

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 2 February 2021**

Present:- Councillor Mallinder (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Brookes, B. Cutts, Elliot, Jacques, Jepson, Jones, Khan, McNeely, Rushforth, Sansome, Sheppard, Taylor and Tweed.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Birch, Reeder and Wyatt.

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

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

118. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 8 DECEMBER 2020

Resolved:-

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 December 2020 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

119. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

120. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

The Chair confirmed that no questions had been submitted.

121. 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 or public from the meeting.

122. UPDATE ON CODE OF PRACTICE FOR HIGHWAYS INSPECTION, ASSESSMENT, AND MAINTENANCE

Consideration was given to a report providing an update in terms of progress with the implementation and details of Highway Maintenance performance data, customer satisfaction survey data and relevant internal audit reports.

In discussion, Members requested details regarding puddling of LED street lighting. The response noted that very few complaints had been received, and the light level was above the code of practice for street lighting. The team had even met with residents at midnight to look at light levels where there had been concerns. It was clarified that the brightness could not simply be adjusted; the bulb heads must in fact be swapped for brighter ones.

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More information was also requested regarding the provision of training, mentorships and apprenticeships during the pandemic. The response from officers noted that apprenticeships were still being encouraged, but the training had been a challenge this year. Assurances were provided that any new starter was always assigned to work alongside an experienced staff member to learn from them.

Clarification was requested as to the difference between adopted and unadopted highways, and how members of the public might be aware of the difference. The response from officers noted that some members of the public do inquire from time to time about particular roads. In the broadest sense, a road that is unadopted is maintained at the public expense. The team keep detailed records of all the roads and footpaths that are the team's responsibility to maintain. If the team becomes aware of a stretch of road that is unadopted, they reach out to the street manager, who is often the owner of the property fronting that road, to encourage them to take responsibility for the maintenance to reduce the Council's liability.

Further details were requested regarding graffiti on road signage or obscured road signage. The response described how the inspection policy looks at all things on the highway, and, if there is graffiti, that will be removed, and if signs are obscured by trees or brush, the property owner is requested to clear the obstruction. If the obstruction is Council-owned hedges, for example, the grounds team are asked to carry out the necessary work.

Further details were requested regarding the renewal of street works qualification training for highway inspectors after five years have elapsed. The response affirmed that the Council sponsors this training to be renewed so that all inspectors have up-to-date training and qualifications.

With regard to the site reference block headings on page 77 of the agenda pack, clarification was offered outside the meeting.

A public thanks was stated by Members for the team's preparedness and response to recent weather events.

Members requested clarification around the rate of response the team receives on the surveys that are returned following works, and how COVID has affected the collection of this feedback. It was confirmed that the survey is conducted on paper. With a preliminary answer of about 20-30% which has been the return rate in the past, a definitive up-to-date answer was offered outside the meeting.

Members requested assurances that the street plans will be conducted on time in addition to weather-related urgent repairs. The response provided information on the process by which highway inspectors identify the vast majority of defects. Two standard teams are in rotation, and in the winter, there are three and sometimes four teams so that there is sufficient resource to meet the need. The response noted that the team conducting

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street works according to plans are not the same staff who respond to emergent weather events. In the recent near flood event, the MET office signalled the team early enough that 4000 sandbags were deployed to residents, and the pumps at Catcliffe and Thurcroft were utilised. No internal flooding was experienced. Colleagues in Neighborhoods, Grounds, Cleansing, etc. all responded to the recent event and prevented a potential flood. Some of the dykes flowed into the roads, and it was noted that six roads had been temporarily closed during the response. Regional partners and colleagues reported that they had more awareness of proactive actions through their engagement with the Council, which prevented a lot of electrical equipment from being damaged. Therefore, they were able to bring their services back online faster. One of the advantages to the virtual meetings that was noted was that officers onsite could show the group in the meeting the real-time, live situation. Coordinated information was passed through from customers, technician engineers out on site, and officers in the office making decisions. Strategic decisions were made based on live, real-time information—the first time this had been possible. There were regular Member briefings and engagement from Members about their local communities. The high levels of engagement made what would have been a serious flood into a near miss.

