

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION  
Wednesday, 15th November, 2017**

Present:- Councillor Mallinder (in the Chair); Councillors Albiston, Buckley, B. Cutts, Elliot, Jepson, Jones, McNeely, Reeder, Sheppard, Walsh and Wyatt.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Taylor.

**84. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors Allen and Sheppard both declared an interest in the report on Neighbourhood Working (Minute No. 88 due to their participation in the Neighbourhood Working Group.

**85. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

There are no questions from members of the public and the press.

**86. COMMUNICATIONS**

The Chair had been to Coventry on some training and a report will follow.

Quarterly meetings have been held with Councillor Beck – Cabinet Member for Housing and Councillor Denise Lelliott, Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy along with Councillor Hoddinott in relation to collection of waste.

The Chair has been looking at a strategy plan for housing and that will come back once it is formulated.

Housing Information Day – 17<sup>th</sup> January. If Members have any questions or topics they would like including in the event, please send them to Christine Bradley, Scrutiny Officer.

**District Heating.** A brief update was provided by Councillor Sheppard a conclusion has been reached on this issue and resulted in the tenants receiving the lowest district heating. A proper consultation was undertaken and there's a much more positive relationship between tenants and the Council. An exercise is underway to test fuel efficiency in homes; the results will be shared with all tenants.

The Chair thanked Councillor Allen for her involvement in the Neighbourhood Working Group.

**87. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 20TH SEPTEMBER, 2017**

Councillor Walsh referred to page 9 “zero cost to the rate payers” and asked if this could be changed to “zero cost to the public purse”.

Page 7 Item 2 – in relation to the report on Emergency Planning and the report begin forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board. Councillor McNeely enquired if OSMB had raised the same concerns as this committed including the need to speak to Sheffield regarding attendance at joint meetings. Christine Bradley to follow up.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2017, be approved as a true record.

## 88. REVIEW OF NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING UPDATE

The Chair introduced the report by stating the importance of it and the changes it will mean to the workings of Councillors in their communities.

The Council's Corporate Improvement Plan has a specific improvement theme of "strong, high impact partnerships". This includes "active ward Councillors working within neighbourhoods to build community and citizens capacity". The objective was the introduction of "a new model of citizen engagement and neighbourhood working linked to a review of Area Assemblies". To give effect to this improvement priority the Council decided on 19th May 2017 to endorse a new vision for neighbourhood working:

**"Putting communities at the heart of everything we do by Councillors working with their communities on what matters to them, Listening and working together to make a difference and Supporting people from different backgrounds to get on well together . . . to help make people healthier, happier, safer and proud"**

- To support delivery of the vision the Area Assemblies were replaced with a new ward based model of neighbourhood working with the following characteristics:
- Production of Ward Profiles and Action Plans for all 21 wards identifying local issues, priorities and opportunities.
- The assignment of dedicated officer support at 2.5 days per week per ward to implement the new model.
- An allocated devolved budget for each ward to address and respond to local Ward Plan priorities and support community involvement and development.
- Training and support provided by the Local Government Association on ward planning and new ways of neighbourhood working. This will include "Ward Walks" in each ward and joint officer and member capacity building seminars, and training on using social media to engage with residents.

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The review is a councillor led process and implementation over a 12 month transitional period, is being driven by a member group chaired by Councillor Yasseen, Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Working and Cultural Services. The group will oversee the transitional arrangements leading to the embedding of the model.

Other related matters the group will address will be the production of a new Neighbourhood Strategy that will see the ward as the “building block” to enable partners and communities to work together to improve local outcomes, make the best use of resources and local assets, and develop innovative approaches to enable more people to help themselves and each other.

### **Key Issues**

The review sought to address a number of key issues originally raised in the RMBC Corporate “Fresh Start” Improvement Plan (26th May 2015). These were to:

- Determine why working at a neighbourhood level is important
- Describe the outcomes of improved neighbourhood working
- Highlight the added value of a neighbourhood approach to locality working

The expected outcomes of the review of neighbourhood working are to:

- Improve local democratic engagement and community leadership by describing the way in which councillors, officers and partners will interact with the local community.
- Identify the support that could be expected by Elected Members from the Council and its key partners.
- Clarify the role of the Council and partners in addressing neighbourhood based issues.
- Determine how other services run by the Council and its partners can be tailored to and benefit from neighbourhood approaches.
- Highlight the role of the community, voluntary and faith sectors in supporting local based organisations to deliver services in neighbourhoods.

