

THE CABINET
Monday 18 November 2024

Present:- Councillor Read (in the Chair); Councillors Alam, Allen, Baker-Rogers, Sheppard and Taylor.

Also in attendance Councillor Steele (Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cusworth.

66. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

67. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were two questions from members of the public:

1. Mr Ashraf asked the Chair to commit to providing documentation to his email address from the second sub-OSMB meeting held on 30 April 2024 and the appendices of the OSMB recommendations of 24 July 2024. Mr Ashraf also asked for documentation to be sent that showed Cabinet had done or where in the process of doing any of the actions from the 22 OSMB Palestine recommendations that had been unanimously passed by the Cabinet. Mr Ashraf asked why there were discrepancies between those, and the letter sent by the Leader to Councillor Steele on 10 September 2024.

The Leader stated that there were no discrepancies. The Leader agreed to provide all publicly available information from the scrutiny meetings and to provide an update on the actions. The Leader was confident that actions were being delivered.

In his supplementary question, Mr Ashraf asked for any and all of the Council's legal opinions and the sources of those legal opinions in relation to Palestine to be sent to his email address. That included information discussed inside and outside of the Council Chamber and communicated in any format.

The Leader explained that Mr Ashraf should submit a Freedom of Information request in relation to his question.

2. Mr Azam asked for an update on Dignity. He stated that Councillor Sheppard has missed the last Muslim Bereavement Group meeting. Mr Azam understood that Dignity had given three proposals at the beginning of September, but the community were none the wiser on how the Council was progressing these proposals. He asked what the latest was and how the matter could be concluded?

Councillor Sheppard explained that it was a long and technical process. The Council continued to have regular talks with Dignity. In relation to burials plots at East Herringthorpe and Wath, Councillor Sheppard stated that progress was being made. There was a lot of work going on behind the scenes and an update would be provided in the near future.

Mr Azam stated that the response was disappointing. The row of earthen graves was now complete. Mr Azam believed that three revised plans had been submitted for the Council to consider as well but there was still no update. The situation over the past two years had left the community feeling blindsided and having to go through processes multiple times. There was no movement forward. This particular matter was first raised in August 2024 as an urgent issue but in November 2024 it was still ongoing. Mr Azam asked the Council to make a decision as it was of the utmost importance and it was frustrating for the Muslim community.

Mr Azam made reference to the Kaushar Tai independent review and stated that a report had been submitted to the Council for consideration. He asked when this would be made visible so that work could be done on the feasibility of the recommendations.

The Council's Head of Legal Services explained that the draft report had been received by the Council and was with legal services for review. It would be a number of weeks before that review was complete, after which the community would be consulted. The Leader committed to try and share a copy of the report with the Community prior to January 2025 Cabinet meeting.

68. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 14 October 2024 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings and signed by the Chair.

69. 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 and public from the meeting.

70. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) SUFFICIENCY UPDATE (INCLUDING THE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS UPDATE)

Consideration was given to the report which detailed the proposed addendum to the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency

Strategy 2023-2028 which summarised the needs of Care Leavers. The report also included an update to the LAC Sufficiency Strategy delivery plan to better reflect the needs of Care Leavers.

The Local Authority had a duty to ensure that it had carried out appropriate needs analysis of both its children in care and care leavers' placement and accommodation needs. It then needed to create a strategy that addressed the resultant sufficiency priorities and a clear local offer for Care Leavers. The delivery of the residential development programme remained a clear priority within the LAC Sufficiency delivery, but it was also important to focus explicitly on the needs of Care Leavers. The Care Leavers Addendum to the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy (Appendix 1) did that and identified a requirement to further develop provision to meet the needs of young people and young adults. It was also important to ensure that this provision provided positive outcomes and value for money.

The analysis of future need within the Care Leavers addendum suggested that there would be 551 Care Leavers in Rotherham in 2027. This was significantly higher than the 353 Care Leavers in Rotherham in May 2024. In May 2024, 88 Care Leavers were accommodated in externally commissioned accommodation; the forecast number of Care Leavers in externally commissioned accommodation in 2027 was 156.