If there is a peak that means the teams are having to deal with the emergencies instead of the planned work, it was requested that this be fed back to members and to the Committee. If the situation arises, officers will take the first opportunity to communicate the lessons learned through neighbourhood colleagues. Officers noted that, when weather happens, the maintenance that was scheduled for that day cannot be performed that day. The maintenance schedules therefore have time built in for weather interruptions. What can be noted is that the allocated funding is spent each year to deliver the maintenance programme on time and to budget. It is also something that Members can trust officers to be honest about interruptions that are going to shift that programme and feed back to Members if so.

Members noted that many constituents may not know the difference between a pothole and a scrape. Details were requested about potholes that have to be re-filled. The performance data was referenced in the response regarding the pothole data, wherein the repair to a percentage of potholes are re-inspected for quality assurance purposes. A few repaired potholes can potentially fail for a number of possible reasons. The conditions for repairing potholes are sometimes not optimal, but the repair must be carried out anyway, because it is imperative to make the road safe.

Further information was also requested around pathways and materials such as flagstones, where contractors have previously damaged the pathway surfaces years ago. The response indicated that tarmac footways are installed as a practice, unless there is a particular material in use on the estate, for example. In that case, an in-kind material is used for replacement to maintain the aesthetic. All contractors must guarantee their work for two years after completion, unless it is a deep work which is guaranteed for three years following the work.

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Based on the high repudiation rates, Members inquired if there were common misconceptions which complainants report because they are believed to be a breach when they actually are not. The response described that many of the possible questions of this kind are answered by having robust inspection policy based on the national code of practice, and the service provides that information. Often the questions do not proceed to court. Sometimes there are misconceptions around what constitutes a defect, and it comes down to the “reasonableness” that the court finds on the day. The service finds that most of the cases come out in the Council’s favour which is reassuring because there are lessons to be learned if not. This is because of the robust inspection and maintenance programme that is routinely carried out.

Officers further noted that the numbers do not currently indicate that there is a problem in Rotherham. If the repudiation rates started to tailor away and the performance dropped, then improvement measures would be put into place. The data is reported on a regular basis and monitored closely. The reason for the dropping number of claims in the past year could be owing to COVID with fewer people using the roads. As the pothole numbers and the claims come down, repudiation numbers also come down. Often when people make contact initially, they are satisfied with the answer they receive because they can be reassured that there is a robust system in place.

Members also asked about the cleaning of grates and drains on the roadsides. The response clarified that the drainage team inspect the drains and 46,000 gullies, some more than once a year, especially if they are in the high-speed, high-risk locations. The team carries out about between 60,000 and 70,000 visits per year to inspect the gullies. That data is collected in the telematics, and if gullies can be cleared by the inspection team, that is completed at that point; or, if further work is required, that is passed to the maintenance team for unearthing and clearing.

Members also asked for advice around how to escalate the issue about contractors that have created disruption and damage through recent works. The response was twofold: first, to let the Highways service know, and to complain to City Fibre as well. The contractor had not performed as well as CityFibre would like, and it had been agreed that a leaflet would be distributed to let people know about upcoming works at the sites. Introductory information was also delivered by signs on phone poles. City Fibre were therefore now taking action to address that, in order to improve performance by the contractor.

Further information was requested about the maintenance or replacement of concrete columns, footpaths and street signs which may be in need of restoration. The response from officers noted that the ten-year programme to replace the at-risk columns came to an end a year or so ago, and an independent survey was subsequently performed to help guarantee the safety of the remaining columns. All the ones that were potentially hazardous were immediately taken down and repaired. Currently there was

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a programme in place and a capital bid for 2021-22 to replace the ones on the main routes that require work. That bid will soon be presented to Full Council as part of the wider Capital Programme. The plan after that is for a further inspection about a year to two years later with a proposal to look at the remaining further 3 or 4 thousand columns and request the funds for any necessary replacement of those columns.

Regarding the footpaths, there was a programme of footway works. It was noted that the teams always ensure that these are kept safe, even if the teams are not able to do all of the work that they would like to do. There is flexibility for inspectors to increase the safety inspections where they have concerns, to ensure that these are kept safe.