Shokat Lal, Assistant Chief Executive, gave a brief outline of the report and the reason for bringing the report to this Commission was to provide an update on the work undertaken so far by the Neighbourhood Working Group, over the past six months.

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- The work undertaken to date by the group
- Neighbourhood Working Group established and
- Ward Plans/Profiles have been completed for all Wards in the Borough.
- Promotion of neighbourhood working via an established Twitter account. Further work is to be undertaken with Members on this aspect.
- Ward Walks led by officers from the Local Government Association are taking place. A report will be produced by the LGA on the findings from the Ward Walks once they have all taken place.
- Dedicated officer support – two and a half days officer support for every ward – this has been agreed and Members will know who their officer is
- Further training for Members is to be identified as part of this transitional year.
- Devolved Budgets
- Developing a new structure alongside the Neighbourhood Strategy

Councillor Yasseen

- The issue of devolved budgets has been sticking point in the development of neighbourhood working. One proposal is to have a four year devolved budget along with simplifying the budget process which will allow for improved planning of larger capital works within Wards.
- Consistent approach by Council Officers to the model of Neighbourhood Working.
- Aspiration is that neighbourhoods are the core and central part of the councils work lead by member is their communities.
- This transitional year has provided much information and learning regards this new way of working.

Councillor McNeely asked for clarification with regards to

- Carryover of any unspent finance from 2017 into 2018, due to the devolved budgets not being approved until six weeks into 2017.
- Receipt of report from the LGA in relation to the Ward Walk in Boston Castle Ward.

With regards to finance, Finance need to be more flexible in the way they approach Neighbourhood Working overall and Shokat Lal has been tasked with resolving any anomalies in this area. With regards to capital expenditure, funding only needs to be allocated against a project for it to be classed as spent, regardless of completion of the works.

Two reports have been received so far from the LGA for Sitwell and Wingfield. Zafar Saleem will liaise with the LGA for further completed reports.

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Discussions took place around the involvement of Area Housing Panels and the associated budget within Neighbourhood Working, this role is to be clarified along with involvement of other partners and groups.

Support was given to the neighbourhood way of working by Councillor Wyatt and that it was working well in the Swinton Wards including working with the Area Housing Panel.

Councillor Wyatt asked for confirmation of what the Ward Walks were expected to achieve.

Councillor Yasseen outlined that there are many newer Councillors in the Council and this support was offered by the LGA to work with local councillors, if they wished to and also to share findings and experiences between different wards along with providing an independent view.

Councillor Wyatt queried the value of these ward walks unless members of the LGA are willing to spend much more time in the local wards. Overall it's about sharing best practice about the borough and identifying the best practice happening in Rotherham.

Councillor Walsh wanted to know what the plan was for working with partner organisations, who would be responsible for building these relationships.

Councillor Yasseen the idea was to redefine working relationships with organisations at borough level and then for relationships to be built locally by Ward Members, one example given was working with Parish Councils.

In relation to promotion of NW are the blogs live on the Council's website and will training be provided to Members is this topic. Training will be provided in relation to social media which will be fronted by Leona Marshall the Interim Head of Communications, to look at branding for this area of work and the facilities to be available for each Ward.

There has been a delay in launching the individual sites and the preferred option is to go live with the websites once all Wards are at a similar level.

Councillor Walsh suggested that in relation to Ward Walks an element of diplomacy is adopted as in some areas as Parish Councillors are experienced in this area of working. Councillor Yasseen confirmed that it is up to the discretion of Ward Councillors if they are involved in the Ward Walks and all Parish Councillors are aware of the WW through the Parish Council Liaison Group.

Councillor Albiston shared her view in that the NW of working could be seen as a postcode lottery based on the effectiveness of Councillors working in each area. It may appear unfair that some wards have better deal than others

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What kind of protection is in place against this to ensure there is no detrimental impact to residents and how this is measured in terms of equality across the borough.

