

THE CABINET
21st December, 2020

Present:- Councillor Read (in the Chair); Councillors Alam, Allen, Beck, Hoddinott, Lelliott, Roche, Steele and Watson.

Also in attendance Councillor Steele (Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board)

86. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

87. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

- (1) Mr. Felstead referred to a previous question he had asked regarding housing schemes and informed Cabinet that he had received a response via a Freedom of Information request that stated the loss was at £15.4 Million. Mr Felstead claimed that there had been untruths presented at Cabinet that should be looked into. In response the Leader confirmed that he was not aware of any untruths told but stated that he would look into it.

Mr. Felstead's substantive question related to the proposed demolition of the old Primark building in the town centre and whether any alternative uses had been looked into, such as the relocation of the indoor markets. He also asked for the cost benefit analysis to be sent to him along with details of any alternative development plans.

The Strategic Director Regeneration and Environment explained that the old Primark building had been put forward as part of the Towns Fund process which was Government funding. As part of that process a Board had to be established which was chaired by the private sector. The input from the Board had led to proposals to spend the first £1 Million of the Fund. The rest would form part of a bid that would be submitted to Government in January 2021. In terms of the rationale behind the plan to demolish the building, an overall aim was to shrink the amount of retail footprint in the town centre due to the increase in online shopping. Other buildings and areas within the town centre were being repurposed for residential development or leisure development. The demolition of the old Primark building would allow for more public open space but would also keep open the possibility of future development on the site.

In response to a comment from Mr. Felstead on why the building was not listed in the Town Centre Masterplan as a building that detracted from the town centre, the Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy explained that the Plan had to evolve to keep up with changes. Addressing Mr. Felstead's concerns about anti-social behaviour at the site if only one third of the site was turned into the public open space as set out in the planning application, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the Council did hold regular meetings with South Yorkshire Police and with town centre businesses to address anti-social behaviour issues. The Cabinet Member agreed to raise the issue of police attendance at incidents in the town centre with the Assistant Director for Community Safety and Street Scene. The Cabinet Member also confirmed that the old Primark building had been selected by the Town Centre Board and that there would be no waste land as part of the proposal.

The Leader agreed he would look into what documents could be sent to Mr. Felstead regarding the old Primark building scheme.

88. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved:-

That the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 23rd November, 2020, be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

89. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

90. YEAR AHEAD PLAN - QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT

Consideration was given to the report which gave an update on progress in delivering the key activities in the Year Ahead Plan (the Plan.) Appendix 1 to the report was a milestone tracker whilst Appendix 2 detailed the initial equality screening assessment for the Plan. The Plan had been approved by Cabinet on 21st September, 2020, and set out the Council's priorities and actions to support residents, communities and business up to May 2021. It was anticipated that a new Corporate Council Plan would be developed following the May 2021 local elections.

The Plan was framed around five themes: Thriving Neighbourhoods; Better Health and Wellbeing; Economic Recovery; New Ways of Working and Hope and Confidence in Rotherham. There were also two cross-cutting strands that were integral to each scheme, namely: Equalities and Social Justice, and Climate Impact. As of 25th November ,2020, 18% (14)

of the activities outlined in the Plan had been completed; 70% (54) were on track; 4% (3) had been delayed; 0% (0) were off-track and 8% (6) were not yet scheduled to start. The Leader confirmed that two out of the three actions that had been delayed were down to Central Government delays. The third was works at Herringthorpe Stadium which had been delayed due to the practicalities of the Pandemic.

Information was provided in the report on the activities relating to each of the five themes. The impact of these activities would continue to be measured through the Resident Satisfaction Survey as well as other key indicators such as the total funding dispersed to businesses affected by COVID restrictions and the increased social value from Council spend. Consultation with the public was a key priority and was ongoing.

The Head of Performance, Intelligence and Improvement confirmed that further reports would be brought to the Cabinet in order to keep them updated on the progress of the Plan.