Regarding the filling of gullies by contractors, if any Member sees this happen, the service would like the instance to be reported immediately to help the team identify these blockages right away, and to help recover any costs that the local authority would incur in making those gullies serviceable again.

Regarding the maintenance of street signs and name plates, there is a limited budget for that. If the team receive a report and find that there is a plate that cannot be read any longer, the team do endeavour to have that street name plate replaced. Officers further noted that every single thank you is received by the team members who perform the work, often in difficult conditions. It does matter to them to get the positive feedback, and they remember it.

Members noted that the feedback has been very favourable, and that the number of reported potholes has come down dramatically. Members also noted their thanks for the rapid responses. The response from officers indicated that the engagement from Members and residents helps shape the work programme to influence how works are prioritised based on what is important to them.

Members asked about an abiding issue with a recent road resurfacing. The response from officers indicated that in delivering the sheer volume of work that the team does, in the rare instance that work could not be completed to the standard that the team and residents would like, the important thing is how the team responds in that instance. Therefore, it was offered that the specific location mentioned would be picked up outside the meeting.

Members requested more insight into how the team had responded to the three recent snow events in the Borough this year. It was noted that it had been a very busy time and that team leaders were empowered to make the judgement call to begin salting the footpaths as soon as there was a whiteout. A recent video posted of the gritting efforts got 5000 hits. The priorities and procedures were in place for gritting, and all the bus routes and 50% of the roads are gritted, but if things get bad, a plan was in place to reinforce the gritting on the main roadways. Then, as the weather improved, the gritters would begin to work on the roadways into the

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neighbourhoods. People can see online when the gritters are scheduled to go past. The feedback had been very supportive on social media, and that feedback had been well-received by the teams. It was also noted that the team were very hard working—it was stated that, on the previous night, a gritter had overturned, and the driver, who had been bruised, went back out gritting again to ensure that the roads were safe and passable for people. This was an example of the brilliant work that the teams do in the current circumstances which still includes the COVID pandemic.

Members asked to be informed if there was any way that they could contribute to the compilation of the Highways work programme for the coming year. In response, input from Members was invited to make suggestions for each ward to be included in the work programme, with the aim to add one item for each Member. The indicative work programme had been submitted to Cabinet to be presented in March.

Members requested assurances that there were backup gritters in case a gritter goes down as it did recently. The response from officers provided assurances that there was resilience built into the service response. Occasionally, gritters do break down, going out in all weathers. In the most recent case, signoffs were in place and a replacement gritter was in action within 24 hours.

Members also asked for clarification around the recent event in which members of the public reportedly had to step in to help push a hearse which was not otherwise able to climb a hill. The response from officers was to express gratitude to the citizens who helped that funeral to be able to take place, and the family had also been in touch to express their gratitude. It was noted that the snowfall was hugely challenging for the service. The previous night there had been very heavy rain, which did not stop, and when temperatures dropped, that turned immediately to snow. It is not possible to grit when it is raining, because the rain washes the grit away. After the snow began to settle, the team had begun to grit on the road as it was prioritised; it was necessary to have vehicles that could move on the snow and remove the snow so that the grit could start working. Therefore it was one of the most challenging weather situations in recent memory. It was noted that that place had been gritted three times overnight at the time of this discussion.

Members also requested more information regarding estate roads in Wickersley. The response indicated that, regarding the 10 million pounds and 4 million pounds, these were specifically designed to target estate roads. All local authorities were required to collect data through mechanical surveys on the condition of their roads which the government then publishes. Rotherham's main roads were above the national average, but the estate roads were adrift from the national average, so the service had asked for additional funding to address this. If there were any potholes or other safety issues, the team would like to be informed of these so that they can keep these roads safe until more funding is available to launch a more substantial scheme.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the next update be presented in 12 months' time.

123. PERFORMANCE MEASURES - EXCEPTION REPORTING

Consideration was given to a report detailing performance measures from the end of the previous year, 2019/20, which related to the remit of Improving Places and which had missed the target. These were Priority 3 'A strong community in a clean, safe environment' and Priority 4 'Extending opportunity, prosperity and planning for the future'. This report focussed on red measures, which were those which did not progress in accordance with the target set. In relation to Priority 3, there were five off-track measures at 2019/20 year-end, while Priority 4 had three off-track measures.