Councillor Yasseen reported that it is based on how Members define quality as the needs of each ward are different. Consistency of approach is achieved through the work and support provided by the officers and the involvement of senior officers where appropriate.

Councillor Albiston is concerned that approx. £1m has been spent on adopting the neighbourhood way of working without any consideration given to other potential approaches. Another concern is that staff has been moved around without any skills assessment to what is needed and are the right people in post. A restructure is taking place currently and this issue has been identified by the NWG. The question is the level of involvement by Members. Job descriptions and specifications will be made available in the New Year in relation to the required structure to implement NWG.

Councillor Jepson appreciates that this is a transitional year in this new way of working, however it has been a difficult process in creating ward profiles, knowing about the Ward Walks and setting the budget and would welcome a discussion with Cllr Yasseen outside of the meeting. The involvement of the staff in the process was welcomed.

Councillor Turner, the ward walk has been completed and welcomes the chance to see the completed report, which will be circulated via Shokat Lal. Councillor Turner also welcomed support and further information regarding devolved budgets. Councillor Yasseen agreed to provide the information with Councillor Mallinder requesting that this information be shared with all Councillors.

Councillor Buckley reported that despite differences with other ward colleagues work was progressing well as the focus of what is being done is for the local community. The budget has already been allocated and Cllr Buckley is interested in receiving the report from the LGA about their Ward Walk. The point that this is a transitional year in this new way of working and time needs to be spent evaluating the learning points and also finding out the views of the public regarding this new approach bringing all the learning points together in a review meeting.

Councillor Cutts enquired as if there any external costs associated with this piece of work. The external organisation involved in this work is the LGA who are providing their support free of charge. With regards to when the Ward Walks take place, Councillor Cutts suggested that evening walks would be appropriate. This is an option also there are available for the walks to take place on Saturday evening. Councillor Yasseen pointed out that this was a learning point from the pilot project.

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Councillor McNeely raised the point that it has taken 3 months to do 12 Ward Walk and 9 have to be completed within 2 weeks, which was considered to be a tight timescale.

A question was asked in relation to the NWG and can the members of that group be identified and this information shared to avoid issues of conflict of interest.

Zafar Saleem, the Neighbourhood Partnerships Manager confirmed that all the walks apart from 6 have been scheduled to take place.

Councillor Jones did not support the abolition of the area assemblies and he welcomed the report presented to the meeting, to identify what progress had been made to date regarding NW to which he was disappointed.

Councillor Jones identified points which related to potentially the miss or non-communication of how the new process is being introduced across the borough with members of the public. Other points raised included:-

- Communication across the project is seen as an issue, with members of the public, representatives from other partner organisations and Members.
- The skill sets for Council Officers will need to be varied due to the skills set of the Members they are matched to work with.
- Rotherham West has not allocated the budget devolved to it.
- Seemingly the pilot project has worked in the four pilot areas, but the findings have not been shared

Councillor Yasseen offered support to Rotherham West to resolve some of the identified issues and did not share Councillor Jones' experience of NW in this time of transition, but was happy to report back to this Committee regarding the meeting with Councillor Jones.

The Chair suggested that any Members with concerns about the NW to meet with Councillor Yasseen and find a solution to any queries.

Councillor Yasseen reiterated that this new process allows Members to work with the public at grass roots level and support work happening in local areas.

A reminder that is work is being undertaken as part of the improvement journey as the previous model was not fit for purpose and there was no option other than to identify a new way of working. 100% commitment from Members will provide something beneficial for the people of Rotherham.

Councillor Albiston had a further question, but due to time constraints Councillor Mallinder asked if she would meet with Councillor Yasseen outside of the meeting.

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Resolved:- (1) That the progress made in the first phase of the review - May 2017 to 31st October 2017, be noted.

(2) That a further update report on progress on the second phase of the review 1st November 2017 to 30th April 2018.

(3) That an information/learning/sharing best practice day take place in the New Year and arranged by the officers involved in the project for all Members.

### **89. YOUNG TENANT SCRUTINY REVIEW - UPDATE**

Asim Munir, Tenant Involvement Co-ordinator, presented the report outlining the main points as identified in Appendix 1.