The report had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board as part of the pre-decision scrutiny process. The Board were supportive of the recommendation and requested that a report on performance against Year Ahead activities be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on a quarterly basis and that the report provide a detailed narrative on performance exceptions, both positive and negative, including direction of travel and on the action being taken to improve performance as required.

Resolved:-

- (1) That the progress made with the Year Ahead activities is noted;
- (2) That a report on performance against Year Ahead activities be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on a quarterly basis; and
- (3) That the report provide a detailed narrative on performance exceptions, both positive and negative, including direction of travel and on the action being taken to improve performance as required.

91. HRA BUSINESS PLAN 2020-21

Consideration was given to a report which provided a detailed overview of the current position of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and the reason for any changes to the Business Plan.

It was reported that the HRA recorded all expenditure and income relating to the provision of council housing and related services, and the Council was required to produce a HRA Business Plan setting out its investment priorities over a 30-year period.

It was noted that there had been no significant Government policy changes that affected the business plan since the last update but there were some significant changes to the Consumer Price Index as a consequence of the COVID-19 Pandemic. This had resulted in the CPI being 1.5% lower than predicted when the Plan was last reviewed.

The Business Plan recognised the importance of continued investment in new affordable homes, focus on the next five years and would continue to be amended and reported annually. Given the economic uncertainty the overall position remained challenging, but given the level of reserves and the previous decision to defer some investment in stock until later in the Plan, the ability to divert resources to fund housing growth and contribute to the Year Ahead Plan remained.

The Business Plan operating account was at or around the minimum balance over the short to medium forecast. However, due to inflationary pressures, there was significant pressure on the longer term forecast. The key risks in the Business Plan were increased Right to Buy sales above those planned for, interest rate rises above those planned for and inflation. The risks were continuously monitored and mitigated by the Housing Service with support from Financial Services.

The Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed that £114 Million including grant income had already been, and would continue to be, invested in the Housing Growth Programme which supported the building of new affordable housing, shared ownership housing and open market housing. All projects not yet agreed would be subject to future Cabinet approval. There was also a focus on maintaining the existing Council Housing stock to the agreed standard and it was anticipated that over £1 Billion would be spent to achieve this over the course of the 30 year Plan. The Cabinet Member also confirmed that the Arundel Avenue and Braithwell Road schemes had been redesigned to deliver 14 bungalows rather than 12 as previously agreed.

Cabinet Members were very supportive of the Business Plan and expressed their pride at being able to deliver additional, high quality Council homes.

The report had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board as part of the pre-decision scrutiny process. The Board expressed their support for the recommendations and requested that a sub-group of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be established to feed into the work being carried out to develop housing on garage sites.

Resolved:-

That Cabinet recommends to Council to:

- (1) approve the proposed 2021-22 Base Case Option 1 for the HRA Business Plan;
- (2) approve the reprofiling of housing growth budgets to ensure resources are available at the right time to deliver on the annual housing development programme commitments as set out within paragraph 1.6 of the report;
- (3) review the plan annually to provide an updated financial position; and
- (4) That Cabinet agrees that a sub-group of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be established to feed into the work being carried out to develop housing on garage sites.

92. HOUSING RENT AND SERVICE CHARGES

Consideration was given to a report that sought approval for the proposed values of the housing rents, non-dwelling rents, District Heating and service charges and the draft Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2021/22. Attached to the report at Appendices 1 and 2 were the Initial Equality Screening Assessment form Part A and Part B. Appendix 3 was the draft Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2021/22.

From April 2016, social landlords had been required to reduce their rents by 1% each year for four years, 2019/20 being the final year. It was now for Cabinet to decide which option to choose for 2021/22. A number of options were set out in section 3 of the report. Housing rents option 1 had been recommended for approval and would mean an increase of 1.5% on rent for social housing. This was an increase by CPI plus 1% which was in line with Government guidance. Option 1 would result in an average rent increase of £1.12 per week from £74.21 to £75.22.

Non-dwelling rents option 2 had been recommended for approval. That would result in an increase on non-dwelling charges of 2% for 2021/22 in line with the recommended increase being applied across the Council. There were no proposed increases for the District Hearing scheme.

