

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
25th July, 2012**

Present:- Councillor Whysall (in the Chair); Councillors Andrews, Astbury, Atkin, Ellis, Falvey, Gilding, Gosling, N. Hamilton, Jepson, Read, P. A. Russell, Swift and Wallis.

Together with:- Mr. Derek Corkell, Mr. Brian Walker, Councillor Amy Rushforth and Councillor Gerald Smith and Whelbourn.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Havenhand and Sims.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Councillors Andrews and Wallis declared personal interests in Minute No. 13 (Review of the Library and Information Service).

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

There were no members of the public or the press present.

11. COMMUNICATIONS.

There was nothing to report.

12. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission held on 13th June, 2012, were considered.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

Arising from Minute No. 5 (Work Programme 2012/13), it was noted that there was to be a joint Improving Places and Lives review on 106 Agreements and School Places.

13. REVIEW OF THE LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE.

The Chair advised that the report was before the Select Commission as part of the consultation process. No decisions had been made as yet on the proposals.

Elenore Fisher, Customer and Cultural Services Manager, presented the report submitted highlighting the following:-

- Consultation would continue until the end of August, 2012
- Workshops had been held in all but 2 of the community libraries so far
- Substantial number of comments from members of the public via on line, e-mails and in person

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- The rationale for the proposed closure of Kimberworth and Kimberworth Park Libraries
- The relationship between Mowbray Gardens and Wickersley Library – both success stories, both received substantial investment but served their communities differently. Wickersley had high visitor numbers and active borrowers; Mowbray Gardens, although open less hours, had equally high number of visitors which did not translate into book issues but did in different activities. Each were tailored to their communities but equally successful
- The report was long, but a lesson learnt from other authorities who had undertaken the review was to ensure it was based on a clear strategy. One of the appendices, which summarised the proposals, was what members of the public received
- The statistics reflected the number of visitors and active borrowers
- The proposal was to create a number of hub sites across the Borough – Aston, Dinnington, Wath and Riverside House (all open between 49-55 hours per week)

Resolved:- (1) That the draft future Service model (Appendix C) for the Library and Information Service be noted.

(2) That it be noted that no decisions on the model will be made until the Autumn when a further report would be submitted to Cabinet.

14. LEISURE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES: AFFECTS OF BUDGET SAVINGS ON GROUNDS MAINTENANCE AND STREET CLEANSING SCHEDULES.

Steve Hallsworth, Leisure and Community Services Manager, presented a report outlining the changes made to Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing schedules as a result of the 2012/13 approved budget savings highlighting:-

- Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing functions were now part of the Leisure and Community Services Team divided into 2 delivery teams:-
Eastern Team working from Barbers Avenue Depot, Kiveton Park Depot and Hellaby Depot
Western Term working from Oaks Lane Depot and Ulley Country Park
- Work included general grass maintenance, shrub and rose bed maintenance, hedge maintenance, fine turf, horticultural services including seasonal bedding displays, scheduled litter picking and emptying of litter and dog waste bins
- Miscellaneous Cleansing Team based at Hellaby Depot providing mechanical sweeping, graffiti removal, fly tip removal, weed killing, leaf removal and response to other cleansing issues e.g. road traffic accidents. There was also a dedicated Rotherham Town Centre Team
- Total savings for 2012/13 - £1,683,500

- Budget reduction for Grounds Maintenance resulted in change to grass cutting schedule – 3 weekly cycle from 2nd April reducing to 5 weekly from the beginning of July
- Budget reduction for Street Cleansing resulted in scheduled litter picking reduction and frequency of litter and dog waste bins emptied
- Treatment of weeds reduced to once a year
- As from August 1 of the 3 mechanical sweepers to be withdrawn

It was noted that a full review of Service provision would take place in October/November to support decision making on the deployment of resources for the remainder of 2012/13 and 2013/14. With regard to the Street Cleansing schedules, an action plan had already been established and a full review of Service provision would take place in the New Year to support decision making for the remainder of 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Discussion ensued on the report with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- Health and safety issues – the experienced team of operational managers and staff were conscious of where the scheduled work was not fulfilling the needs in terms of health and safety and would react accordingly. The additional work had added to in-year budget pressures
- Deprived communities agenda – a standard schedule established but when a Member contacted the Service, a response would be provided where possible. The Service was at such a level, that to provide additional services elsewhere would possibly mean stopping service somewhere else
- Complaints – the Contact Centre could perform certain functions but the schedules for Grounds Maintenance work were greatly influenced/affected by weather conditions so it was difficult to provide information that was always up-to-date
- Weed spraying – Weed spraying this year had been hampered by the weather. It was acknowledged that if weeds were not dealt with there were bigger consequences for the reinstatement of pavements and in some cases highway. As a part of the monthly budget monitoring, consideration was given to any resources that could be diverted to weed treatment. To reinstate a full weed spraying programme would cost approximately £50,000. So far an additional £20,000 was required to spray sight lines
- Grass verges – wild flowers was a good economical solution. Work was ongoing into possibly carrying this out along central reservations. There was the initial investment of purchasing the seeds and a level of ongoing maintenance. Additional funding had recently been agreed for rural verges and would be prioritised by the Rural Verges Team
- Reducing community assets – there were a number of open spaces and small pockets of land with little amenity value. Members of the community may wish to purchase them

