

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday 20 January 2021

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

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

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

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

284. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 2 AND 16 DECEMBER 2020

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, held on 2 and 16 December 2020, be approved as a correct record of proceedings.

285. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

286. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

287. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

288. COVID-19 - UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 25 January 2021 that provided an update on how the Council was currently responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and that also outlined proposals to introduce a local self-isolation support payment scheme. The Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, the Assistant Chief Executive, the Strategic Director – Adult Care, Housing and Public Health and the Director of Public Health attended the meeting to present the report.

The Leader noted that in addition to the national scheme of payments designed to support individuals who were required to self-isolate as a result of a positive diagnosis or from having been in close contact with an individual that had tested positive, the Council had been administering a scheme of discretionary payments for individuals who would as a result of self-isolating experience financial hardship but who were not in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

The Leader advised that for the discretionary payments scheme the Government would not be providing any additional funding once the funding that had already been allocated had been used. As such each local authority would be required to manage their allocation of funding by either making smaller payments, stopping payments once the fund had been exhausted or looking to fund discretionary payments through another route. It was noted that discretionary payments fund at Rotherham was expected to have been fully utilised during January 2021. The Leader advised that in order to address the likely shortfall on the discretionary payments scheme that it was being proposed that an additional discretionary payments fund be established that was funded with a sum of up to £100,000 to come from the Council's allocation of the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), £2.123m.

In addition to the additional funding being used to enable discretionary payments to continue to be made the Leader advised that it was proposed that a local self-isolation payments scheme be established to further support the Contain Strategy by further supporting and encouraging self-isolation where required. The Leader advised that the proposed local scheme would broadly follow the same principles of the Government's self-isolation support payment scheme, but that entitlement would not be based on financial hardship. The Leader advised that the only requirement to be able to access the scheme would be for individuals to be able to provide evidence of loss of income due to having had to self-isolate. The Leader stated that the aim of the scheme would be to encourage and incentivise individuals to self-isolate if they were required to do so. It was noted that the payments of £250 would be funded from the COMF, with a maximum funding allocation of £100,000.

The report provided an update that was summarised by the Chief Executive and the Assistant Chief Executive on key activities surrounding the pandemic including support for businesses, community testing, enforcement activity, the Community Hub and support for vulnerable residents and the roll out of the vaccination programme in Rotherham. The Director of Public Health provided information on the latest case figures surrounding the pandemic in Rotherham.

The Chair asked for further information on the work that had been done with supermarkets on the Government direction regarding checks on their compliance with measures to ensure that supermarkets were as safe an environment as was possible. The Chief Executive advised that all large supermarkets were being visited to check compliance with safety procedures, with activity being targeted at shops where reports of non-compliance had been received. Members asked if the smaller local supermarkets would be visited to ensure that they were operating safely. The Assistant Chief Executive advised that the directive from Government had been to focus on large stores but assured members that if reports of non-compliance were received regarding smaller stores then these would be investigated.

Members welcomed the roll out of the vaccine programme across the

Borough and noted the reports of positive experiences of the programme that they had received from residents.

Members noted concerns about the temporary closure of the community testing facility at Forge Island due to concerns regarding flooding in the area. The Director of Public Health advised members that the testing site would reopen in the coming week and assured members that other testing sites across the Borough had more than enough capacity to take up the demand for testing that had been displaced from the Forge Island testing site.

Members noted their support for the additional local scheme of discretionary payments to help people self-isolate but expressed concern about reports about the high number of applications for discretionary support nationally being refused and asked whether this was the case in Rotherham. The Leader advised that unfortunately that this was the case in Rotherham, as while the scheme was administered locally, the rules were set nationally. The Leader assured members that as the proposed local support scheme would have different eligibility criteria to the other self-isolation support schemes it would enable more residents to be able to access the financial support that they needed.

Members asked for further information on the latest situation regarding the payment of financial support for businesses. The Head of Corporate Finance who was in attendance meeting provided further information on the payment of financial support and assured members that all payments were being made promptly and to all those businesses who were entitled to support.