The Council has commissioned Rother Fed to undertake two scrutiny reviews per year to inform service improvement and quality. The RotherFed Tenant Scrutiny Working Group was formed in April 2016 and their first review was to consider the engagement of young tenants in Council housing. This topic was selected as it had been established that younger tenants, aged between 16 and 34, were on the whole more dissatisfied with housing services.

This scrutiny review was agreed by Improving Places Select Commission (IPSC) on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2017 and it was agreed that an action plan be brought back in six months detailing progress against the recommendations. Progress against the recommendations outlined in the action plan is set out at Appendix 1. The action plan has been agreed by the Housing Involvement Panel and the Housing and Neighbourhood Senior Management Team.

The majority of the actions in Appendix are identified as being either amber or green on the "rag" rating, which is testament to the people involved in achieving the actions.

Councillor Sheppard suggested a follow up non mandatory event for the young tenants to share their experience from the process – which was detailed to inviting some young people to this meeting the next time it is on the agenda.

Young people have had input into consultations regarding customer care training, shared accommodation, the Housing Strategy and the Housing Revenue Account.

Councillor McNeely asked in relation to items E, F and G on page 29 of the papers.

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Mobile telephone numbers for Housing Officers should not be given to tenants due to the many cases they have to deal with. The special number for Housing should be used by customers after which their enquiry will be passed onto the relevant Housing Officer.

In relation to items E and F regarding tenancy workshops the Financial Inclusion Team are working with the Housing Options Team. Housing Officer will be involved in providing any issues identified by the tenants.

Recruitment in relation to the Housing Income Team should be completed by the end of November.

Councillor Mallinder asked for any information regarding the tenancy workshops to be shared with this commission.

Lillian Shears, Co-opted Member asked regarding the progress made in relation to the Housing App.

Requirements in relation to the website and the Housing App should be clearer by the end of 2018 financial year.

Page 31 (M) Councillor Sheppard suggested that the young people taking part in the Tenancy Workshops may benefit from being shown around all the on-line services that are available which may assist them in the future.

Further work is needed on the web site in relation to the digital offer made to tenants around accessing services. Feedback has been provided by young people to improve the offer.

Councillor McNeely (M) page 29 and the Tell us Once service and how this could be implemented due to data protection issues. Asim Munir this is an important question in relation to all customer services and for them to know who to contact.

Councillor Elliot (B) p28 would like to see some element of "Mystery Shopper" being included in this element. Asim will provide details of outcomes from such exercises.

Councillor Cutts raised concerns that tenancy were being offered to potential tenants as young as 16 and would these young people be in a position to pay the rent.

Post meeting note. Information was circulated to IPSC Members and there are no people ages 16 currently with a tenancy agreement with the Council.

Asim Munir noted that the Council no longer offers lifetime tenancies only fixed term tenancies. All aspects of holding a tenancy agreement are examined prior to a tenancy being offered. Other options available to 16 year olds are single bedroom tenancies and shared tenancies.

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Councillor McNeely noted that any person under the age of 18 requires a guarantor to sign on their behalf.

Councillor Albiston view was that the Action Plan although for young people was not sufficiently young person friendly and that young people do not specifically use the telephone as a way of communicating.

Asim Munir further work is required in this area and that other options need to be explored in relation to social media, however social media apps do have limits.

Lillian Shears told of previous findings in that young people identified receiving letters as a preferred way of communicating alongside communicating via apps.

Councillor Albiston answered a question from Lillian Shears regarding the action plan not being young person focussed. Councillor Albiston would prefer to see an action plan with the actions being delivered by the young people rather than just a generic action plans. Additional information was provided by Lillian and Asim in relation to the involvement of young people in the process so far and to note that this is the start of a new journey for some young people but it is positive that the Council and Rotherfed are engaging with young people.

Councillor Mallinder asked if the Housing Magazine could be circulated to Members of IPSC

Resolved:- (1) That the Action Plan and the progress made to date be noted.

(2) That the Action Plan be brought back in a further six months updating on progress against the recommendations.

### **90. EMERGENCY PLANNING TASK AND FINISH GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS**

Sam Barstow, the Head of Community Safety, Resilience and Emergency Planning, introduced Ajman Ali, the Interim Assistant Director, Community Safety and Street Scene for the next six months.

