities and those who do not have English as a first language are consulted on the Waste Option Appraisal;
3. That a further report be submitted in February 2018 to report on the outcome of the consultation and the recommended options for approval.

34. VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES REVIEW

Consideration was given to the report which detailed how infrastructure services provided support that helped voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations across the borough to become more effective and sustainable.

Active and vibrant community groups and voluntary organisations were the backbone of local communities and work collaboratively with residents and with the Council to make a positive difference. The Council's funding for infrastructure support meant that local groups and organisations could access capacity building support and be part of a Rotherham-wide network.

Community and voluntary organisations have an important role in helping to build resilient communities across the borough and in supporting residents - particularly the most vulnerable.

The current infrastructure services were provided by Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR) with the engagement of Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance (REMA). The current arrangements ran until the end of March 2018.

As part of considering arrangements for the next three years, a review into the infrastructure support needs of the VCS in Rotherham had been completed. The purpose of this review was to assess the effectiveness of the existing service and to identify future needs. The outcome of this was the recommended continuation of infrastructure support (in line with the commitments of the Rotherham Compact), with a priority focus on activity and support aligned to communities and neighbourhoods as set out in the Council and Rotherham plans.

The next stage in the process was to invite bids for there to be a lead infrastructure organisation to work with the Council to develop full proposals and then lead the delivery over the next three years.

Members referred to the recommendations within the report and sought clarification as to how activities would be achieved and how success would be measured. In response, it was confirmed that this would be part of the specification and targets would be defined against benchmarking data within the voluntary and community sector. Following on, Members sought assurances that the funding was not going to be taken away with an expectation that the sector would have to deliver more. In response, it was confirmed that there was no intention of asking the lead organisation to do more work, but they would be required to work to an identified set of priorities.

Reference was made to part of the report which stated that external funding would be sourced to mitigate any budget cuts and Members asked for information as to how the Council would get this funding and how it would tackle inequalities. In response, it was explained that the borough was not currently receiving its fair share of external funding and the intention was to put in collective bids for external funding with the voluntary and community sector. In respect of equalities, it was noted that there had been a concentration on particular communities and not addressed outlying communities and the new neighbourhood working model would play an important role in addressing inequalities.

Members queried whether voluntary and community sector infrastructure grants were being monitored and how performance would be reviewed. In response, it was acknowledged that this had been neglected in the past and discussions were taking place with Voluntary Action Rotherham (VAR) on how this would work in future. The expectation was that quarterly monitoring reports would be submitted and it may involve a refreshing of objectives and the specification itself.

Assurances were sought in respect of efforts to encourage voluntary and community sector organisations to build their own reserves so that their financial modelling would become more sustainable.

Members sought clarification in respect of how the preferred approach was determined and how the precise figure was reached. In response, it was accepted that the options were considered to be radical and that option 1 was chosen on the basis that the sector in the borough continued to need infrastructure support. The alternative would have been to cease funding altogether and that would not be supported.

Resolved:-

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That there be greater clarity on the outcomes arising from the activity (as outlined in Recommendation 1.3 of the report) to ensure that value for money is achieved on the Council's investment.

35. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Consideration was given to the report which detailed how the Member Development Panel had worked with councillors, officers and the Local Government Association to prepare a strategy to direct the Council's approach to learning and development for Members.

This strategy had been prepared to reflect the ambitions in the Council Plan and enhance the skills, knowledge and behaviours of Members and sought formal approval by the Cabinet.

Members broadly supported the thrust of the strategy and welcomed the adoption of a single document that would enable councillors to focus their development activity. Some concern was expressed in respect of requiring Members to undertake training and some Members felt that this would be better reflected as an aspiration rather than a requirement. An explanation of mandatory training was provided to the Board and Members were reminded of the need to continue to develop as part of the Council's improvement journey and Members would be required to continue to enhance their knowledge, skills and behaviours as part of that journey.

Resolved:-

That the Member Development Strategy be supported for approval.

36. DISTRICT HEATING SCHEME CHARGES REVIEW

Consideration was given to the review of district heating which had been undertaken following capital investment made to infrastructure that had improved the efficiency and concerns raised by tenants on the Swinton Fitzwilliam Estate about the high cost of heating.

A previous report to Cabinet in July 2017 recommended that a weekly standing charge of £2 be introduced to enable a reduction in kwh charge to 5.65p so mitigating a payment spike for residents on the Swinton Fitzwilliam Estate who were on pre-payment meters. The equivalent charge per kwh if no standing charge was levied would have been 7.09p per kwh. There were concerns expressed by some tenants and Ward Members that prompted a further review of charges to be undertaken.

Subsequently, the review focused on anticipated costs for 2017-18 based on full year operating costs for 2016-17 now being available and the known cost reductions from significant investment in district heating infrastructure over the last three years now coming to fruition.

This report, therefore, recommended the reduction of the kwh charge to 6.28p per kwh with no standing charge for 2017-18 which would be applied retrospectively from 1st April, 2017. These cost reductions would mean that charges for district heating in Rotherham for 2017-18 were comparable to both Sheffield and Doncaster.

Resolved:-

That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.

37. TO DETERMINE ANY ITEM WHICH THE CHAIRMAN IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY

The Chair reported that there were no items of business requiring urgent consideration at the meeting.

38. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting be held on Wednesday, 22nd November, 2017 at 11.00 a.m.