

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday 16 December 2020

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors R. Elliott, Jarvis, Jepson, Keenan, Mallinder, Napper, Taylor, Walsh and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillor Cusworth.

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

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

271. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 18 NOVEMBER 2020

Resolved: -

That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 18 November 2020 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

272. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Napper declared a personal interest in Agenda items 7 and 8 (Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2020-21 and Housing Rent and Service Charges 2021-22), as he had a relative who was a Council tenant.

Councillor Wyatt declared a pecuniary interest in Agenda items 7 and 8 (Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2020-21 and Housing Rent and Service Charges 2021-22), as was the holder a garage tenancy with the Council.

Councillors Jepson, Taylor and Walsh declared a personal interest in Agenda item 9 (Neighbourhood Road Safety Fund Programme) as they had submitted successful requests to the Neighbourhood Road Safety Fund Programme.

The Chair confirmed that the members who had made declarations would be allowed to participate in the discussions on the items as the meeting was not making decisions in relation to the recommendations.

273. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

274. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items requiring the exclusion of the public or press.

275. YEAR AHEAD PLAN - QUARTERLY PROGRESS REPORT

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 21 December 2020 that provided a report on the on progress made in delivering the key activities as set out in the Council's Year Ahead Plan in the plan. The Leader of the Council and the Head of Policy, Performance and IntelligenceInformation attended the meeting to present the report.

The report noted that the Year Ahead Plan was the Council's plan for operating in and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and that it set out key activities for the Council for the period September 2020 to May 2021. The report stated that the plan detailed in the key activities that would be undertaken in order for the Council to support residents, communities and businesses through the ongoing challenges and uncertainties of the pandemic and also direct the Council's ambitious plans for Rotherham's future.

The Leader noted that of all the activities contained in the Year Ahead Plan:

- 18% (14) of the activities had been completed as planned,
- 70% (54) were on track to be completed on schedule,
- 4% (3) had been delayed,
- 8% (6) activities were still to reach their scheduled start date,
- No activities were off track.

The Leader advised that the three activities that had been delayed had been impacted by the restrictions surrounding the pandemic.

The Leader provided further information surrounding the activity that had been taking place to deliver on the actions detailed in the Year Ahead Plan. A document that outlined progress against all of the actions contained within the Year Ahead Plan was attached as an appendix to the officer's report.

Members asked how confident the Leader was that all the activities detailed in the Year Ahead Plan would be completed on time. The Leader assured members that there was high confidence that all the planned activities would be completed on schedule.

Members also welcomed the planned innovations surrounding an appointment based system for face-to-face customer service contact, noting that while the necessity of the change had come from the impact of the pandemic, the change would result in an improved experience for customers.

Members asked whether the services that were being provided by the Rough Sleeper Initiative team, that would be working to provide intense support for all non-priority customers placed in emergency

accommodation and for those at risk of rough sleeping, would continue throughout the current year and into the future. The Cabinet Member for Housing, who was in attendance at the meeting advised that it was planned that the services offered would continue and that they would supplement the Council's existing homelessness support services.

Members asked for further information on how council buildings would be used in the future, as new ways of working, with more staff working at home or flexibly in other ways would likely continue post-pandemic. Members noted any plans for the Council's estate should be ambitious and innovative. The Leader noted that work around the rationalisation of Council buildings had been progressing for some years prior to the pandemic, and as such any further made changes as a result of the pandemic may be more limited due to the significant work that had already taken place.

The Leader noted that Riverside House had been designed around modern, flexible working practices with hot desking in place and an assumption being made that staff would be at times working flexibly. The Leader advised that as such any further changes to working practices and accommodation at Rotherham would be less wide ranging than at other local authorities who had prior to the pandemic had more traditional ways of working.

The Chair asked whether the current format of the document that outlined the progress made against the actions contained within the Year Ahead Plan would be used in future as the document did not provide the level of detail that previous progress reports on Council Plan actions had had. The Head of Policy, Performance and Information advised that the format of the report would evolve over time with more detail and visual aids added in future reports.

The Chair asked for further information on the monitoring surrounding activities not included in the Year Ahead Plan. The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence Information assured the Chair that detailed monitoring was taking place of these activities and reports are routinely shared with cabinet members and the Leader.

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council and the Head of Policy, Performance and Information for attending the meeting and answering member's questions.

Resolved: -

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. 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 provides a detailed narrative on performance exceptions, both positive and negative, including direction of travel, and on the actions being taken to improve performance as required.

276. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN 2020-21

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 21 December 2020 regarding the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. The Cabinet Member for Housing, the Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health, Strategic Housing and Investment Manager and the Business and Commercial Programme Manager attended the meeting to present the report.

The report stated that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) recorded all expenditure and income relating to the provision of council housing and related services, and as such the Council was required to produce an HRA Business Plan that was reviewed annually to set out its investment priorities over a 30 year period.

In introducing the report, the Cabinet Member for Housing noted that despite the challenges that the continuation of right to buy sales presented for the HRA Business Plan, the Council continued to be committed to delivering new affordable housing across the Borough. The Cabinet Member also noted the Council's continued commitment to, and continued success in ensuring that all Council homes met or exceeded the national decent homes standard.

This report provided a detailed technical overview of the current position of the HRA Business Plan and detailed the reasons for proposed changes. It was noted that the report was to be considered alongside the subsequent report that detailed the proposed 2021-22 rents and service charges.