An update was also provided on the in-house children's residential development that was agreed at Cabinet on 17 February 2020. Previous progress updates had been reported to Cabinet in June 2020, September 2021, and October 2022.

The four phases of the programme aimed to deliver 20 residential beds and 2 emergency beds across 11 registered settings. So far, the programme had delivered 10 residential beds and 1 emergency bed across 6 registered settings. This included 1 x 4 bed provision, 3 x 2 bed homes and 1 x 1 bed emergency provision. There was a current total in house capacity of 11 beds.

In January 2023, a new judgement for Care Leavers was introduced to the Ofsted Inspecting Local Authority Services for Children (ILACS) inspection framework. In March 2023, the Government introduced new national standards for the registration, regulation, and inspection of supported accommodation for Looked After Children aged 16 and 17 years, to be overseen by Ofsted.

A Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review took place between 12 to 15 March 2024, at the request of the Council. The Peer Review identified "Services are making a real difference to the lived experience of care leavers, however, the range of accommodation services needed for Care Leavers in Borough is insufficient."

The Peer Review had recommended the Looked After Children and Care

Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2023 – 2028 be updated to better reflect the needs of Care Leavers in the context of the regulatory changes.

In relation to the Peer Review comment that “the range of accommodation services needed for Care Leavers in Borough is insufficient”, it was confirmed in the meeting that the Service were confident that the actions as outlined in the Strategy would lead to a sufficient range of accommodation.

The challenges of providing appropriate accommodation were outlined in the meeting. This included finding appropriate properties, getting Ofsted approval and hiring qualified staff. It was noted that there was no quick fix, but the Strategy did present a strong, positive way forward.

The report was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB), who advised that the recommendations be supported. There had been some concerns regarding the target and the budget but overall, OSMB felt that it was a good Policy. An additional recommendation had however been made, relating to ensuring that the local neighbourhood teams and ward members were consulted when identifying properties within their localities. The Strategic Director confirmed that this was already being done.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Note the progress made to deliver the in-house children’s residential development, the positive impact for Children in Care and financial efficiencies that will be achieved.
2. Approve the Care Leavers addendum to the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2023 – 2028.
3. Agree that the LAC and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy Delivery Plan be updated to increase the appropriateness and number of available accommodation options for Care Leavers as per the Care Leaver addendum to the LAC sufficiency strategy (see 2 above).
4. Note that on 16 October 2023 authority was delegated to the Assistant Director of Housing Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to acquire up to 100 properties in line with the Housing Acquisitions Policy, which includes scope to acquire properties to meet the accommodation needs of Children and Young Peoples Services.
5. Authorise the Councils Designated Property Officer, or relevant Strategic Director in their absence, to negotiate any additional accommodation required and complete necessary transactions, in consultation with the Council’s Section 151 Officer, Strategic

Director Children's and Young Peoples Services, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services and the Assistant Director of Legal Services.

6. That Cabinet give consideration to ensuring that the local neighbourhood teams and ward members were consulted when identifying properties within their localities.

71. ROTHERHAM LEAVING CARE STRATEGY 2024-2027

Consideration was given to the report which presented the Rotherham Leaving Care Strategy 2024-27. The Strategy outlined the three-year plan for Rotherham Care Leavers and set out priorities for care experienced young people. It also outlined improvements to services and practice for children who were Care Leavers or Care Experienced.

The Leaving Care Strategy as a standalone document was the first of its kind in Rotherham and was a recommendation of a Peer Review undertaken in March 2024. The consideration of Good and Outstanding Local Authorities offer to Care Leavers had confirmed that having a bespoke Care Leaver Strategy was best practice. This Strategy compared well to other examples across the Care Leaver landscape. Corporate Parenting responsibilities were taken seriously by Rotherham Council and its partners, and it was recognised that there should be greater development of the Leaving Care Service over the next few years. Leaving Care strategic and operational service plans had been devised to track the progress of development work and these aligned with the Leaving Care Strategy priorities.