Members asked about how the clinically extremely vulnerable residents who were accessing support from the Community Hub were being supported if they advised that they were experiencing financial difficulties. Members also asked how many clinically extremely vulnerable residents there were in the Borough. The Chief Executive advised that the Council's advocacy and other support services could assist with advice for residents who were experiencing financial difficulties as a result of the pandemic. The Leader noted that many of the financial concerns that people had were surrounding Council Tax and advised that options for support with or for the deferment of Council Tax payments were available. The Director of Public Health advised that information on the number of clinically extremely vulnerable residents in the Borough would be circulated to members.

Members asked if there were any expectations of further financial support being received from the Government to support increased costs related to the pandemic. The Strategic Director – Finance and Corporate Services who was in attendance at the meeting advised that there was no expectation of any further additional funding being received.

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive, the

Assistant Chief Executive, the Strategic Director – Adult Care, Housing and Public Health and the Director of Public Health for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

Resolved: -

That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.

289. NOVEMBER FINANCIAL MONITORING

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 25 January 2021 that set out the financial position of the Council as at the end of November 2020. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Finance, the Strategic Director - Finance and Customer Services and the Head of Corporate Finance attended the meeting to present the report.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services advised that the report was the latest in a series of financial monitoring reports and noted that the current report detailed the Council's the financial position as at the end of November 2020. The Cabinet Member stated that as at November 2020, the Council had a forecast year-end overspend of £23.6m on the General Fund, this however was mitigated in part by the Governments provision of COVID-19 emergency support grant and a Sales, Fees and Charges Income Compensation scheme that meant that the net forecast budget outturn was showing a £0.9m overspend was being forecast.

The report provided a full and detailed analysis on the current budget position (as at November 2020) for each of the Council's directorates as well as current information regarding the Council's Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme.

The Strategic Director – Finance and Customer Services assured members that despite the current projected overspend of £0.9m, that there was high confidence that there would be a balanced budget position by the end of the financial year.

The Chair noted the delayed implementation of the savings that had been detailed in the budget and asked what activity was taking place with directorates to ensure that the required savings that had been deferred until next year would be delivered. The Strategic Director advised that work was ongoing with directorates to ensure that the required savings were delivered and assured members that directorates understood clearly that it was essential that the savings that had been deferred to next year were delivered.

Members noted how well, in comparison to many other local authorities that the Council was managing the financial challenges created by the pandemic.

Members asked whether the recent bad winter weather, that had included several weeks of sub-zero night-time temperatures, snow and heavy rain would create any difficulties for the budget with regards to winter maintenance. The Strategic Director advised that the work had been carried out over recent years to realign budgets and to ensure that directorate budgets were realistic would ensure that the winter maintenance budget would be able to cover the demands of the recent bad weather. The Strategic Director - Regeneration and Environment who was in attendance at the meeting advised that while extra winter maintenance activity was budgeted for it would possibly have an impact on the delivery of other services due to staff being redeployed to work on winter maintenance activities and away from other activities. The Strategic Director also assured the Chair that staffing costs were as expected and that there were no concerns related to the cost of agency staff.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Finance, the Strategic Director - Finance and Customer Services and the Head of Corporate Finance for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

Resolved: -

That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.

290. COMMUNITY ENERGY SWITCHING SCHEME

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 25 January 2021 regarding proposals for the delivery of a Community Energy Switching Scheme. The Strategic Director – Regeneration Environment, the Assistant Director - Planning, Regeneration and Transport and the Environment, Energy and Data Manager attended the meeting to present the report.

The report stated that a community energy switching scheme would be open to all Rotherham residents and the aim of the scheme would be to reduce the number of households paying high tariffs for gas and electricity and consequently reduce fuel poverty. It was noted that though the scheme would be open to all residents, it would be of particular benefit for harder to reach and vulnerable residents, who may not be able to access energy switching services independently.

The development of a community energy switching scheme had first been approved by Cabinet on 17 December 2018, with Robin Hood Energy subsequently being awarded the contract, however due to various problems with the contract and Robin Hood Energy ceasing to trade a new approach had been needed to be developed. The Strategic Director – Regeneration and Environment noted that on 20 July 2020 that Cabinet had approved a procurement process in order to identify a potential

partner to develop a Community Energy Switching scheme. However, as only one bid had been received from a company that could not provide the level of service that was required, as well as not having all the required licences, the bid had been deemed to be a non-compliant bid.