Sam Barstow presented the report which details the recommendations made by the Task & Finish Group made up from Members of this Commission. The review was completed in August 2017 and the report highlights the progress during this short time against the recommendations along with the refresh of the Major Incident Plan.

Councillor Wyatt, who chaired the review into the Emergency Plan, thanked Sam for responding so quickly to the review and accepting the recommendations in full.

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Councillor Wyatt went on to highlight the next phase of the work relates to the monitoring of the recommendations in particular the refresh of the Major Incident Plan on a bi-annual basis. Councillor Alam, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Finance, has seen the report and shared the same concern as to how the progress of the MIP is undertaken.

A decision has been made to take the recommendations from the review and put them into an action plan which will continue to be updated and presented to Councillor Alam. The MIP will be updated on a continual basis as new learnings are identified.

Councillor McNeely page 33 of the report relates to training/update sessions scheduled for 28<sup>th</sup> November and 5<sup>th</sup> December. Confirmation was requested if Members need to attend one or both sessions and if notification could be sent to Members informing them of any such sessions.

Sam Barstow confirmed that notification of any future dates would be sent to colleagues in Democratic Services to then inform Members and that it would be satisfactory for Members to attend only one of the training sessions.

Councillor Walsh, referred to mandatory training mentioned in the report, if training is mandatory, will attendance be logged and if any consequences will be felt for non-attendance.

Councillor McNeely requested an update in relation to a facilitated meeting/away day involving the emergency services and Rotherham M.B.C Major Incident staff to promote team working on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2017

Also in relation to under the Shared Service Agreement, that funding is secured for a Community Resilience Worker, questioning where this officer will be based.

P35 – What was the outcome of the meeting held by the Joint Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2017; how well was it attended and who is the representative from Rotherham who can provide feedback to this Commission.

P35 without IT how can we be confident that the information on the website is updated where appropriate

Sam Barstow provided a response to the questions raised. In relation to IT, this means that computers and IT will be used, but it will not be a bespoke system for Emergency Planning. A database and manual system will be used and the relevant information updated on the website and available to the public

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An Elected Member from both Rotherham and Sheffield attended the meeting which is what is required for the meeting to be quorate. Officers from Rotherham have raised this as a concern. A meeting has been arranged with a strategic lead from Sheffield in January 2018 with regards to attendance at these meetings.

With regard to the future workings of the shared service, questions need to be asked about service provision and any answers will need approval from both Rotherham and Sheffield.

The Local Resilience Forum meeting which took place on 6th November 2017 was to identify what exercises the Local Resilience Forum, (LRF) intend to do for 2018 along with picking up learning points from recent disasters in Manchester and Grenfell Towers incident.

Councillor Jepson asked if it usual for staff working on the Emergency Plan to go out into wards in the Borough to familiarise themselves with the locations and when an application for industrial premises etc. is received by the Council's Planning Officers is any relevant information shared with the Emergency Planning staff for their consideration.

There are two applications with the Council relating to fracking in the borough and Councillor Jepson wanted reassurances that that these are being considered from an emergency planning perspective.

Sam Barstow reported that there is a Gold Command Structure in place to deal with any appropriate response to issues should they arise.

EP is not a statutory consultee in relation to planning applications, however the Fire & rescue Service is and they will notify EP staff of any relevant information.

EP staff do go out and visit various wards to review the community risk register along with identifying any facilities that are available in the wards should they need for them to be used in an emergency situation. However it is unusual to see EP staff visible on a regular basis in the local areas.

Resolved:- (1) That the updates in respect of the recommendations made be noted.

(2) That the Select Commission schedule bi-annual reviews of the Major Incident Plan, in line with the first recommendation.

(3) That the tracking of the Action Plan be monitored on a regular basis by the Select Commission.

### **91. PROPOSED ROTHER VALLEY COUNTRY PARK CARAVAN SITE**

Councillor Yasseen presented the report on the proposal for the caravan site at Rother Valley Country Park.