The Strategy demonstrated how partners across Rotherham would work together to ensure the needs of Care Leavers were met. The six priorities had been selected as the key areas for development in Leaving Care services and in the offer to Care Leavers. These young people had often experienced adversity and as such, were more vulnerable than their peers who had not had care experience. As such, the Strategy had to outline priorities which met the complex needs of all Care Leavers and determine how these needs could be met over the next three years.

Initially, the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board, alongside performance clinics, would review the progress of the Leaving Care Strategy, 2024-2027 and of the service plans which sat alongside the document. Progress reports would be provided to the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board every six months. These would include metrics used to measure performance and quality, such as performance data around key areas and audit outcomes in respect of quality.

The Council was committed, as Corporate Parents, to ensuring that all Care Leavers needs were met and that they were supported to achieve their aspirations and transition successfully to adulthood. The proposed Strategy and governance arrangements would support to achieve this.

It was confirmed that the Strategy pulled together all current actions and was an overarching document of existing arrangements.

Resolved:

That Cabinet approve the Leaving Care Strategy and approve the three-year plan as set out within the Strategy.

72. MULTI-AGENCY SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS

Consideration was given to the report which contained changes to and updated information relating to the place-based arrangements for the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership (RSCP), which included additional arrangements for South Yorkshire Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements. The previous arrangements were published in 2019 and had been updated to reflect the changes within the new Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) statutory guidance.

The additional Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangement for South Yorkshire would mean that the Chief Executive of the ICB, Chief Constable of South Yorkshire Police and the Chief Executive of the Council would meet twice a year to provide strategic oversight and agree the vision and priorities for safeguarding children in Rotherham. This would be replicated with the other South Yorkshire Local Authority Chief Executives and any safeguarding matters across the region in which collaboration would prove effective would be considered. It would also enable the sharing of good practice across the region.

As outlined in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements, Rotherham would continue to have it's own arrangements which would be monitored locally by representatives from the ICB, South Yorkshire Police and the Chief Executive.

During the meeting it was noted that the system in place in Rotherham was rigorous and involved a high level of scrutiny.

Resolved:

1. That Cabinet endorse the South Yorkshire Multi Agency Safeguarding arrangements which include the place-based Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership (RSCP) Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements.
2. That Cabinet approve the Local Authority involvement in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements and receives appropriate reports on progress against the RSCP priorities and the Annual Report on impact of the RSCP in safeguarding children and young people.

73. SEPTEMBER 2024-25 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

Consideration was given to the report which stated that the Council currently estimated an overspend of £5.3m for the financial year 2024/25. This was largely due to demand led pressures on children's residential placements, adults social care packages, home to school transport and the expected impact of the Local Government Pay Award. In addition, the Council was still impacted by the inflationary pressures in the economy. Even though inflation had fallen to 1.7%, the Council's base costs had significantly increased across the recent high inflation period by well in excess of 20%. Increased costs across this period were also being felt by the social care market in particular, leading to market prices increasing at above inflation levels and placing further pressures on the Council's Budget.

It was noted that a number of the Capital Programme's had been completed sooner than expected which was positive news.

Reference was made to the Adoption of the Department for Education's model for calculating kinship allowances for Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) as set out in paragraphs 2.42 and 2.43 of the report. The Council had decided several years ago to calculate SGO payments according to a bespoke RMBC payment model, using a locally devised formula for the calculation of kinship allowances. The DfE had since produced a calculation form to help local authorities financially assess Special Guardians. It was known as the standardised means test model and when issued was not a statutory requirement for local authorities, though was to be used as a guide. Most Local Authorities had adopted this model, though the Council had continued to use its own model. However, recent legal challenges and best practice suggested that the means test should be undertaken using the Government's recommended allowance calculator for SGOs, Child Adoption Orders (CAOs) and Adoption. This would result in the payment of higher levels of allowance. The estimated financial impact of the Council adopting this approach was £560k per annum, the impact of which for 2024/25 (£140k) was already factored into the CYPS forecast position. It was proposed that the Council adopted this approach from January 2025.

