

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 20 July 2021**

Present:- Councillor Wyatt (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Barley, Burnett, Cowen, Ellis, Jones, Keenan, Khan, McNeely, Mills, Pitchley, Reynolds, Sansome and Tinsley. Also present were co-opted members K. Bacon and M. Jacques of Rotherfed.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Havard.

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

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

149. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 29 JUNE 2021

Resolved:-

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 June 2021 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

150. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

151. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

The Chair advised that there were no members of the public or representatives of media organisations present at the meeting, and there were no questions in respect of matters on the agenda.

152. 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 observing the proceedings.

153. ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report providing an update on progress against Aim 4 “To End Rough Sleeping and Begging in Rotherham.” The presentation included a description of actions taken since the last update on 14 July 2020, and identified the types of accommodation provided, demographics regarding people who have been accommodated under the strategy, and information about funding and sustaining the scheme. It was noted that an upcoming review of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy was planned to commence in September 2021.

In discussion, Members expressed interest in more assurances regarding the sustainability of the programme in terms of skilled staff and in terms of funding over the long term, especially in view of the implications of COVID on employment and housing. The response described ongoing and anticipated challenges of obtaining new acquisitions quickly in a buoyant housing market as well as with availing and retaining staff with the right skills on short-term grant-defined contracts. The upcoming internal service review would seek to address these areas.

Members wished to know if the strategy was appropriate in the view of officers given the new pressures presented by the pandemic. The response from officers affirmed that the strategy had strengthened the service, especially as regards partnership working.

Members requested additional details regarding the partnership working with Drug and Alcohol Treatment programmes. The response from officers described the offer of Drug and Alcohol Treatment where customers are receptive.

Members requested more details about the experience of families with children. The response from officers illustrated the efforts to help families with children into temporary accommodation rather than hotels. If someone does go into a hotel if the service is struggling for space, every effort is made to get them into more appropriate temporary accommodation as soon as possible. Because of the strong partnership working sub-regionally, someone who approaches a service in one of the areas would receive the same response in Rotherham.

Members requested clarification around the appeal process, and what happens to people who request a review. Officers provided assurances that individuals must be accommodated while the review is undertaken, in compliance with the law.

Members also requested additional details around savings and forecasting of costs, which were offered outside the meeting.

Members also asked for clarification around the changing role of private landlords. The response noted that private rented housing can be difficult to access because private landlords often prefer applicants who are working.

Further assurances were requested around the housing of veterans who may later be accessing the homelessness service. Officers provided assurances that veterans are prioritised for housing accommodation with the highest band in the housing allocation policy.

Assurances were requested that accommodation is provided for individuals who have dogs. Officers indicated that predominantly the new acquisitions would be houses rather than flats, and these would be exempt from the bedroom tax. As such, they would have gardens and would be pet-friendly.

Further clarification was requested as to the status of the two rough sleepers indicated in the report who were not currently accessing services. Officers confirmed there were no rough sleepers at the time of the meeting. New people who approach the service who are not in priority need, that is, single people, negotiations with family and friends can be undertaken with the lifting of restrictions. This prevents the use of temporary accommodation, including hotels, by single people, and frees up temporary accommodation for families.

Further information was raised about the role of the private rental sector. Assurances were provided that there is a designated officer who monitors the private sector opportunities and potential schemes which may be of use.

Resolved:-

1. That the reports be noted.
2. That the next update be brought back following the completion of the upcoming internal service review.
3. That the update provide further assurances around sustainability of the service especially as regards costs, and staff salaries and skills, and repeat customers.

154. WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22

Consideration was given to a proposed schedule of scrutiny work for the 2021/22 municipal year. This revised work programme incorporates feedback from Members about potential areas for scrutiny work, according to the alignment of these potential areas of work with Council priorities, potential to add value, and importance to residents. It was noted that the priorities reflected in the work programme centre on themes of recovery from the pandemic and climate and environmental action. It was further noted that some flexibility would be maintained in the scheduling of agenda items as further high-value items of importance could arise during the year, and the needs of services and partner organisations would be taken into consideration as to the timeliness and format of updates, presentations, and reports.

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Resolved:-

1. That the report and proposed schedule of work be noted.
2. That authority be delegated to the Governance Advisor in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair to make changes to the schedule of work as appropriate between meetings, reporting any changes back to the next meeting for endorsement.

155. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring the Commission's consideration.

156. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:-

That the next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 7 September 2021, commencing at 1.30 pm in Rotherham Town Hall.