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Extensive work has been undertaken to develop outline proposals for a new caravan site at Rother Valley Country Park and to assess its business potential. Financial projections suggest that such a development could enable the park to generate a significant net revenue stream for the Council, particularly if it were operational by the time that Gulliver's opens in 2019. It would also improve greatly the availability of affordable overnight accommodation in Rotherham and enhance Rotherham's reputation as a welcoming and enjoyable visitor destination. In particular, it would meet Gulliver's requirement for a caravan site within the vicinity of their major new visitor attraction on the adjacent Pithouse West site.

Much consultation has taken place to date, around the proposal which will provide an AA 5 pennant Standard accommodation with 129 caravan pitches either with one or two shower blocks. The financial projections over the first 5 years of operation are included in the report. This is a capital project for which RMBC will borrow funds which will extend the availability and quality of overnight accommodation in Rotherham.

Councillor Albiston asked why the proposal will take so long to implement. A response was provided by Phil Gill, Leisure and Green Spaces Manager, Culture, Sport and Tourism, that advice has been sought from Asset Management on the timescale for completion of the project, and that it is, in fact, an ambitious but achievable programme, taking into account the need to obtain planning permissions, building regulations permissions and undertake a tendering process in accordance with procurement requirements.

Councillor Elliot questioned the use of the caravan site, should it be called a caravan and camping site. Not everyone with a tent has a car but there are potential users who are cycling the trans Pennine trail. Also the allocated space on the map is the same regardless of whether it's for a caravan or tent.

The Project Team are developing a marketing plan and will need to ensure that the facility appeals to all regardless of what form of transport they use. The research done to date shows that the caravan market is what is most likely to generate most business.

Councillor McNeely explained that the Caravan Club and the Caravan and Camping Club are two separate organisations who should be consulted with equal importance.

Page 44 (12) implication for partners and directorates. Councillor McNeely highlighted possible impact on Transportation, including the need for tourist road signs to the attraction. This should emphasise the fact that the attraction is based in Rotherham and not Sheffield.

In reply Phil Gill noted that whilst contact had been made with both caravanning clubs in the past, it is the intention of the Council to operate the caravan site at Rother Valley itself as this offers the greatest potential financial return.

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Councillor McNeely suggested that both organisations should be approached again regarding possible promotion of the site to their members. All the suggestions put forward by Councillor McNeely can be considered further in the development of the marketing plans.

Councillor Cutts made reference to point 4.1. Asking if it is feasible for Rotherham MBC to operate the site.

Various options for the operation of the site are considered in the report. The most favourable option for the Council to achieve its objectives and to maximise the return on investments is to manage the site in house, utilising existing business systems and experience at the park.

Councillor Cutts showed support for this project and the fact that RMBC were looking to manage it, but questioned then why it could not manage care homes and crematoriums also.

The response from Councillor Yasseen was that three examples provided by Councillor Cutts were not comparing like with like services.

Observations put forward by Lillian Shears made reference to the site map in that

- there were no pot washing facilities shown;
- that the toilet blocks appear to be a long distant from the tent area and
- the informal tent areas are to have electrical hook ups.

Phil Gill explained that two toilet blocks are proposed, one of which is near the reception block and tent area. He also noted that these are draft plans, drawn in a small scale that does not allow all the details to be shown. He will check if the pot washing facilities have been included and the specification of the pitches.

Councillor Reeder was pleased to hear that RMBC were proposing to operate the site and if this was to change could Members be notified prior to any changes being made public.

Councillor Mallinder went on the read the Exclusion of Press and Public notice and the meeting went into closed session to discuss the exempt papers.

Discussion took place covering several aspects of the proposal with Members sharing their views and ideas with Officers.

Resolved:- (1) That the recommendation made to Council to include the RVCP Caravan Site project within the Council's approved Capital Programme as an invest-to-save initiative be noted.

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(2) That, subject to inclusion of the project within the Council's approved Capital Programme, a further report be submitted to the Improving Places Select Commission when tenders for construction of the facility have been evaluated and the preferred contractor has been selected.

**92. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING:- WEDNESDAY, 3RD JANUARY, 2018 AT 1.30 P.M.**

Resolved:- That a further meeting be held on Wednesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 2018, commencing at 1.30 p.m. with a pre-meeting briefing at 11.30 a.m.