

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday, 28th November, 2018

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

Apologies were received from Councillor Keenan.

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

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

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Walsh declared a personal interest in item 5 (Community Energy Switching Scheme) on the basis of his role as a Corporate Member of the Energy Institute.

The Chair (Councillor Steele) declared a personal interest in item 6 (Universal Credit Roll Out in Rotherham) on the basis of his role as a trustee of the Citizens Advice Bureau, which was providing support to individuals.

9. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

10. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair advised that agenda item 5 (Community Energy Switching Scheme) contained exempt information which the Board would wish to discuss. Consequently, it was

Resolved:-

That under Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for agenda item 5 (Community Energy Switching Scheme) on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of such Act indicated, as now amended by the Local Government (Access to Information)(Variation) Order 2006.

11. COMMUNITY ENERGY SWITCHING SCHEME

Consideration was given to a report due to be considered by the Cabinet on 17 December 2018 concerning proposals to establish a Community Energy Switching Scheme.

It was reported that the proposed scheme would be open to all Rotherham residents and would reduce the number of households paying high tariffs for gas and electricity and reduce fuel poverty. Although the scheme would be open to all residents it should be particularly beneficial for hard to reach and vulnerable tenants that were generally considered to be the groups that required the greatest support to identify and change to a cheaper tariff.

It was expected that residents could save around £200 to £300 per year in an average 3 bedroom semi-detached houses. A Community Energy Switching Scheme report had been discussed at the former Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting on 9 July 2018, where it had been agreed that a feasibility study should be undertaken and a report be brought back for consideration. Having completed the feasibility study, approval was sought to carry out an OJEU procurement process to identify a potential partner to develop a community energy switching scheme and inform a business case that will be developed based on the results of the tender.

Members sought clarification in respect of the proposed marketing campaign and advised that it would be crucial to target groups and individuals, with GP surgeries be a suggested venue for marketing materials to be placed. In response it was confirmed that the marketing strategy was subject to development, however it could not be rolled out until the procurement process had been completed, which mean that June or July 2019 was expected to the date for roll out. It was noted that additional resources would be required to undertake this work.

Members sought assurances the customer support and service standards were built into the specification for the scheme to ensure that the local people would receive a high quality service, as well as lower costs. It was also felt that this was an important work stream and, as such, the Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy should maintain oversight over performance in respect of customer support and service standards.

Further discussions were held in respect of the procurement process and the criteria that may be used in determining which scheme and supplier would be chosen.

Resolved:-

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That Cabinet be asked to ensure that customer support and service standards are built into the tender framework.
3. That the performance of customer support and service standards be reported on a quarterly basis to the Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy.

12. UNIVERSAL CREDIT ROLL OUT IN ROTHERHAM

Consideration was given to a report submitted by the Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health in respect of the roll out of Universal Credit across the borough on 11 July 2018. It was reported that individuals move onto the Universal Credit system when they are a new claimant or if there is a change in their circumstances which would trigger the changeover from legacy benefits.

The report explained that working groups continue to meet at both strategic and operational levels, which have brought together service providers, the Department for Work and Pensions, Jobcentre Plus and other relevant partners, including Rotherfed and the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

It was reported that, as at 21 September 2018, there had been 58 referrals for Personal Budgeting Support, of which 43 claimants attended the subsequent appointment, meaning that 26% of referrals had failed to attend. It was advised referral rates needed to be maintained, as the value of grant funding received by the Council was based on forecasted referral rates provided by the Department of Work and Pensions. For Personal Budgeting Support it was anticipated there would be 799 Personal Budgeting Support appointments by 31 March 2019.

It was further reported that the migration of 720 Universal Credit Live Service claimants (single people who made a claim locally between December 2015 and December 2017) commenced on 19 September 2018. It was expected that all claimants in this group would be transferred by December 2018, prior to the national computer system for Universal Credit Live Service claims being switched off early in the New Year. The Housing Service would continue to support all affected tenants to offer support as required given the claimant would need to activate a new claim for the Universal Credit Full Service.