Priority 3 had the highest proportion of targets met across the Council Plan, with, 75% of measures having achieved or exceeded their target at the end of the fourth and final quarter of 2019/20. 15 performance measures were on track and five were off track. The off-track measures included:

3.A2 – The proportion of positive outcomes over the year for reported Hate Crime cases. This measure was 1.05% short of the 20% target, with an average of 18.95% positive outcomes at 2019/20 yearend.

3.A4(b) – The proportion of a) licensed vehicles b) drivers found to be compliant with licensing requirements during in the spot inspections. Compliance for both vehicles and drivers did not meet the target of 85%, with 70% of vehicles and 83% of drivers found compliant with licensing requirements during spot inspections.

3.A5(b) – Overall, all things considered, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with Rotherham Borough as a place to live? In the Wave 9, conducted in June 2019, 58% of residents were found to be 'Very Satisfied' or 'Fairly Satisfied' with Rotherham as a place to live against a target of greater than 69%.

3.B3 – Total number of customer contacts by service area and overall total. The target of a 10% reduction in the number of complaints over the year (around 190 cumulative complaints) was not met, with the complaints at year-end totalling 208.

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3.B4 – Number of missed bins per 100,000 collections. At year-end 2019/20, the number of missed bins per 100,000 collections was 84.16 against a target of 50.

In relation to Priority 4, seven measures were on track and three off track at the end of the final quarter of 2019/20. The off-track measures included:

4.A1 – Number of new businesses started with help from the Council. The average number for 2019/20 of new business started with help from the Council per quarter was 14.25, with the target being 15.

4.A2 – Survival rate of new businesses (3 years). This measure's status was based on figures for 2018/19 in the Quarter 4 Council Plan report as this was the latest available data at that time, which saw a survival rate of 57.7% against a 60% target.

4.A5 – Narrow the gap to the UK average on the rate of the working age population economically active in the borough. The target for this measure was to achieve the national average of 79.1%, but at year-end 2019/20, the economic activity rate in Rotherham was 4.2% lower than the national average, and 2.4% lower than the Yorkshire and Humber rate of 77.3%.

In discussion, Members asked for more information around any trends in regard to the Safer Rotherham Partnership. Officers noted that much work had been done to encourage reporting hate crimes. The focus for SRP is to give people confidence that if they report a crime, that there will be an outcome. There was not data currently to show whether there were changes in demography associated with hate crimes.

More information was also requested regarding the mode of hate crimes, being online versus in person. It was noted that while it was uncertain if there has been a rise in online hate crime during the pandemic, it was the case that often online crime is perpetrated anonymously; nevertheless it remained important that online and indeed any hate crimes are reported.

Regarding missed bins, Members requested more information regarding how feedback is collected from residents following a missed bin. The response averred that while there is not currently a customer satisfaction assessment following a resolved missed bin, the suggestion would be taken back to the service for consideration.

More information was requested regarding the missed bin rates. The response from officers noted that 130,000 bins were emptied each week, and if a bin was missed, that would be reported to the service. While the numbers seem large, relative to the scale of the service that is being delivered, a very small percentage of the total number were missed. The rate of missed bins was 70 per 100,000, although the goal was 50. Another way of thinking about this was that 99.5% of collections take place without any contact from the public.

Members requested that these rates be noted in future reports in comparison with other neighbouring authorities. Officers explained that collection data used to be a national indicator, the data from which was shared among all authorities; however, this was no longer done. It was asserted that Rotherham currently have the best service in South Yorkshire, and it was noted that future reports would include this information.

Members noted their compliments to the bin collection service, especially given the recent weather conditions.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That Members be briefed regarding survival rates of new businesses for 2019-20 and 2020-21 as soon as the ONS data becomes available.

124. CLEAN AIR ZONE

Consideration was given to a report providing an update on the current status of the Clean Air Zone measures in Rotherham and an indication of the future programme of work. A summary of proposed schemes and measures to deliver air quality compliance were supplied in the report. Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and Sheffield City Council had been legally mandated to work together, supported by DEFRA's Joint Air Quality Unit (JAQU), to identify options to reduce levels of Nitrogen Dioxide below the legal limit of 40µg per cubic metre of air, on an annual average, in the 'shortest possible time'.

