

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL SCRUTINY PANEL
16th September, 2010

Present:- Councillor J. Hamilton (in the Chair); Councillors Dodson, Hughes, Johnston, Littleboy, Pickering, Sims and Tweed.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Austen, Currie, Cutts, Mannion and Parker.

Also in attendance:- Joanna Jones and Councillor Dryden (Community Representatives) and Councillors Whelbourn and S. Wright and Sally Parkin for Minute No. 26.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest to report.

23. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or the press.

24. ROTHERHAM'S CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU (CAB) – TRUSTEE BOARD

Further to Minute No. 12(2) of the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Community Development and Engagement held on 12th July, 2010, it was recommended that a representative for the Rotherham's Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) Trustee Board be sought from the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel.

Information was provided on the frequency of this Trustee Board and details of the Annual General Meeting.

Resolved:- That Councillor Sims be nominated to Rotherham Citizens Advice Bureau Trustee Board.

25. PRIORITIES OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS, COUNCILLOR JAHANGIR AKHTAR

The Scrutiny Panel offered a warm welcome to Councillor Jahangir Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods, who gave a presentation on his priorities under the Safe Theme Board for the current municipal year during his term of office.

The presentation drew specific attention to:-

- Priorities Across All Portfolios.
- Building on Overwhelming Success – 13% reduction in crime.

- Headline Statistics for Domestic Burglary, Criminal Damage, Violent Crime, Serious Acquisitive Crime and Robbery.
- The Challenges.
- Knowing the Local Priorities.
- Government Direction.
- Government Priorities.
- Government “Structural Reforms”.
- Key Consultation – Policing in the 21st Century.
- Our Priorities.

A discussion and question and answer session ensued and clarification was provided on:-

- Reports of performance improvement, but some indicators were off target, like NI28 serious knife crime, NI34 domestic abuse and NI 32 reporting incidents of domestic abuse.
- No serious increase in crime related activity as a result of the economic downturn.
- National coverage and a more focused approach to policing had had a desired effect on reducing crime.
- Statistical information and the effect of confidence building in residents to report crime.
- Constraints on the area based grant and what this figure accounted to.
- Tackling domestic violence had been a priority in Rotherham and nationally.
- Replacing bureaucratic accountability with democratic accountability – Government Direction.
- Statistical breakdown of all crime related activity.

Resolved:- (1) That Councillor Jahangir Akhtar be thanked for his very informative presentation.

(2) That a report on progress be provided to the December, 2010 meeting of this Scrutiny Panel.

(THE CHAIRMAN AUTHORISED CONSIDERATION OF THE FOLLOWING ITEM IN ORDER TO ASSIST WITH PREPARATION OF A DRAFT CONSULTATION RESPONSE AND ITS DEADLINE)

26. POLICING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Consideration was given to a report presented by Steve Parry, Partnership Manager (Neighbourhood Crime and Justice Management), which detailed how “Policing in the 21st Century - Reconnecting Police and the People Consultation” was published on 26th July, 2010 as part of the coalition reform.

The report, therefore, provided a summary of the Government's proposals to transform the approach to local policing with a focus on those that have a significant impact on the Council and was accompanied with a prepared draft consultation response to the questions most relevant.

It was noted that the proposals set out in the report show the direction of travel the Government intended to take in reforming the police service and its governance.

Councillor Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods, was to consider the report at his delegated powers meeting on Monday, 20th September, 2010 and would take account of any comments made by this Scrutiny Panel.

Discussion ensued on the document and reference was made to the proposals for the police service to lose some of its independence by its closer working with local authorities, but this was what was happening in Rotherham currently. Rotherham was in a strong position to meet the requirements of this document and to manage the priorities through neighbourhood policing.

Reference was also made to Question 20 of the consultation and the suggested response which included the word "compulsory" for school/ college leavers. It was proposed that the word "compulsory" be removed.

The Scrutiny Panel also considered in detail the response to Question 1 and concern was expressed about the election of Commissioners, who may put themselves forward for election and how much an election may cost the ratepayers.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received.

(2) That the consultation response be noted and Question 20 be amended and incorporated into that document to be approved by the Cabinet Member on Monday, 20th September, 2010.

27. COMBINED PARLIAMENTARY AND LOCAL ELECTIONS MAY 2010

Consideration was given to a report presented by Tim Mumford, Assistant Chief Executive – Legal and Democratic Services, which provided an accurate account and assessment of how the combined parliamentary and local elections in May, 2010 were conducted in Rotherham. The report included key aspects of the process from the planning stage through to the counting of votes and drew on

direct experience of the Electoral Services Team and feedback from other stakeholders including voters, candidates, agents and polling staff.

Further information and a detailed account was given of:-

- Planning for the Election.
- The Nomination Process.
- Communications with Candidates - Briefings and Guidance.
- Voter Registration.
- Printing and Postal Ballot Preparation and Despatch.
- Postal Ballot Opening and Personal Identifier Verification Process.
- Polling Day.
- Counting of Votes.
- Security at the Election and at the Count.
- Assessment of Performance.

Discussion ensued on the whole election process. Concerns were expressed about some unsuccessful candidates not joining successful candidates on the declaration stage, and about security and the segregation of candidates, agents and observers into the constituency areas which should be addressed by the Electoral Services Team in the future. However overall, credit was due to Rotherham's Electoral Services Team for the successful conduct of the combined election.

Resolved:- (1) That the contents of the report be noted.

(2) That this Scrutiny Panel's recognition of the first class performance of the Electoral Services Team be noted.

28. ROTHERHAM ELECTION TURNOUT ANALYSIS

Consideration was given to a report presented by Tim Mumford, Assistant Chief Executive – Legal and Democratic Services, which provided statistical analysis of the May Election turnout figures, which could be used to identify turnout change or information that could help Members work more effectively in their wards.

Further information was provided on the correlation between turnout and deprivation, age, tenure and qualifications.

Discussion ensued on the proposals to increase voter turnout, whether there could be a link between the census and the annual canvass and the encouragement of younger people to register and vote.

Resolved;- (1) That the contents of this report.

(2) That a further report on voter registration feature as an agenda item at the next meeting of this Scrutiny Panel.

29. COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP FUND 2009/ 2010

Consideration was given to a report presented by Paul Griffiths, Community Liaison Officer, which outlined the expenditure of the Members' Community Leadership Fund for the financial year 2009-10 and its continuing role in enhancing the leadership role of Elected Members within Rotherham's neighbourhoods.

To assist with the information contained within the report Paul Griffiths gave a short presentation which focused on:-

- The National Context.
- Expenditure 2009/ 10.
- Projects within the Wards of Brinsworth, Rotherham West, Cross Ward Projects and Maltby.
- Carry Over Funding.
- Options for Change.
- Other Devolved Budget Schemes.
- Key Differences.

A question and answer session ensued and the following issues were raised and subsequently clarified:-

- Flexibility of the fund and carry over facility for larger projects.
- Spend by Members and opportunity to pool budgets.
- Publicity options for the fund and visibility on the website.
- Fund information circulated to the relevant Area Assembly on an annual basis.
- Support for proposals of a central pot for bids should some Members not spend all their allocation.
- Notifications and reminders to Members as the deadline period approached.
- Continued support for the fund and its arrangements to remain the same.

Resolved:- (1) That the expenditure for the financial year 2009-10 be noted.

(2) That no changes be made to the fund at the present time.

30. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON 15TH JULY, 2010

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel held on 15th July, 2010 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

31. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE HELD ON 23RD JULY, 2010

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings of the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee held on 23rd July, 2010.

Resolved:- That the contents of the minutes be noted.