

**SELF REGULATION SELECT COMMISSION  
11th October, 2012**

Present:- Councillor Currie (in the Chair); Councillors Atkin, Beaumont, Beck, Ellis, Godfrey, J. Hamilton, Mannion and Tweed.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from The Mayor (Councillor Pickering), Councillors Sharman and Watson.

**24. COMMUNICATIONS**

There were no communications to report.

**25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest to report.

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

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

**27. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 20TH SEPTEMBER, 2012**

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting of the Self Regulation Select Commission held on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2012 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

The Select Commission had noted a number of items from the previous minutes which were suggested for inclusion on future agendas and received confirmation that these outstanding items would be scheduled into the work programme, which would be included within future agenda papers for information.

**28. COMPLAINTS - ANNUAL REPORT 2011 - 2012**

Consideration was given to a report presented by Stuart Purcell, Performance and Improvement Officer, which provided information about complaints made between 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2011 and 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2012 to the Local Authority, under the Corporate Complaint's Procedure, the Adult Social Services and Children's Social Services complaint regulations

The report set out in detail the number of complaints made by customers. The information was presented for the Council and by each Directorate and contained a summary of complaints received, main complaint issues and how services have been improved.

Also included were details on how complaint handling had been improved over the year and how this could be improved further.

Over the last twelve months the total number of complaints received by the Council had reduced from 1248 (2010/11) to 724, which was a 42%

reduction and overall 94% of all complaints were responded to within the statutory timescales, compared to 76% in 2010/11.

A distinction was sought between a "comment" and a "complaint" and how these were documented and recorded within the figures presented. It was suggested that the distinction between the two be more explicit in order to tease out the issues and deal with the correlation of matters objectively and collectively, especially in light of concerns being raised about the reduction in services arising from the funding cuts. It was also suggested that "compliments" amounting to some 598, be included in future reports.

Further discussion ensued and a number of questions were raised and subsequently clarified relating to:-

- The levels of satisfaction given the reduced spend available for services and ensuring all comments and complaints were recorded.
- The numbers of complaints upheld.
- The correlation of complaints in the areas of Neighbourhoods and Adult Services and Children and Young People's Services and whether any bespoke work was being done in these areas.
- Good practice identified in Neighbourhoods and Adult Services and whether this was being rolled out across other Directorates in order to move forward and improve performance.
- Take up of suggestions and learning from experience.
- Numbers of complaints being taken to Stage 3 of the process.
- Inclusion of concerns raised as part of Councillors' Surgery reports and how these were escalated.
- The need for all Directorates to be working corporately and consistently with complaints and Councillors' Surgery issues.

It was noted that the report related to the period ending March, 2012 and since then a number of significant changes have been made to the way Council handled complaints, leading to the consistency in approach requested by the Select Commission.

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

(2) That the issues raised be discussed further with the relevant Cabinet Members.

(3) That the Strategic Leadership Team ensures that consistent approach is taken across all Directorates when dealing with comments/complaints/concerns and disseminating good practice.

## **29. LOCALISATION OF SUPPORT FOR COUNCIL TAX (COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT) AND COUNCIL TAX TECHNICAL CHANGES**

Consideration was given to a report presented by Andrew Bedford, Strategic Director of Resources, detailing how from April, 2013, the Government was abolishing the current national Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme and asking local authorities to set up their own local schemes to meet the needs of their

local area. In making these changes the Coalition Government was cutting the amount that Rotherham had to provide Council Tax Support by £4.1 million.

The Government was also allowing Councils more discretion with regards to certain Council Tax discounts and exemptions which could be amended in order to raise additional Council Tax income which could be used to partially meet the funding cut.

Proposals for Rotherham's local Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme and changes to Council Tax discounts and exemptions have been developed in the form of a consultation leaflet. In order to meet legislative requirements these proposals must be put out to public consultation.

Following an eight week consultation period, which commenced on 24th September 2012, the responses would be considered before the final scheme was agreed and finally adopted by Council. The adoption of the scheme must happen by 31st January, 2013 in order to avoid the imposition of a Government default scheme which would have severe financial implications for the Council.

Clarification was sought on the mitigation measures being considered and the options to change Council Tax Discounts and Exemptions and assurances given that all permutations would be considered before any proposals were put forward for approval. Changes to the wider welfare reform would also have an adverse effect on the levels of Council Tax collection in the borough. Details as to the effect of any changes would need to be clear before any decision was taken and in conjunction with the budget setting process. The Council had not yet been provided with a final funding figure so this would need to be known before any final scheme was put forward for adoption.

Further information was also provided on the review of the Single Person's Discount and the need to tighten up on fraudulent claimants and the Second Adult Discount within the current scheme.

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

(2) That the proposed Local Council Tax Support Scheme and Council Tax changes for public consultation which commenced on 24th September 2012 for an 8 week period be noted.

(3) That a further update report be submitted to the Select Commission during December, 2012/January, 2013.

### **30. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Resolved, That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act (as amended March, 2006 (information relating to finance and business affairs)).

**31. DIGITAL REGION**

Andrew Bedford, Strategic Director of Resources, gave an update on the current position with the Digital Region.

Further information was provided on the prospects of securing a private sector partner, timetable for taking matters forward and the costs and options of making the network available to 80% of households and business across South Yorkshire.

A number of issues were discussed.

Resolved:- (1) That Andrew Bedford be thanked for his update.

(2) That the information be noted.

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

Resolved:- That the next scheduled meeting take place on Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2012 at 3.30 p.m.