

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
19th April, 2013

Present:- Councillor Whelbourn (in the Chair); Councillors Currie, Dalton, Falvey, Gilding, J. Hamilton, G. A. Russell, Steele and Whysall.

157. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this meeting.

158. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

159. HM GOVERNMENT WELFARE REFORM - UPDATE

Michael Holmes, Policy and Partnership Officer, presented a summary of recent developments, at a local and national level, in relation to the Government's Welfare Reform Programme.

He drew particular attention to:-

Fund for Change/Local Welfare Provision

Rotherham's model had gone live on 2nd April, 2013, where applications were made via the telephone to the Customer Contact Centre with the vast majority of decisions made by a short software-assisted assessment. The Scheme comprised:-

- A small emergency payment, via the Post Office, for those whose health and safety were at immediate risk and had no other means of support (expected to be available from late April)
- Loans via Laser Credit Union for those in financial difficulty but needed less urgent support
- Provision of goods via the Council's Furniture Solutions Team to help people resettle or stay in the community with repayment required in cases where the assessment deemed it appropriate

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- Monthly governance meetings due to start in May to assess the Scheme's effectiveness, applications received, payments made and Service pressures
- There had been a few problems with regard to customers not being sure where to contact the Council or the DWP
- It was a 6 months contract with Laser Credit Union who already had a relationship with the Council with regard to rent in advance

Festive Food Fund

The Fund had operated from 19th December, 2012, to 11th January, 2013, aiming to help those lacking money to buy food over Christmas. It had been delivered by Laser Credit Union offering interest free loans of £50 for individuals and £100 for families with payment in the form of vouchers for PAK Stores.

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- The locality of PAK Stores had been made it difficult for those living in outer parts of the Borough, however, it was recognised this had been due to the ability of PAK being able to respond to the request quickly and other supermarkets having to refer the request to their respective head offices
- Could vouchers exclude alcohol and cigarettes in future?
- The Local Welfare Provision Scheme was in place where the Post Office was allowing people to access £20

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

DHP funding was provided by the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) to help local authorities deal with the impact of Welfare Reform, in particular the Social Sector Size Criteria and the Benefit Cap. The national annual funding for 2013/2014 had been increased from £60M to £155M and, as a result, Rotherham's allocation had increased from £115k to £437k.

The Cabinet had agreed (Minute No. 190 of 10th April, 2013), to prioritise DHP as follows:-

- Support disabled people who lived in significant adapted accommodation and were affected by the social sector size criteria
- Support foster carers who need an extra room and were affected by the social sector size criteria
- Provide short term assistance to claimants affected by the benefits cap

In Rotherham it was suggested that 4,384 households would be affected with an average loss of £12.66 per week. Of those, 3,577 would see a 14% cut with an average loss of £11.24 per week while 799 would see a 25% cut with an average loss of £19.57 per week. It was anticipated that 136 households would be hit by the benefit cap losing an average of £53.18 per week.

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- The estimated total benefit loss in Rotherham was £3.27M
- Revised Allocations Policy still in draft – was retaining social housing for Rotherham residents included?
- Clarity required on redesignation of rooms

Universal Credit

There was no detail as yet on the amount of funding to be provided (if any) but the Guidance indicated that local authorities would be expected to continue to provide welfare and housing advice and support “from existing funding arrangements”.

Part of the support available to claimants would include (temporary) alternative payment arrangements for those who could manage monthly payments. This could include rent paid directly to the landlord, more frequent payments or payment split between partners.

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- Clarification still required on a number of points
- Funding would be available but would be payment by rewards
- Possibility that claimants may be fined if they made a mistake on their application form
- Issues for Self Regulation Select Commission to monitor – impact on Performance Indicators, effect on Housing Revenue Account, income stream coming back to the Council and trends
- Possibility of temporary transitional support for clients in exceptional circumstances
- Direct payment pilot in a number of areas last year
- Research from Sheffield Hallam University showed a £91M potential impact when the full impact of all the benefit cuts came in - £611M across the City Region
- A more detailed analysis had been undertaken to look at the impact which provided detail on where potential problems were in the Borough, work with the DWP to provide preventative support and help through the online system

Welfare Benefits up-rating

Certain working age Social Security benefits and payments, and certain elements of tax credits, would be up-rated by 1% rather than in line with inflation for the 2013/14 tax year.