The Cabinet Member for Housing explained that the increases to housing rents would allow for the maximum amount of funding to support ongoing maintenance and management services for Council dwellings. The Leader explained that a substantial number of social renters would not have to pay all of the increase and that a minority of social renters would not have to pay any of the increase as this would be covered by the housing benefit they received.

The report had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board as part of the pre-decision scrutiny process and the Board supported the recommendations.

Resolved:-

That the Cabinet note the content of the report and recommend to Council: -

- (1) That dwelling rents are increased by 1.5% in 2021/22 (Option 1) in line with the Government policy on rents for social housing which allows rents to increase by Consumer Price Index (CPI) (as at September) plus 1%;
- (2) That shared ownership rents are increased by 1.6% in 2021/22 (Option 1) in line with the Government policy on rents for social housing which allows rents to increase by Retail Price Index (RPI) (as at September) plus 0.5%;
- (3) That there is a 2% increase (Option 2) in charges for garages and parking spaces, communal facilities, cooking gas and use of laundry facilities, in line with the Council's policy on fees and charges;
- (4) That the unit charge per Kwh for District Heating Schemes remains the same level as agreed by the Council in December 2017.
- (5) That the draft Housing Revenue Account budget for 2021/22 be approved.

93. NEIGHBOURHOOD ROAD SAFETY FUND PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report on the Neighbourhood Road Safety Fund Programme. The Programme had been approved in 2019/20 and Cabinet were asked to approve the second tranche of the Programme for delivery in 2020/21 and 2021/22. With a budget of £150,000 per year for three years to March 2022, the aim of the Programme was to address local community road safety concerns.

Cabinet were asked to approve the delivery of 19 schemes as identified following consultation in July 2020. Details of the schemes were provided in Appendix 3 to the report. Appendix 1 contained the Impact Assessment Screening Form whilst Appendix 2 was a progress update on Tranche 1 of the Programme. The Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety explained that 19 schemes had been completed during Year 1 of the Programme.

The report had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board as part of the pre-decision scrutiny process. The Board supported the recommendations and asked the Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety to give further consideration to actions that could be taken to ensure that pedestrian crossings and other road infrastructure across the Borough fully takes into account the needs of vulnerable road users.

Resolved:-

- (1) That Cabinet approve the delivery of 19 schemes identified following the latest round of consultation in July 2020 as detailed in Appendix 3; and
- (2) That the Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety give further consideration to actions that could be taken to ensure that pedestrian crossings and other road infrastructure across the Borough fully takes into account the needs of vulnerable road users.

94. REVISION TO THE HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE POLICY 2020-23 IMPLEMENTATION SCHEME

Consideration was given to a report on the proposed revision to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy 2020-23 Implementation Scheme. Cabinet had approved the new policy in March 2020 but due to COVID-19 it had not been possible to implement some of the policy changes. The implementation scheme had therefore been amended to set out new dates by which the policy would be applied in full.

The original scheme was set out in Appendix 2 to the report with the amended scheme at Appendix 3. Appendix 1 was the Equality Impact Analysis. The amended scheme would be fully implemented by 31st July 2021. The Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety confirmed that the report contained a recommendation to allow for additional short-term resources to ensure the effective and timely delivery of training. The training would include refresher training to any driver renewing their driving licence application. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic the training would need to be delivered virtually. Training on safeguarding would also be undertaken. Public consultations that had been delayed due to the pandemic would also take place.

Resolved:-

- (1) That Cabinet approve the implementation of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2020-2023 as outlined in Section 2 of this report and in accordance with the implementation scheme attached as Appendix 3; and

(2) That Cabinet approve the additional short-term staffing requirement, to ensure the effective and timely delivery of training, as detailed in Section 2.4, funded from within the Directorate.

95. REVISION TO THE HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE POLICY 2020-23 IMPLEMENTATION SCHEME

Consideration was given to the circulated report, the contents of which were included as part of the relevant items and the details included accordingly.

96. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next virtual meeting of the Cabinet be held on Monday, 25th January, 2021, at 10.00 a.m.