The Strategic Director advised that due to the difficulties experienced with finding a suitable delivery partner the option that had also been approved by Cabinet on 20 July 2020 for the development of an internally delivered scheme as an alternative approach had been pursued.

The report stated that an internally managed scheme would be delivered by a Community Energy Officer that in 2020/21 would be funded from a combination of National Energy Action grant of £14,091 and directorate approved revenue budget. It was noted that further external funding, when available, would be used to extend or grow the scheme.

Members noted the length of time that the development of an energy switching scheme had been in development and agreed that the proposed option would enable activity to take place that would support residents who may not have the skills or internet access in order to switch energy providers.

The Chair asked how residents who needed support to switch providers, and who did not have access to the internet would be reached and engaged with. The Environment, Energy and Data Manager advised that online engagement activity would be supplemented by work with community groups and voluntary organisations in community settings that would ensure that those residents who did not have access to the internet could be engaged with and supported.

Members noted that the name of the scheme did not clearly describe its proposed purpose of supporting residents to switch to a cheaper energy tariff and were in agreement that a more suitable name should be considered for the scheme. Members also agreed that council tenants who were on the district heating scheme should be advised that the proposed switching scheme would only enable them to access alternative tariffs and providers for the supply of electricity.

The Chair thanked the Strategic Director – Regeneration Environment, the Assistant Director - Planning, Regeneration and Transport and the and Environment, Energy and Data Manager for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

Resolved: -

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That the name of the scheme be reviewed in order to ensure that it is both accessible to residents and clearly matches the objectives of the scheme.

3. That information on the number of residents in receipt of the district heating scheme be circulated to members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

291. DOMESTIC ABUSE SERVICES

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 25 January 2021 that detailed proposals for the recommissioning of Domestic Abuse Support Services. The Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety, the Assistant Director - Community Safety and Street Scene and the Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services attended the meeting to present the report.

Councillors Clark and Simpson, as members of the Improving Lives Select Commission joined the meeting at this point. The Chair had invited members of the Improving Lives Select Commission to attend the meeting for this item as Domestic Abuse Support Services had been an area of focus for the Commission.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety advised that Domestic Abuse remained a key priority for the Council and its partners through the Safer Rotherham Partnership (SRP). The report stated that current commissioned Domestic Abuse Support Service contracts were scheduled to come to an end on 30 September 2021. It was noted that a range of consultation, engagement and review activity had already taken place in respect of domestic abuse services and that this information would be used to identify the key issues that needed to be addressed as part of the recommissioning process and the establishment of a new system of support for victims of domestic abuse. The Cabinet Member advised the recommissioning process would be managed alongside the work surrounding the development of the Council's refreshed Domestic Abuse Strategy and that the new services would be supported by an increase in funding of £150,000 per year, with the total annual budget being £660,000.

The report provided details on a proposed engagement process that would be followed by a competitive procurement process with providers for the support services that would establish a new delivery model for victims of Domestic Abuse. The Cabinet Member advised that the new service provision would then offer a seamless service for victims, with an increased focus on prevention and early intervention alongside improved access to information and support. The Cabinet Member advised that the new services would have the flexibility in order to meet the needs of all communities, including victims of domestic abuse who were from minority ethnic groups or who were refugees and those in same sex relationships or who were transgender.

The report stated that it was proposed that the Council's refuge provision

should be recommissioned immediately in order to maintain current provision so as to ensure that the needs of victims and survivors of Domestic Abuse continued to be met and to ensure the seamless continuation of a female-only refuge space.

Members noted the impact of the pandemic on both incidents of domestic abuse and also on how services to support victims of domestic abuse were able to be delivered.

Members asked for further information on how Rotherham compared to other areas regarding numbers of domestic abuse incidents. The Cabinet Member advised that compared to the national average, incidents in Rotherham were slightly lower. The Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services noted that regular benchmarking activity took place to look how Rotherham compared to other areas both locally and nationally with regard to domestic abuse incidents. The Head of Community Safety advised that despite the impact of the pandemic, the number of incidents of domestic abuse reported in the last year had not shown any significant change to the numbers reported in previous years.

