

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 7 September 2021

Present:- Councillor Wyatt (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Barley, Burnett, Cowen, Ellis, Havard, Jones, Keenan, Khan, McNeely, Mills, Pitchley, Reynolds, Sansome and Tinsley.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Miro and Whomersley.

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

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

18. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 20 JULY 2021

Resolved:-

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 July 2021 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Burnett declared a personal interest related to Flooding Alleviation based on his attendance as a Ward Councillor at a separate meeting in respect of flooding concerns within the Ward.

Cllr Tinsley declared a personal interest in respect of the Bereavement Services update based on his previous meeting with representatives of Dignity, Ltd. during his work as a Ward Councillor.

20. 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.

21. 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.

22. FLOODING ALLEVIATION UPDATE

Consideration was given to an update report in respect of flooding alleviation and defence projects throughout the Borough. The report included updates on progress of construction of flood defences at specific locations in the borough as well as projected work and funding timescales. Information regarding recent event responses was also provided as part of the update.

In discussion, Members requested clarification of the rationale for the concurrent working at 6 priority sites rather than identifying and prioritising smaller projects that can be completed based on the funding currently available. Officers offered clarification regarding how projects are prioritised and offered the rationale that no part of the Borough is being left behind whilst others are being protected. This is the reasoning behind the concurrent project approach.

Members requested assurances that gullies are being properly maintained. The response from officers noted the figures and frequency of maintenance of all gullies and drains in the Borough, with gullies and drains in high flood risk areas receiving additional monitoring.

Members requested assurances that Borough residents have recourse when encountering difficulties applying for insurance. The response from officers noted that as flood defences are installed, the service provides statements to insurance companies upon request which reflect the updated situation at the property location.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the next update be brought in 12 months' time to include information in respect of progress with canal barriers and the pilot communications initiative.

23. COLD HOMES

Consideration was given to a report regarding fuel poverty and home fuel efficiency, representing the first time this topic has been considered at scrutiny. Heat loss was described as one of the significant challenges for housing services which affects many families across the borough. The presentation provided information about the retrofits and energy conserving solutions that have been implemented across the Borough to tackle heat loss and promote fuel efficiency especially in areas of severe deprivation.

In discussion, Members requested assurances that the most up to date data and ward boundaries would be reflected in a future update on this topic. The response from officers noted the challenges to data collection presented by the pandemic and offered assurances that updated maps would be used in future presentations.

More details were requested regarding private landlords' response to heat loss. The response from officers noted the work with private landlords and the various resources that renters and homeowners can apply for as they seek to retrofit their properties.

Further information was requested in respect of the several households which have elected to retain coal heating. Officers offered these details outside the meeting.

Members also expressed concern for families who will be experiencing fuel poverty in the months to come and requested information about how these families are identified and assisted to access the support they need. The response from officers noted that when fuel poverty is identified, that officers liaise with Public Health officers to address the need.

Resolved:-

1. That the next update be submitted in 12 months' time, to include the latest ward data.
2. That a toolkit of available resources, schemes and grants supporting energy efficient upgrades and retrofits be provided to Members with a view to sharing these widely and encouraging Borough residents to apply.
3. That a clear action plan be developed in liaison with the Director of Public Health to identify residents who are experiencing fuel poverty and assist them in accessing support.

24. BEREAVEMENT SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

Consideration was given to an update report including annual performance information regarding the contract with Dignity, Ltd. The report highlighted exceptions and provided information around land use as well as timelines for upcoming steps including consultation plans.

In discussion, Members requested further clarification around provision of environmentally friendly burials. The response from officers noted that the interest in environmentally friendly burials was very occasional and that a suitable site had been identified.

Members also expressed interest in more information around the upcoming consultation with professionals. The response from officers noted the intention to conduct this consultation, the results of which would be taken on board and learning reported back at the next update.

Members sought more details around the process by which Bereavement Services officers monitor the standards to which the contract is being fulfilled. The response from officers noted that there were regular reports from the contractor which were then followed up with quarterly site visits by the officers, who performed visual checks. Any concerns around compliance were then addressed with staff members to ensure compliance.

Resolved:-

1. That the update and annual report be noted.
2. That the next annual report be submitted in 12 months' time, to include information in respect of engagement with professionals, including clergy and providers.
3. That the forthcoming five-year plan for maintenance be circulated upon availability.

25. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

Resolved:-

1. That the updated work programme be approved.
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.

26. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring consideration.

27. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Chair announced that the next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 2 November commencing at 1.30 pm.