The Government had accepted that the measures would push an additional 200,000 children into poverty. The DWP's impact assessment showed that 4.4M couples with children would lose an average of £3 per week whilst 2M lone partners would lose an average of £5 per week.

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- An extensive awareness raising campaign had been undertaken to make people aware of the changes that were coming in and give an understanding of the benefits they were entitled to linked into the work in Deprived Areas
- To be included on the agenda of the next Parish Liaison meeting

- Research being undertaken in the City Region on the impact on housing. The Cabinet Member for Safe and Attractive Neighbourhoods was to attend a meeting on 15th May where the outcomes would be reported. The increase of rent arrears had already been flagged
- The Government had already accepted it would push many into poverty. The Authority was working closely with the Troubled Families Initiative

Resolved:- (1) That the report be noted and a further report be submitted in 6 months.

(2) That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board retain the overview for the new workstreams with the following being delegated as follows:-

- (a) Self Regulation Select Commission consider Performance Indicators across all the initiatives as the information became available;
- (b) Improving Lives Select Commission consider Child Poverty in its general terms and the impact of Welfare Reform and benefits take up;
- (c) Improving Places Select Commission consider the research undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University and the impact on housing.

160. 2011 CENSUS - UPDATE

Miles Crompton and Elena Hodgson, Policy and Partnerships Team, gave the following powerpoint presentation:-

2011 Census

- 27th March, 2011 – Census Day
95.5% response rate in Rotherham
- July, 2012: first Census data released
Rotherham's population 257,300 (+3.7%)
Up from 248,175 in 2001
Mid-2011 est. 257,700 (+1,900 above projected)
108,300 households (+6%)
- 11th December, 2012: Local Authority key statistics
- 30th January, 2013: Ward, SOA

Age Structure

- School age –10%
- Over 85 +35%

BME Population

- 91.9% White British
- 8.1% BME
- 95% of population are UK born

BME Population – National Comparison

- 20% are BME
- 86% are UK born
- Pakistani ranked 50 (top 15%)

Families with Children – Rotherham Households with Dependent Children 2011-2011

- Average household size fell from 2.40 to 2.36
- Co-habiting couple family ranked 26 (top 8%)

Religion

- Muslims had increased by 78%

Housing Tenure

- 112,000 homes
- 3,775 were empty (3.4%)
- 108,300 households
- 4.5% were crowded
- Council rented ranked 26 (top 8%)

Economic Activity – Economically active Rotherham residents aged 16-74

- Employment +6%
- Unemployment +39%
- Men: from full-time to part-time work and self-employment
- Women: more in all areas, mainly full-time and part-time

Change since 2007/09

- Unemployed: 92% of men and 61% of women claim benefit
- Reduced from 36% to 33%
- Ranked 51 for long term sick or disabled (top15%)

Health: Limiting Long Term Illness (national comparison)

- 22% had a limiting long-term illness (England 17.6%)
- Limited a lot ranked 40 (top 12%)

General Health: Not Good – national comparison

- Bad and very bad health – ranked in worst 10%

Carers - % of Rotherham population providing unpaid care

- 31,000 or 12% provide unpaid care (England 10%)
- 3% increase in carers but estimated 14% increase in hours of care

Qualification Level

- 98% increase in Level 3+
- Ranked 29 for no qualifications (top 8%)
- Lowest 6% for Level 4+ qualifications
- National Comparison – Level 3+ Rotherham 29% England 40%

Car Ownership

- 123,783 cars and vans (+18%)

Summary of Key Issues

- Ageing population (especially 85+)
- BME population had doubled and more diverse
- 95% born in the United Kingdom, 98% spoke English
- More co-habitation, lone parents, one parent households
- Shift from Council to private renting
- Rise in unemployment and part-time work
- High levels of limiting long term illness and bad health
- Intensification of unpaid care (longer hours)
- Large rise in level 3+ qualifications
- 30% have no qualifications
- Rise in multi-car ownership – 18% more cars