Members sought assurances that the Council was prioritising the residents of Rotherham, rather than the risk of rent arrears hitting the finances of the Housing Revenue Account. In response, it was advised that the Housing Income Team had been restructured to help support tenants with financial advice in the context of Universal Credit. Members observed that the support offered was limited and could not be regarded as an advocacy service. In response to a question regarding contact from the Council when entering arrears, it was confirmed that tenants would receive a notification immediately and a conversation with the service would take place within three weeks of entering arrears.

Members expressed some surprise at the report citing an absence of difficulties being experienced by partners in providing support following the roll out of Universal Credit. In response, it was confirmed that it was still relatively early in the transition and that a further report would break down the issues relating to impact on housing tenants and the broader impact of implementation of Universal Credit on residents in the borough, which would take into account the demand on foodbanks and other support services, including services across the Council. It was recognised that it was still relatively early in the roll out and the Council was not responsible for the implementation, but it was driven by Government through the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

Assurances were sought from Members that training for staff in respect of assisting tenants with making claims for housing benefit had taken place across the authority, rather than just in the Housing Service. It was confirmed that there had been a corporate roll out of the training. Further concerns were expressed that communication with DWP was creating issues which were impacting on residents. Further assurances were providing that senior officers were meeting with DWP to ensure that services were more joined up and effective in responding to a moveable issue with the Government's position on Universal Credit being uncertain in some areas.

Resolved:-

1. That a further report be submitted to the Board on the impact of the roll out of Universal Credit.
2. That the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and the Chair of the Improving Lives Select Commission work with the Scrutiny Officer to assist in the scoping of the future report from the Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health.

13. YOUTH CABINET/YOUNG PEOPLE'S ISSUES

The Chair reported that a motion had been submitted for the Council meeting on 5 December 2018 to thank young people for their work in developing the South Yorkshire Transport Charter, which had been developed after a Children's Commissioner Takeover Challenge with Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

Furthermore he paid tribute to the excellent presentation by the Rotherham Youth Cabinet on 13 November 2019 of the manifesto for the year ahead. Members wished for their thanks to be recorded to the Rotherham Youth Cabinet.

Resolved:-

1. That the update be noted.

2. That the thanks of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be extended to the Rotherham Youth Cabinet for the excellent launch of their manifesto on 13 November 2018.

14. WORK IN PROGRESS - SELECT COMMISSIONS

The Chair invited the Select Commission Chairs to provide updates on current and planned activities:-

Health Select Commission

Councillor Evans reported that the Commission had not met since his last update, but was due to meet on 29 November 2018 where consideration would be given to the role of integrated care and an update on the performance of the drug and alcohol treatment recovery service. The Commission would also be considering themes for spotlight reviews in the coming months.

Improving Lives Select Commission

Councillor Cusworth reported that there had not been a further meeting since the last update to Overview and Scrutiny Management Board earlier that month. However, at the next meeting on 4 December 2018, the Commission was due to receive the annual reports of the Local Children's Safeguarding Board and Local Adults Safeguarding Board. Furthermore, an update on domestic abuse was expected to be received in January 2019.

Improving Places Select Commission

Councillor Mallinder reported that the Commission would meet informally on 11 December 2018 to consider proposals to be reported to Cabinet in respect of the Clean Air Zone. Any recommendations from this meeting would be reported to Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 12 December 2018. The next formal meeting of the Commission was scheduled for 20 December 2018 where reports on Asset Management and the draft Rotherham Skills and Employment Plan were due to be considered.

Resolved:-

That the updates be noted.

15. CALL-IN ISSUES

The Chair reported that there were no call-in issues arising from recent Cabinet decisions.

16. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair reported that there was no business requiring urgent consideration by the Board.

17. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**Resolved:-**

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