Members asked for further information on how the recommissioned services would support victims of domestic abuse who were not women suffering abuse from a man in a heterosexual relationship. The Cabinet Member noted that specialist and alternative provision was currently offered to support all victims of domestic abuse but advised that this needed to be developed further in order to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse had access to the support that they required via a universal and encompassing service offer. The Head of Community Safety provided further information on the services offered including houses throughout the Borough that could be accessed as refuge for victims who were not female, or who had older male children. The Cabinet Member assured members that the time scales for the recommissioning process had been designed to ensure that an innovative and inclusive service offer could be fully developed.

Members asked how a seamless service could be offered, as in order to meet the evolving needs and circumstances of victims in a responsive way it was often essential to refer victims to another service at different points in their journey of receiving support. The Cabinet Member advised in order to provide a service that was both seamless and also responsive that it was essential that the recommissioned services were fully integrated in order to ensure that the most relevant support could always be provided to victims of domestic abuse as their support needs changed and evolved. The Head of Community Safety advised that as the levels of risk and support needed by victims of domestic abuse changed the risk assessment process was agile enough to respond to these changes and to ensure that the most appropriate support services would always be provided.

Members asked for further information on the figure in the report that estimated that 27,000 women and girls in Rotherham had at one time

been a victim of domestic abuse at one time. The Head of Community Safety advised that this was an estimated figure but noted that there were approximately 6,000 domestic abuse incidents reported to the police each year. The Cabinet Member assured members that the number of incidents of domestic abuse were constantly monitored.

Members noted their support for the Council's continued commitment to provide refuges for victims of domestic abuse in the Borough. Members asked for further information on the proposal that the contracts for the provision of refuge services would be shorter than for other aspects of the support service. The Cabinet Member advised that the timescales were different as the service provided by refuges would be carrying on as before and would be recommissioned immediately, whereas the other support services were being redesigned with the timescales allocated to allow the design process be responsive to the details of the upcoming Domestic Abuse Act from the Government.

Members asked for clarification on how the success of the services provided would be measured. The Cabinet Member advised that success would be measured by using a range of activities including peer reviews of the service, data analysis and detailed case reviews. The Cabinet Member also assured members that the proposed funding for the provision of services would be sufficient to meet the anticipated demand.

Members asked for assurances on the level of support that the Council currently offered victims of support with regard to rehousing. The Cabinet Member advised that victims of domestic abuse who were seeking to be rehoused were always placed in the highest priority band for the allocation of a property.

Members asked how confident the Cabinet Member and officers were that the commissioning process would attract interest from a wide range of service providers. The Cabinet Member advised that the pre-market engagement activity, combined with the longer than usual recommissioning process should generate interest from a broad range of different service providers.

Members asked whether there were sufficient numbers of dispersed properties available to provide refuge to victims of domestic abuse who were not female or who had older male children and who could not be placed in the larger refuge centres. The Cabinet Member assured members that the funding was there for these types of properties but advised that ideally there would be more of these properties available.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Community Safety, the Assistant Director - Community Safety and Street Scene and the Head of Community Safety and Regulatory Services for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

The Chair of the Improving Lives Select Commission thanked the Chair

for inviting its members to the meeting for the consideration the item.

Resolved: -

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That the contracts made with providers for Domestic Abuse support services should enable the Council to review outcomes and the methods of delivery at key intervals throughout the lifetime of the contracts in order to ensure that the services provided remained fit for purpose.
3. That the results of the pre-market engagement exercise, due to be completed by end May 2021, be circulated to members of the Improving Lives Select Commission.
4. That the members of the Improving Lives Select Commission have the opportunity to feed into the development of the outcome-based service specification for Domestic Abuse support services.

292. WORK PROGRAMME

The Board considered its Work Programme.

Resolved: -

That the Work Programme be approved.

293. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Board considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions 1 January – 31 March 2021.

Resolved: - That the Forward Plan be noted.

294. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no call-in issues.

295. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business.

296. 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 10 February 2021 as Microsoft Teams meeting.