

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**  
**Wednesday 17 November 2021**

Present:- Councillor Clark (in the Chair); Councillors Barley, Baker-Rogers, Browne, Burnett, Cooksey, Elliott, Pitchley, Wyatt and Yasseen.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Baum-Dixon, A Carter and Hoddinott.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-  
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

**61.           DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**62.           QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

The Chair confirmed there were no questions from members of the public or press.

**63.           EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Chair confirmed there was no reason to exclude members of the press or public from observing any items of business on the agenda.

**64.           SEPTEMBER 2021/22 FINANCIAL MONITORING**

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services and the Head of Corporate Finance. The report set out the financial position as at the end of September 2021 based on actual costs and income for the first six months of 2021/22 and forecast for the remainder of the financial year. Financial performance is a key element within the assessment of the Council's overall performance framework and is essential to achievement of the objectives within the Council's Policy Agenda. To that end, this was the third financial monitoring report of a series of monitoring reports for the current financial year which was to be brought forward to Cabinet on a regular basis.

As at September 2021, the Council expected to deliver the overall outturn within budget for the financial year 2021/22. Whilst the Directorates had a forecast year-end overspend of £9.8m on the General Fund, this was mitigated by the government's provision of COVID-19 emergency support grant and Sales, Fees and Charges Income Compensation. However, it was noted that the longer term impacts of Covid-19, public health measures and the pace at which services can return to normal remains unknown.

In discussion, Members requested further information in respect of the

impact of using agency workers in Children and Young Peoples' Services (CYPS). The response from officers noted the general guideline for appropriate use of agency workers in this service. Where there has been a reduction in staff numbers corresponding to a reduction in caseloads, to manage temporary rises in caseloads, agency workers may be called upon.

Members expressed curiosity around how the agency worker numbers for Rotherham MBC compare to similar or neighbouring authorities. The response from officers noted this as a question for the service, with the note that these numbers have been higher than they were two years ago. The Chair noted an upcoming item on the scrutiny work programme regarding use of agency workers.

Members expressed concern that this year's underspend in Adult Care could result in higher expenditures next year. The response from officers noted the finance team supporting the Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing, and Public Health (ACHPH) with regard to the packages and numbers relevant to the budget for this directorate who worked to ensure that problems are not masked with short term funding. Whilst this was a question for the directorate, it was noted that expense comes not primarily from care for the elderly population but from pressures associated with mental health care provision.

In respect of the unknowns around budget forecasting, Members requested a view from officers on when there might be greater clarity. The response from officers cited unknowns associated with the progressing pandemic, including possible future lockdown, which would alter the financial picture. It also was too early to know when or if clientele of places like Rother Valley Country Park would return to spending. Budgets would be responsive to changes of this kind. In terms of business rates, relief funds have meant that revenue has not been lost, but it was hoped that businesses would be able to sustain themselves moving forward.

Members requested clarification around the saving and use of reserves during times of hardship like the current period. The response from officers noted that the COVID grant reserves rolled over to this year because it was expected that the situation would be ongoing. Officers provided a summary of the Covid Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) relief grant and business support details.

Further information was requested around the challenges associated with projected savings and overspend in Children and Young People's Services, as placement shortages were not a local but a national issue. The response from officers cited the history of spending in this service area and noted the more recent savings goals had been delayed by temporary factors that were unforeseeable. It was noted that some of the requested savings had been delivered by CYPS and by Regeneration and Environment (R&E). Some of the savings yet to be delivered may be delayed, but careful attention was given in making these savings to

ensure there would not be unintended consequences.

Members requested assurances around the appropriateness of savings in areas like CYPS and ACHPH, considering that some services that would benefit all children are available only to vulnerable children. The response from officers noted that this is a wider question for the budget that only Council can change if there were to be a considered view that the savings are not needed. It was noted that there are a small number of choices based on the limitations inherent in budgeting, because it is important not to cause harm.

**Resolved:-**

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

**65. MID-YEAR HOUSING DEVELOPMENT UPDATE REPORT**

Consideration was given to a Mid-year Housing Development Update Report – 2021/22 presented by the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Acting Assistant Director of Housing and the Head of Strategic Housing and Development. The report set out the progress against the 2021/22 Housing Development Programme which listed a range of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) sites to be developed for housing, along with potential strategic acquisitions. The Covid 19 pandemic had presented unprecedented challenges in terms of the availability of construction materials and labour. Despite this, coupled with the additional challenge posed by the nature of the sites in the Council's housing growth programme (typically more difficult and expensive to develop), good progress had been made with all projects, excellent quality was being achieved, and the Council continued to make a significant contribution to Rotherham's overall affordable housing requirement.

In discussion, Members requested an update on the uptake of new housing developments in the Town Centre. A summary of the recent work was provided and detail around reservations was offered outside the meeting.

Members requested assurances that current stock is being updated to ensure all the homes are of decent standard. Assurances were provided that the Council also invests in existing stock to maintain decent standards, which an upcoming report to Cabinet will illustrate in detail.

Members requested an update on the progress of the strategy for becoming a market leader in green housing. The response from officers noted the goal of EPC rating C or above and cited the use of funding from government to promote thermal efficiency. The response further noted the desire to invest further to lead on this agenda.

Members requested further clarification around finances: differences in unit costs between new builds built by partnerships versus those directly

from builders, a proportional breakdown of grant sources, and details around projected increase in costs. The response from officers noted the upcoming reports to Cabinet and in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan which will include financial information in detail. Many of the homes the Council delivers directly are more expensive, because of high standards for space and energy efficiency. These homes are also built in places that can be more difficult for building. The Council does not have sight of the full cost breakdown of homes delivered in partnership, although this information can be requested. The response emphasised the continued need to avail a mixture of partnership and direct approaches because some private developers are not building in the areas where the Council needs to increase housing stock. Most homes are delivered through the HRA fund with a smaller contribution from supplementary grant funds, such as those which help achieve the Council's energy efficiency targets. Higher level detail was offered outside the meeting.

Members requested further information around how new developments could be better integrated aesthetically into the surrounding community. The response from the Cabinet Member for Housing noted the national and local design guides and noted the opportunity for Members to take part in these discussions, as these design guides need to be consistently refreshed.

Further details were also requested around attendance of the virtual housing developer summit. A description was provided of the recent housing developer summits and the attendees. It was noted the summits have been well attended and achieved clear outcomes, including the most recent one which was held virtually. In response, Members requested the hope that new and emerging developers and investors in the housing market would be proactively invited to the housing developer summits.

**Resolved: -**

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That members be consulted and invited to feed into the new local design guide with a view to ensuring new developments are better integrated aesthetically into the surrounding community.
3. That new and emerging developers and investors in the housing market be proactively invited to the housing developer summits.

**66. ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT**

The Chair deferred this item to 15 December 2021.

**67. WORK PROGRAMME**

Consideration was given to the updated work programme.

**Resolved: -**

1. That the work programme be approved.

**68. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no urgent items.

**69. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chair announced that the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board will be held at 11am on Wednesday, 15 December 2021 at Rotherham Town Hall.