It was also proposed that the Council write off a debtor balance in relation to Iliad (Rotherham) Ltd, to the value of £466,360.22, dating back from March 2013 as set out in paragraphs 2.44 and 2.45 of the report. The Council had pursued the debt through a variety of channels over a significant period of time. However, it was believed that all avenues had been exhausted and the debt should be written off. The Council had used the normal debt collection routes to no avail and had sought external legal support through its contract with Greenhalgh Kerr, who lodged a case with the liquidator but had informed the Council that it was unlikely to ever see any return from this process. The Council would continue to monitor the case with the liquidator but given the unlikely ability to recover the debt it was proposed to write off the debt.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Note the current General Fund Revenue Budget forecast overspend of £5.3m.
2. Note that actions will continue to be taken to reduce the overspend position but that it is possible that the Council will need to draw on its reserves to balance the 2024/25 financial position.
3. Note the updated position of the Capital Programme, including proposed capital programme variations to expenditure profiles and funding.
4. Approve the adoption of the Department for Education's procedure to help local authorities financially assess Special Guardians as part of the process for setting up Special Guardianship Orders.
5. Approve the proposed debt write off detailed at 2.44.

74. HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE POLICY

Consideration was given to the report which presented the Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy, attached to the report at Appendix 1. The revised Housing Repairs and Maintenance Policy set out the Council's approach to delivering a responsive repairs and maintenance service which met the needs of tenants and leaseholders, and enabled the Council to meet its statutory, regulatory, and contractual obligations.

The Housing Services Electrical Safety Policy, attached at Appendix 3, and the Gas and Carbon Monoxide (CO) Policy, attached at Appendix 2, set out the Council's approach to managing its responsibilities for gas safety, electrical safety, smoke alarms and CO alarms in housing assets in line with legislation and best practice.

The introduction of the Social Housing (Regulation) Act, 2023, prompted the Council, and social housing landlords nationally, to examine all aspects of housing service activity. This self-assessment enabled the Council to gauge how well it was meeting the expectations of the Regulator's consumer standards, to identify gaps in delivery, and focus on areas for improvement. Increasing the number of published policies was identified as an area of improvement.

The Council currently awarded £25 per room to tenants following damage to tenants' décor. The Council had not revised its approach to Decoration Allowance, and the sums awarded to tenants, since 2005. Inflation since 2005 meant that the decoration allowance should be increased. Cabinet was asked to approve a new allocation of £50 per room, which compared favourably with neighbouring social housing landlords. A limit of £350 per

property was also proposed.

Following consideration by Scrutiny, it was confirmed that a change to the proposed Policy had been suggested and accepted by the Cabinet Member. The report, at paragraph 2.18, stated that the sums in relation to the Decoration Allowance would be reviewed every three years under the delegations proposed in Recommendation 6. Following Scrutiny, it had been agreed that the sums awarded for the Decorating Allowance be increased in line with the corporate Fees and Charges annually.

The report was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB), who advised that the recommendations be supported. Councillor Steele explained the process behind the new proposal and thanked Cabinet for their support on that matter. Discussions at Improving Places and OSMB had included replacing fences and concerns around appointment times. However it was felt that no further changes to the Policy were required.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Approve the Housing Services Repairs and Maintenance Policy (Appendix 1).
2. Approve the increase in decoration allowance from £25 to £50 per room, up to a maximum of £350 per property, as proposed in the Housing Services Repairs and Maintenance Policy (Appendix 1).
3. Note the ongoing work to scope the future repairs and maintenance delivery model for Rotherham and agrees to receive a further update on this work in 2025.
4. Approve the Housing Services Gas and Carbon Monoxide Safety Policy (Appendix 2).
5. Approve the Housing Services Electrical Safety Policy (Appendix 3).
6. Delegate authority to the Strategic Director for Adult Care, Housing and Public Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to make amendments to the following housing policies in line with operational, regulatory and legislative demands:
 - Housing Services Repairs and Maintenance Policy
 - Housing Services Gas and Carbon Monoxide Safety Policy
 - Housing Services Electrical Safety Policy
 - Housing Services Fire Safety Policy Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy as it relates to housing assets.

7. That Cabinet supports the proposal that the sums awarded for the Decorating Allowance be increased in line with the corporate Fees and Charges annually.

75. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION POLICY

Consideration was given to the report which sought approval of a new Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy as attached at Appendix 1. The report set out the objectives and principles that were reflected in the Policy and explained how the Council intended to meet its statutory obligations under the Housing Act 1996 and The Homeless (Suitability of Accommodation) Order 2012, in line with the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities and the objectives and principles of Rotherham's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

The report also provided Cabinet with an update on the growing demand for temporary accommodation and the work being undertaken by the Council to improve outcomes for residents and reduce the impact on the Council's financial position. The report requested a specific, time-limited delegation to expand the Council's temporary accommodation portfolio to meet demands.

National rates of homelessness and use of temporary accommodation were currently the highest on record. According to national housing charity Shelter, 112,660 households were homeless and living in temporary accommodation at the end of 2023, a record high figure and up 12% in a year. In the same year, 317,430 households were accepted as either homeless or at imminent risk of it by their local authority, the highest number since records began, and up 9% on the previous year.

Rotherham Council had experienced significant increases in demand for homelessness services over the last few years. In the financial year 2022/23, 1,409 homelessness applications were received. During the same period, there were 771 placements into hotel/bed and breakfast temporary accommodation. In 2023/24 the number of homelessness applications increased by 7.9% to 1,521, while the number of placements increased by 29% to 995. The placement of families with children also increased in 2023/24: 258 families with children were placed in hotel/bed and breakfast accommodation, a 14.2% increase from 2022/23. It was noted that some households could have been placed more than once.

The Leader noted the scale of homelessness and how it was often perceived incorrectly.

The report was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB), who advised that the recommendations be supported.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Note the increase in homelessness and growing demand for temporary accommodation and the work being undertaken by the Council to respond to this demand.
2. Approve the adoption of the new Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy (Appendix 1).
3. Delegate authority to the Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health for a 3-year period in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to make operational amendments to the Policy when the need is identified.
4. Note officers' intention to continue to pursue opportunities for a 3-year period to increase the portfolio of Council-owned temporary accommodation to meet service demands, subject to available budget and in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing.

76. HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report which explained that the Household Support Fund (HSF) had been extended by Government from October 2024 to March 2025, with £421m of funding available in England. Consistent with previous awards, the Council had been awarded £2.489m for the Borough for this time period.

Given the need in communities to commence support for the most vulnerable residents and the timing of the grant award and receipt of the associated grant conditions, a delegated officer decision was taken to allocate this funding on 11 October 2024. The report provided a summary of the allocations of the £2.489m of funding made. Any variations arising through spend were proposed to be managed through adjusting the allocation made towards the Energy Crisis Support Scheme.

It was noted that the application process for the Energy Crisis Support Scheme was open and available to all households, including pensioners.

Resolved:

That Cabinet:

1. Note the provisional allocations of the Household Support Fund Grant of £2.489m have been made as follows:
 - a. £1.028m for food vouchers to children eligible for free school meals for school holidays up to and including Easter 2025.
 - b. £1.156m to support applications from households for assistance

with energy costs, through the Council's Energy Crisis Support Scheme.

- c. £150k towards the costs of the Council's Local Council Tax Support Top Up Scheme.
 - d. £45k to support care leavers, being young people leaving foster or local authority care and living independently in their own accommodation who are responsible for paying their own utility bills, providing additional financial support through the cost-of-living increases.
 - e. £60k to local voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations to support vulnerable households over Christmas / New Year through a supplement to the Crisis Support service level agreement.
 - f. £50k to provide parcels of household items to be distributed through VCS community support including food banks, social supermarkets, and the Open Arms programme drop-in sessions.
2. Delegate authority to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Neighbourhood Working, to determine revised and final allocations for the Household Support Grant, to include provision for other eligible actions within the use of Household Support Fund should it not be possible to achieve full spend of the grant through the approved options.

77. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Consideration was given to the circulated report, the contents of which were included as part of the relevant items and the details included accordingly.

78. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:-

That the next meeting of the Cabinet be held on 16 December 2024, commencing at 10.00am.