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

- Illustrate the 11 Deprived Areas on the maps
- When Universal Credit was introduced there could only be 1 claimant per household
- The information reinforced the reasoning for selecting the 11 Deprived Areas. There were some real issues relating to the elderly – insufficient consideration given to pensioner poverty
- The Health statistics aligned with information known generally about the health of the Borough and emphasised the priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Board
- The information was being used to support funding bids

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

(2) That further reports about the 2011 Census of population be submitted to future meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board as each of the releases of Census data are made by the Office for National Statistics

(3) That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board oversee the preparation of a report about the 2011 Census of population and the implications for service planning, delivery and funding, for eventual submission to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

161. PROPOSALS TO STRENGTHEN THE CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY - CONSULTATION

Steve Pearson, Communications and Marketing, presented a report on the above consultation.

The Department for Communities and Local Government was consulting the Local Government Association and the National Association of Local Councils on proposals to give the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Government publicity greater force in particular to “protect the independent press from unfair competition”.

The consultation proposed the provision of the Secretary of State of powers to make directions requiring compliance with some or all of what were currently guidelines/recommendations in the Code.

The consultation ran from 8th April to 6th May, 2013.

The existing Code included specific guidance about the frequency, content and appearance of local authority newspapers, including recommending that principal local authorities limit the publication of any newspaper to once a quarter and Parish and Town Councils limit their newsletters to once a month. Local authority publicity should be lawful, cost effective, objective, even-handed, appropriate, have regard to equality and diversity and be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

The Council did not produce its own Council newspaper or magazine. However, the Authority currently spent approximately £53,000 on placing public notices in local newspapers and may in future wish to consider alternative more cost effective methods of doing so.

Rotherham continued to operate consistently within the Framework of the Recommended Code of Practice on Local Authority Publicity, drawing on expert legal, media and communications advice to interpret the Guidance in a local context.

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

(2) That the DCLG be informed that this Board felt that statutory underpinning was not necessary as self-regulation worked with the vast majority of cases and may be an additional burden to both sides.

162. YOUTH CABINET/YOUNG PEOPLE'S ISSUES.

There were no issues to report.

163. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 5TH APRIL, 2013

Resolved: - The minutes of the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 5th April, 2013, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

164. WORK IN PROGRESS

Updates were provided to the meeting in relation to the work in progress of the Select Commissions as follows:-

Select Regulation Select Commission

Councillor Steele provided an update on the progress of the Select Commission:-

- A meeting had taken place with regard to the scoping of the Commissioning Review
- Members were submitting requests for the work programme which would be further discussed at the away day

Improving Places Select Commission

Councillor Falvey provided an update on the progress of the Select Commission:-

- An additional meeting had been held which had discussed potholes and off-road motorcycles

Improving Lives Select Commission

Councillor A. Russell provided an update on the progress of the Select Commission:-

- Reviews were continuing on Domestic Violence and Bullying

Health Select Commission

Councillor Steele provided an update on the progress of the Select Commission:-

- Rotherham Heart Town -1st year report of the 5 year project. The work that had been carried out in the 1st year had been excellent. Defibrillators had been placed around the Authority both on Council premises and private properties
- Hospital Discharge arrangements – Rotherham Foundation Trust's draft Policy had been submitted. It had been agreed that a spotlight review be held on the Select Commission's 3 priorities
- Urgent Care Review – The Select Commission had felt that there was insufficient detail to enable a response to be made. A sub-group was to be established to look at issues further
- Residential Care Review – The Review Group's recommendations would be submitted to the Board

Away Day

The Scrutiny Manager reported that the work programme was already fairly well developed; the away day would need to look at the priorities together with the information presented within the Welfare Reform and Census agenda items.

165. CALL-IN ISSUES - TO CONSIDER ANY ISSUES REFERRED FOR CALL-IN.

There were no formal requests for call-in to report.