

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday, 1st August, 2018

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

Apologies for absence:- Councillor Sansome

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

47. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 25 APRIL, 20 JUNE, 4 AND 18 JULY 2018

Resolved:-

That the minutes of the meetings held on 25 April, 20 June, 4 and 18 July be approved as true and correct records of the proceedings.

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

49. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no declarations of interest from members of the public or press.

50. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair reported that there were no items of business on the agenda which would require the exclusion of the press or public from the meeting.

51. DEVELOPING AN EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMME TO REUNIFY YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER

Consideration was given to a report which was due to be considered at the Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting on 6 August 2018 that sought approval to develop an evidence-based programme to reunify young people who are looked after.

It was reported that MST-FIT made a positive case for a model of intervention where young people could learn to behave differently whilst their families learn and are supported to resume leading their case, with the service enabling residential care to be used as an intermediate step on the journey to parents fully caring for their children.

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It was noted that the Life Chances Fund provided local authorities with support to explore opportunities provided by social impact bonds and outcome based commissioning. It was further reported that the Council had been awarded a grant in principle of £85k for a five year period, subject to a final project submission on 31 July 2018.

The project would close the gap in provision for existing children in care by providing a focused treatment programme with the aim of placing children back in a family environment. It was anticipated to complement the work of the Right Child Right Care Board and the suite of services which formed part of the Rotherham Edge of Care offer. Members noted that the total estimated cost of the MST-FIT service was £1.120m per annum, of which £570k was for residential provision in stage 1, which would be funded from the existing out of authority residential placement budget. The balance of £550k for the MST community team and programme management would be funded from gross savings achieved in-year. The exact amount that the Council would need to fund would depend on the financing option selected.

It was reported that the final project proposal to the Big Lottery Fund, who administer the Life Chances Fund Grant, was submitted on 15 June 2018 and a decision regarding the award would be made in early August. It was expected that the service would commence in January 2019.

In response to a query from Members concerning the risk of not receiving monies from the Life Chance Fund, it was confirmed that it was a very small risk and the Council expected to receive confirmation of the award of funding in the near future. It was for this reason that a recommendation had been made to delegate the final decision in respect of the financing method to the Section 151 Officer.

Assurances were sought in respect of the commissioned MST service with Barnsley MBC and officers explained that work had been ongoing for over six months, with a programme board in place to oversee the shared service. It was further noted that the approach was expected to deliver ongoing efficiencies and there may prove to be opportunities to spot purchase places for looked after children in future.

Members indicated some recognition that the proposals were intended to be an investment for the future and sort assurances in respect of confidence that savings would be achieved in the longer-term. In response, reference was made to the proposal being an evidence based programme, which meant that it followed a specific model, that was already operational in Leeds and had demonstrated a 75% success rate, which was being further built upon. Further assurances were provided that savings would be made based on the 12 places identified within the programme.

Members sought clarity as to whether any children across the two authorities that had implemented the model had not been able to return to their home setting and gone back to residential care. Officers confirmed that there had been cases where this had occurred and advised Members that, even if the headline outcome of returning to their birth family was not achieved, better holistic outcomes would be expected and life chances would be improved.

Members were supportive of the second option outlined in the report and indicated their support for the recommendations in the report, despite expressing some unease at delegating authority on the financial method to be used.

Resolved:-

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported, subject to the separation of recommendation 2 to read:
 - (a) That approval be given to progress with plans to set up the MST-FIT service.
 - (b) That the most appropriate method of financing be delegated to the Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services when the grant award from the Life Changes Fund is confirmed and reported back to Cabinet.
2. That Cabinet be advised that option 2 in the report 'Delivery via an outcome based contract in partnership with a social investor (using a Social Impact Bond) and with funding support from the Life Chances Fund' be supported.

52. FUTURE DESIGNATION OF SELECTIVE LICENSING AREAS

Consideration was given to a report which was due to be considered by the Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting on 6 August 2018 submitted by the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment which proposed the future designation of Selective Licensing areas in Parkgate and Thurcroft.

It was reported that Selective Licensing was the licensing of privately rented housing in a specific area with the aim of improving management standards. Where the Council designates an area, landlords must obtain a licence and comply with conditions, or face legal action including prosecution and financial penalties. Members noted that Selective Licensing was an important tool for the Council and partners, to drive improvements not only in the safety of homes, but to contributory issues related to deprivation.

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The data in the report identified areas of Rotherham in Thurcroft and Parkgate, which met the criteria, were within the 20% most deprived areas of England, and additionally had high levels of private rented housing. The report recommended consultation on proposals to designate parts of Thurcroft and Parkgate as Selective Licensing areas, which would help combat problems associated with housing and housing conditions within areas of deprivation, and deliver improved health and social wellbeing outcomes for those communities.

Members sought clarification of the definition of “safe” and why Selective Licensing was an aid to the Council. In response, it was confirmed that “safe” covered adequate fire protection and escape routes, the risk of excess cold from poor insulation and similar examples. The Selective Licensing approach enabled the Council to identify where properties were and proactively manage them with landlords. Fundamentally, the scheme was designed to improve people’s outcomes in respect of health and wellbeing, targeting deprivation and changing the standard of properties and the economics associated with those properties.