- Should there be any underspend, a priority was highway maintenance as there had been a measurable deterioration in the condition of roads and footpaths
- Dog bins – the Miscellaneous Team were able to respond to any particular issue identified by a member of the public where an immediate response was required
- The entrances to the Borough had to be made a priority. If funding could be identified, bids would be submitted for central reservations and how they could be maintained differently
- There should be a review before the end of the cutting season
- Invest to Save bid?
- Gullies – a lot were blocked because of weeds growing in them. The mechanical sweepers had been reduced to 2 and operated on schedules which were out of date. They were being updated and it was expected to reduce the amount of non-productive running time of the vehicles. It was also a fact that some roads were being mechanically swept that should not be. Various options were being considered. There would not be fewer drivers but a group of employees with a wider range of skills so there would always be drivers to operate the machines

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

(2) That a review be carried out as soon as possible including:-

Analysis of the impact of the budget cuts including any unanticipated impact
 Detailed future risk assessment
 Suggestions for improvement
 Invest to Save

15. HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE - POT HOLES.

David Burton, Director of Streetpride, and Stephen Finley, Highway Asset Management Principal Engineer, presented a report on the arrangements for managing highway safety defects (potholes) together with background information on budgets/costs and the number of defects dealt with over the last 5 years.

Attention was drawn to:-

- 2012/13 Highway Maintenance budget was £4,474,932
- Safety defect repairs (potholes) were funded from the Revenue Basic Maintenance allocation - £450,000. This type of repair was classified as reactive. Methods to reduce the number and increase planned non-reactive repairs were actively pursued

- Expenditure on potholes over the last 5 years had increased significantly from £1/4M in 2007/08 to approximately £1/2M 2012/13
- Additional funding provided by the Department of Transport to deal with the impact of the severe weather in 2009/10 and 2010/11
- The Council was responsible for a highway network of 1,189km and 1,680km of footway
- Defects categorised as either ‘immediately dangerous’ – made safe within 4 hours – or ‘actionable’ – made safe within 24 hours
- The ‘industry standard’ method for dealing with safety defects was to sweep out the defect, place in the appropriate material, and compacted by hand. As many roads were traffic sensitive, it was essential that the defect repairs were completed quickly on site to reduce the health and safety to operatives otherwise road closures may be required
- Consideration was being given to taking a different approach to dealing with defects by ‘planing’ out the potholes and immediate surrounds to eliminate the immediate danger and returning several days later to complete a permanent repair
- Condition surveys were carried out on all roads/footways as part of the longer term maintenance plan. This gave a condition and suggested treatment for the road in question. The condition of the Council’s network had for some years been in the upper quartile; it was expected that it would fall into the 2nd quartile in the 2012 survey
- Work was bundled up in an area which may include pre-patching for surface treatments, small patching works and larger type schemes. This allowed the Delivery Team to “set up camp” in that area to maximise efficiency. Liaison also took place with other Teams to carry out works at the same time

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised:-

- Meadowbank Road had been the subject of a Gateway Scheme with its footways the focus of treatment but the carriageway not. Patching had been carried out to get rid of the defects. A bid had been submitted to the Department of Transport to hopefully carry out super patching
- When considering the condition of the network extra criteria was also used e.g. G.P. surgery, identified by Ward Members
- Utility companies – regular inspections carried out of reinstatement works. Utilities were legally responsible for up to 2 years
- The forward schedule was updated weekly. It was a fluid programme but attempted to stick to the schemes selected for that year. If, when on site, a site was found to have deteriorated greatly from the previous inspection and caused the works to take longer than anticipated, any schemes delayed would automatically be added to the next programme

- Road Traffic Accidents – the cost of road sweeping after an accident would be approximately £50. It was not felt to be financially viable to try and recover the cost together with the difficulties in getting information from the Police due to data protection. However, if it was a major traffic accident and the costs of clearing the road much higher, attempts would be made to recover the costs
- Surface dressing – Residents and some Ward Members did not like it as it caused disruption to the road network. Other products were used which were economical and did not cause disruption
- To bring the Borough's roads up to standard would cost in the region of £70-90M
- Review of gateways

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

(2) That a report on the effectiveness of the new method of repairs potholes be submitted in due course.

16. DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING:-

Resolved:- That a further meeting be held on Wednesday, 5th September, 2012, commencing at 1.30 p.m.