Members asked for further information on the level of rent arrears that were currently owed and on the activity that was being taken to recover the money owed. The Business and Commercial Programme Manager advised that there was currently £5million of rent arrears owed, including money owed by former tenants. The Business and Commercial Programme Manager advised that the level of rent arrears owed had reduced by £1million over the last year and not noted that the average level of debt owed by each tenant was around £84. Members were assured that all possible steps were being taken to recover rent arrears, including the writing off of very old arrears where appropriate. The Cabinet Member noted the significant investment that had been made in systems and processes to enable improved management and recovery of rent arrears. Members welcomed the significant reduction in the amount of

rent arrears owed.

Members noted the challenges that Universal Credit created for tenants and consequently the Council with regard to paying rent and asked what steps were being taken to reduce the risk of increased rent arrears and possible homelessness for tenants with more tenants claiming Universal Credit, of The Business and Commercial Programme Manager advised that there was significant support available to both new and existing tenants via the Financial Inclusion and Tenancy Support teams to help tenants avoid getting into financial difficulties and to support those who were experiencing problems paying their rent. The Business and Commercial Programme Manager advised that both services were successful in supporting tenants maintain their tenancies and noted that the number of evictions had reduced from the numbers seen in previous years.

Members noted with approval the services that were offered and sought assurance that the services had the capacity to deal with an increase in demand due to the economic impact of the pandemic. The Business and Commercial Programme Manager assured members that the services had the capacity to cope with an increase in demand.

Members noted with concern the challenges that right to buy sales created for the HRA. Members asked whether there should be an increased focus on the development of shared ownership properties by the Council, as these properties would enable the Council to maintain and increase the number of affordable homes, but also give people the chance to move towards the goal of owning their own property. The Cabinet Member advised that the Council had developed with great success some shared ownership properties and agreed with members that shared ownership could be a better option than right to buy for many people who aspired to own their own home.

Members asked for further information on the programme of development of Council owned garage sites for housing across the Borough. The Strategic Housing and Investment Manager advised that plans for their development were being progressed and that members would be consulted with on developments in their wards in order to ensure that local needs were met.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health, Strategic Housing and Investment Manager and the Business and Commercial Programme Manager for attending and presenting the report and answering members' questions.

Resolved: -

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.

2. 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.

277. HOUSING RENT AND SERVICE CHARGES 2021-22

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 21 December 2020 regarding Housing Revenue Account Rents and Service Charges 2021/22. The Cabinet Member for Housing attended the meeting to present the report.

The Cabinet Member for Housing noted that the report would be considered in conjunction with the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan report that members had just discussed as the as proposed rents and service charges for 2021/22 supported the assumptions that had been used in the preparation of the in the Business Plan.

The Cabinet Member advised that it was being recommended that for 2021/22 that housing rents should be increased by 1.5%. The Cabinet Member advised that this increase was in line with Government policy on rents for social housing and would result in an average rent increase of £1.12 per week from £74.21 to £75.33 per week for social renting tenants. It was noted that the increase in rent would increase rental income by approximately £1.1million that would then be used to support the ongoing maintenance and management of services for council homes.

It was noted that for non-dwelling properties, such as garages, garage plots, cooking gas supplies and communal facilities, that a 2% increase was being recommended in order to enable cost of supplying and managing these services to be covered. It was also proposed that there should be no increase is in the charges for district heating as it was being projected that the scheme would break even in 2021/22.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for attending and presenting the report and advised that the Board had no further questions as members had had the opportunity to discuss all areas of concern and interest during the consideration of the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan report.

Resolved: -

That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.

278. NEIGHBOURHOOD ROAD SAFETY FUND PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 21 December 2020 regarding the Neighbourhood Road Safety Fund Programme. The Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety, the Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment and the Interim Head of Transport

Infrastructure attended the meeting to present the report.

The report provided a progress report on the Neighbourhood Road Safety Fund Programme that had provided a budget of £450,000 over three years up to March 2022 to enable the implementation small scale road safety schemes in response to local concerns and needs. The report also provided information on the proposed schemes that would make up the second phase of the programme scheduled for delivery in 2020/21 and 2021/22. An appendix that provided full details of the progress of the schemes was attached as an appendix to the officer's report.

Members noted how welcome the scheme had been in supporting ward members with their neighbourhood working activities by enabling road safety schemes to be implemented in response to local concerns. Members also noted that they hoped that once the current scheme had ended that funding would continue to be available to implement schemes that were informed by local needs.

Members also asked several specific questions surrounding speed limit enforcement and road safety.

Members expressed concern regarding the ability vulnerable road users such as the elderly and people with reduced mobility to cross roads safely due to road safety infrastructure often not meeting their needs. Members also noted that the introduction of clean air initiatives had made some roads in the Borough much busier, making crossing them safely more difficult for vulnerable road users.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety noted that road safety was priority for the Council and that the funding that had been provided by the Neighbourhood Road Safety Fund was just part of this commitment to improving road safety for all road users and pedestrians. The Cabinet Member noted that large road crossings were not part of the neighbourhood scheme but advised that members should contact her directly if they had concerns about particular areas and the safety of vulnerable road users.

Members stated that there concerns about vulnerable road users were not confined to particular roads or crossings and advised that they were concerned about the safety of vulnerable road users crossing roads safely right across the Borough.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety, the Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment and the Interim Head of Transport Infrastructure for attending the meeting and answering member's questions.

Resolved: -

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.

2. That the Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety gives further consideration to actions that can be taken to ensure that pedestrian crossings and other road infrastructure across the Borough fully takes into account the needs of vulnerable road users.

279. WORK PROGRAMME

The Board considered its Work Programme.

Resolved: -

That the Work Programme be approved.

280. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Board considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions 1 December 2020 – 28 February 2021.

Resolved: -

That the Forward Plan be noted.

281. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no call-in issues.

282. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

283. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board will be held at 11am on Wednesday 20 January 2021 as Microsoft Teams meeting.