One member indicated his understanding of the purpose of Selective Licensing to improve the internal workings and features of housing and considered that to be admirable, however he did not consider that there had been much improvement to environmental conditions surrounding housing properties in Eastwood and feedback provided to him by residents had confirmed that view. In response, the Cabinet Member for Housing suggested that it would be useful to circulate the Mid-Term Performance Report in respect of Selective Licensing, given that the authority was two and a half years in. The report set out measurable targets and detailed the progress made. It was confirmed that Selective Licensing on its own was a very specific piece of regulatory power to tackle housing conditions and could not be used for anything else. .

Members sought to understand the difference in powers through Selective Licensing as opposed to environmental health inspections. It was explained that Environmental Health officers would inspect a property where requested, however many tenants did not feel that they could invite an inspection without being victimised by their landlord. It was indicated that this had been a national concern and had been recognised by government, with a review of legislation being undertaken presently. Selective Licensing enables Environmental Health officers to undertake inspections of properties without the tenant having to make such a request in order to check the safety of a property.

A further query was raised in respect of the trigger points for the Council to address issues that cause real concern. In response, it was confirmed by the Cabinet Member that it was becoming harder and harder once landlords become compliant, but he reiterated that the report in front of Members was a proposal to broaden the Selective Licensing scheme, which had improved housing conditions elsewhere in the borough. It was further confirmed by the Assistant Director of Community Safety and Street Scene that powers in respect of statutory nuisance were available to the Council, for example statutory nuisance in respect of noise in a property. However, if such anti-social behaviour occurred in a park, then the Council had limited powers as it would not be seen as a statutory nuisance, but rather a public order problem.

Members observed that the existing Selective Licensing schemes in the borough had been a success and queried whether the proposals were sufficiently ambitious. In response, it was confirmed that approval from the Secretary of State would be required to expand the scheme beyond 20% of the stock in the borough. However, it was acknowledged that the scheme had been a success, but it was right to proceed with caution in introducing new areas to ensure that improvements were made for the benefit of residents.

Reflecting on the timetable for consultation with residents, landlords and other stakeholders, Members sought assurance that the right people would be consulted and confirmation of the proposed implementation date. It was confirmed that the implementation date would be April 2019 and the intention was to follow the same processes for consultation that had been used for the first Selective Licensing areas. It was further confirmed that drop in sessions would be held in the proposed areas, and specific consultation would take place with tenants, landlords, and councillors and representative associations.

Resolved:-

That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.

53. CCTV PRIORITY CAPITAL INVESTMENT AND POLICY

Consideration was given to a report due to be determined at the Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting on 6 August 2018 which sought to allocate £60,000 of capital funding to purchase mobile CCTV cameras and to approve amendments to the CCTV Policy and associated processes.

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The Budget and Council Tax 2018-19 report to Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting on 19 February 2018 approved the Council's Capital Strategy to 2021/22. As part of this, £60,000 of Priority Capital Investment monies were identified for mobile CCTV cameras. The utilisation of technology to enhance the Council's drive to tackle anti-social behaviour is critical to improving the outcomes delivered by the Council and partners alike to deter and punish offenders whilst improving the quality of life of residents. It is apparent that the Council, partners and residents would benefit from increased provision of CCTV technology to provide suitable capacity, capability and flexibility, and to support ward priorities, Community Action Partnerships and Tasking meetings. Current revenue budgets are not in a position to fund increased provision, and capital funding is therefore required to deliver enhanced capacity - the equivalent of one camera for each ward - to deliver the desired outcomes. It is estimated that the cost of each individual CCTV system will be in the region of £3,000, equating to a total cost of £63,000 for the 21 cameras sought. Whilst this is an estimate, and the actual costs will be determined through a procurement process, any potential costs beyond the £60,000 allocation will be dealt with through existing budgets. Steps will be taken via the procurement process to seek to bring the overall cost of the 21 cameras within the original £60,000 budget allocation. The cameras will be deployed in accordance with the Council's revised CCTV Policy, which has been reviewed and updated as part of this project, to ensure that the future use of CCTV is fully compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Members sought assurances in respect of the number of cameras actually required. In response, it was confirmed that the cameras would be mobile and could be deployed to different locations to respond to issues identified in localities. Whilst a case could be made for more than one mobile camera per ward, the proposals in the report moved the position forward considerably. It was further confirmed that it was intended there would be one camera allocated to each ward and there would be an option to purchase additional cameras from ward budgets.

Referring to cameras previously purchased through the former Area Assemblies, Members sought to understand whether any of those cameras could be brought back into use. In response it was confirmed that some of those cameras were not particularly reliable and the intention was to purchase a more reliable and modern product. It was confirmed that new cameras would be operated through a partnership arrangements have worked successfully in collaboration with South Yorkshire Police. Members noted the intention for the specification for the cameras to be much higher than previously had been the case.

Members thought it was important that the public be informed that there continued to be a need to report issues even with cameras in place. Officers acknowledged that this was an important issue and the location of cameras would be reviewed.

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Members also sought assurances in respect of maintenance costs, training and review. In response it was acknowledged that the cameras would be breaking, but there would be a degree of maintenance required. It was confirmed that operators of cameras would need additional training, but this could be delivered in-house, so no additional cost implications would be anticipated.

Resolved:-

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That all Members be notified of the arrangements and process for re-locating cameras in their wards.
3. That arrangements be made to notify residents of deployment and use of mobile cameras.
4. That a report reviewing the use of the cameras be submitted to Improving Places Select Commission six months after implementation.

54. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair reported that there were no items of business requiring urgent consideration by the Board.

55. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:-

That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be held on Wednesday 12 September 2018 at 11.00 a.m. in Rotherham Town Hall.