An Outline Business Case, describing the proposals to deliver compliance in Rotherham and Sheffield was submitted to Government in December 2018. It was agreed by Government in February 2020. It was noted that the final business case remained to be signed off by the government prior to bidding for and potentially receiving additional funding. Current work was being undertaken to remove the financial risk to the Council associated with delivering the schemes prior to the final Government signoff.

In discussion, Members expressed a desire for more information around the plans for Meadowbank Road and the funding for a crossing there. The response from officers indicated that the proposals have been remodeled to reflect the latest projections about behaviour at that location. It was noted that the crossing would be a safety measure associated with the potential diversion of traffic from Wortley Road to Meadowbank Road. Regarding the funding for the crossing, officers agreed to supply more information outside the meeting.

Members affirmed the need for these measures for when people return to their usual behaviour and requested that any successful bids be publicised. Officers agreed and reaffirmed the priority of improving quality of life for residents in the Borough.

Regarding monitoring on the A57, it was agreed to follow up this query outside the meeting.

Clarification was requested regarding funding for the Parkway Widening Scheme. Officers clarified that this project was outside the Clean Air Zone and was funded separately.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the next update be brought in 12 months' time.

125. OUTCOMES FROM WORKING GROUP - BUILDING USE

The Governance Adviser reported on the findings and recommendations from the recent working group that reviewed the use of the Council's buildings, with attention to operational buildings that are not exclusively designated for service delivery.

Resolved:-

1. That the briefing be noted and the following recommendations be submitted to Cabinet for consideration:-
 - a. That the principle be agreed that the future usage of buildings be determined in accordance with the needs of services located therein.
 - b. That, prior to buildings being brought back into use by staff or the public, consultation take place with Trade Unions and staff following completion of risk assessments in respect of the building or location concerned.
 - c. That any decision to return employees to Council buildings beyond the minimal number that have been required to be present throughout the pandemic be made having regard to advice from the Corporate Health and Safety Team and Human Resources, as well as being subject to Government guidance around the safe use of Council buildings.

- d. That Members be notified when main operational buildings are to be brought back into use, specifically the Town Hall as the civic hub of the Borough.
- e. That, having regard to the positive implications associated with virtual meetings in respect of the Council's carbon footprint, the Leader of the Council lobby the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to legislate for the ongoing provision of virtual meetings beyond 7 May 2021.
- f. That Asset Management and Digital Services work together to identify the necessary changes or solutions required in Riverside House and Rotherham Town Hall, as well as any changes required to equipment or software for Members and officers, to enable continued use of remote working whilst permitting physical presence in a Council building.
- g. That the Head of Democratic Services prepare guidance and training on the procedures and operation of hybrid meetings.

126. OUTCOMES FROM WORKING GROUP - HOMES ALLOCATION POLICY

The Governance Adviser reported on the findings and recommendations from the recent working group that examined the proposed changes to the Homes Allocation Policy.

Recommendations:-

1. That the briefing be noted and the following recommendations be submitted to Cabinet for consideration:-
 - a. That sustained funding be safeguarded for the staff who work on the temporary accommodation team whose posts do not have sustained funding.
 - b. That revisions to the Homes Allocation Policy be undertaken to ensure clarity and readability throughout the document, especially as regards application processes and shortlisting criteria.
 - c. That notation about prolific offenders be included in the information provided to the Housing Assessment Panel.
 - d. That quality standards regarding the proper completion of housing forms be reaffirmed to officers.

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- e. That rent arrears be added to the scrutiny work programme for 2021-22.
- f. That single occupants of larger homes owned by the council be given the opportunity to downsize.

127. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Governance Adviser presented an updated Work Programme, giving special attention to the February working group on Housing Hubs and the agenda items for the upcoming final meeting of the 2020-21 municipal year.

Resolved:-

1. That the Work Programme of the Improving Places Select Commission be endorsed.
2. That the Governance Adviser be authorised to make changes to the work programme between meetings, subject to consultation with the Chair and any changes being reported back to the Commission's next meeting

128. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair confirmed that there were no urgent items of business.

129. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Chair announced that the next virtual meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 16 March 2021, commencing at 1:30.