

DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL SCRUTINY PANEL
28th October, 2010

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Currie, Cutts, Dodson, Hughes and Bryden (Community Representative).

Also in attendance:- Pat Draycott (VAR) (Observer), Joanna Jones and Councillor Hussain.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest to report.

33. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS.

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

34. SIX MONTH REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S WEBSITE

Consideration was given to a report presented by Rachel O'Neil, Customer Access Client Manager which stated that the Council's refreshed website went live on 6th January 2010 following a successful implementation project, led by the Transformation and Strategic Partnerships Team. This included the purchase and roll out of a new Content Management System providing a flexible, cost effective and engaging way for customers to access Council services online.

This report provided an update on the implementation of the refreshed website in its first six months between January and June 2010 which covered the following :-

- Benefits of the new Content Management System
- Website Usage
- Independent External Reviews
- SOCITM Better Connected
- Sitemorse
- Customer Registration
- Customer Satisfaction Results
- Website Forward Plan

Delivery of an effective website as part of the Council's Customer Access Strategy was a critical element in ensuring the Council transformed its services for the benefit of citizens, businesses, members and staff in order to improve the customer experience, generate efficiencies and deliver customer service excellence. This would also form a key supporting access channel for consolidation of customer services.

Members welcomed the success of the new website and asked questions and made suggestions on how to improve things further.

Resolved:- (1) That progress on the implementation of the refreshed website be noted.

(2) That the easy use of the mapsearch be promoted.

(3) That a report be submitted to Members on the possibility of reducing the list of choices following a search.

(4) That a report be submitted to members on how to tackle access problems, from such as young, old or disadvantaged people or those with no computer.

(5) That a Member training session be held on how to use the website effectively.

35. DELIVERING ELECTORAL SERVICES - CURRENT AND FUTURE ISSUES

Consideration was given to a report presented by Mags Evers, Chief Elections and Electoral Registration Officer, which provided a picture of the issues on the horizon for the delivery of electoral services in the UK. The report was written against a background of damaging incidents in some areas at the combined parliamentary and local elections in May 2010 and a challenging future following the publication of "The Coalition our programme for government." It would draw on research into the various Bills currently before parliament and on discussions amongst peer groups such as the West & South Yorkshire Electoral Officer's Forum and the Association of Electoral Administrators (Yorkshire and North East Branch). The report was further informed by attendance at a recent AEA seminar which drew on the expertise of influential and knowledgeable speakers to examine the present and future system of electoral administration. Also in attendance was the Cabinet Office Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform, Mark Harper, MP who spoke about the plans for reforms and gave more detail following his announcement the previous day about the implementation of individual electoral registration.

Members acknowledged the challenges facing Election Staff in the world of elections and asked a range of questions and made reference to key issues.

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

(2) That a Council Seminar be held to inform Members of these challenges.

(3) That regular reports on activity be submitted to this Scrutiny Panel.

(4) That a note be circulated to all Members of the Council on how they could advise the general public on adding their names to the Register of Electors.

(5) That a report be submitted to Members on the pressures facing the Council, including accommodation, resources and staffing.

36. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INPUT FROM THE WOMEN'S REFUGE

A representative of the Women's Refuge gave a detailed presentation on the work of the Refuge, the present position and the pressure on resources.

Resolved:- (1) That the vital work of the Refuge be acknowledged and any bid for funding be supported as part of the budgetary processes of the Council and its Partners.

(2) That the action of the Cabinet to support the 'Rotherham Men Say NO Campaign' be welcomed.

(3) That the Town Centre Event in November be supported.

37. EQUALITY AND COHESION UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report presented by Zafar Saleem, Community Engagement & Cohesion Manager which provided an update on Equality and Diversity issues including community cohesion in schools, Connecting Communities, the Equality Framework review, and complaints monitoring.

The update covered the following issues:-

- Rotherham School Linking Project
- Cohesion duties for schools and how local schools are performing
- Progress on the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) Improvement Plan
- Complaints monitoring
- National Indicator 4 TSF (Target Support Fund) Project (2009-2011) and Connecting Communities (2009-2010)
- Target Support Fund
- Connecting Communities (2009-10)

None compliance with the new public sector duties under the Equality Act 2010 could lead to enforcement action by the Equalities & Human Rights Commission. A number of the provisions are yet to become law so the implications for the council are uncertain.

Members referred to activity and to a number of issues relating to the report, including Community Cohesion within Schools and Local Democracy Week.

Councillor Hussain responded to the questions in detail.

Resolved:- (1) That the update on Equality and Diversity issues including community cohesion in schools, Connecting Communities, the Equality Framework review, and equality data monitoring of complaints be noted.

(2) That a further report be submitted to this Panel on sharing best practice in community cohesion in schools clarifying the performance management and reporting arrangements for schools judged as inadequate by OFSTED.

(3) That a further report be submitted to this Panel on all activity taking place to promote local democracy.

38. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL SCRUTINY PANEL HELD ON 16TH SEPTEMBER, 2010

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting of the Democratic Renewal Scrutiny Panel held on 16th September, 2010 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

39. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PERFORMANCE AND SCRUTINY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE HELD ON 10TH AND 24TH SEPTEMBER AND 8TH OCTOBER , 2010

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings of the Performance and Scrutiny Overview Committee held on 10th and 24th September and 8th October 2010.

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

40. MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE MEMBERS' TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL HELD ON 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2010

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meetings of the Members' Training and Development Panel held on 30th September, 2010.

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