

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet Member for Communities and Cohesion
2.	Date:	23rd June 2014
3.	Title:	Area Partnerships Team and Corporate Community Engagement Service
4.	Directorate:	Neighbourhoods and Adult Services

5. Summary

This report sets out proposals recommending the merger of the Area Partnership Team functions currently within the Housing and Communities Service, with the Corporate Community Engagement Service, to create a corporate 'hub' for community engagement and involvement activity. This will enhance coordination of activity and remove potential duplication of effort. As part of this merger, a unified job description is proposed for the Resident Engagement Officer and Community Involvement Officer posts, to better reflect their core function and to ensure area based activity is managed and delivered in one place. This will help to promote activity focussed on the deprived communities agenda, broader neighbourhood management activity and community engagement and development.

The report also recommends re-locating two posts currently within the Corporate Community Engagement Service, one to Children and Young Peoples Services (CYPS) and the other to the Neighbourhood Crime and Anti-Social behaviour Team within the Housing & Communities Service. This reflects current and long standing operational arrangements in CYPS and in respect of the latter, again creates a consolidated 'hub' for the management and coordination of Safer Rotherham Partnership, community safety, vulnerable persons and ASB related issues.

In addition to an improved neighbourhood focus, the proposed merger will enable further development and innovation with regard to modern methods of community engagement and on-line communications; strengthen intelligence sharing with regard to the key issues impacting upon Rotherham's communities; enhance support to elected members.

6. Recommendations

That the Cabinet Member considers the report and recommendations and supports the proposed next steps.

7. Background and rationale for proposals.

The opportunity to consider the synergies between the two services arose out of the transfer of the Community Engagement Service to Housing and Neighbourhood Services in 2013.

The review is set in the context of a number of drivers for change principally the need to direct resources to promote community resilience and self-help, target resources into our most deprived communities, consolidating service functions to both improve the service offer and deliver sustainable savings and efficiencies.

The proposed merger will create a number of service benefits which are detailed below.

The proposed merger will:

- *Unify community consultation, engagement and development activity* under the management of one Service Manager.
- *Remove duplication of effort.* Currently, there are a number of community based activities, such as the Golden 7 project with Rotherfed, which are supported by staff from both Area Partnerships and Community Engagement. Bringing the two services together will generate sharing of skill sets and expert knowledge. Over time, this will enable a more efficient allocation of resources to specific activities without undermining the quality of engagement and support to community and voluntary organisations, tenants and residents groups and key partners.
- *Consolidate work designed to support the most vulnerable neighbourhoods.* The work associated with the 11 most deprived communities within the Borough is predominantly supported by staff from both Area Partnerships and Community Engagement. The majority of the deprived communities coordinators are from these two services. The merger will create a significant hub for this work. Bringing the majority of the coordinators together within one service, working alongside the principal staff associated with neighbourhood engagement, development and capacity building, will strengthen operational relationships, shared planning and delivery and the exchange of innovation and good practice. This will ultimately benefit all areas, whilst still delivering bespoke solutions.
- *Help to modernise the ways we engage with communities.* Following the successful delivery of the on-line consultation on the Council's budget priorities and with the need to modernise our approach to communication, such as social networking, on-line discussion forums etc the merger will again stimulate a one team approach to shared skills and innovative thinking. The need to provide a stimulating range of communication options to the community will be critical to sustaining community involvement and attracting a more diverse range of views and active involvement from customers.

- *Improve support to elected members.* Bringing together functions associated with community consultation, engagement, social cohesion and community development, will simplify support and provide a more comprehensive service for elected members. This has potential to create a stimulus to Area Assemblies, a revival of communications frameworks and provide members with enhanced streamlined support with regard to tackling broader neighbourhood management issues in a comprehensive way.
- *Provide the capacity to create specific officer support for each deprived neighbourhood.* The consolidation of the Resident Engagement Officer and Community Involvement Officer posts will strengthen the focus of these posts towards dedicated support to each of the deprived neighbourhoods, whilst maintaining a strong service offer to the 7 area assembly areas. These posts will also take the lead with regard to initiatives associated with community capacity building, self-help and volunteering.
- Create a financial saving of £30k in 2014/15 and £50k in 2015/16.

Having described the benefits of the proposed merger, set out below are the details of the current operational arrangements for the two services and specific proposals.

7.1 Current position

The **Corporate Community Engagement Service** undertakes a range of corporate and service specific duties including: oversight of Equality Act 2010; directorate and corporate consultation; community relations including hate crime, Prevent, schools and wider community cohesion; Member and SLT support; migration and asylum issues; voluntary and community sector infrastructure support; and development of communities of interest.

The service is 100 percent General Fund resourced and there are 5 full time posts in the establishment as follows:

- 1 Community Engagement Service Manager
- 3 Community Engagement Officers
- 1 Schools Community Cohesion Officer

The **Area Partnerships Team** within the Housing and Communities Service undertakes a range of duties and responsibilities which include management and administration of the Area Assembly infrastructure, administration and development support to Area Housing Panels and community groups and organisations; broader neighbourhood management based activity; coordination of specific deprived communities based work; management of the Parish Council forums, administration and management of the elected members Community Leadership Fund etc. The team is made up of 21 fte posts, detailed below and is predominantly split funded 60% HRA and 40%

General Fund, with the exception of the three Resident Engagement Officer posts which are 100% HRA funded. These posts were previously within the 2010 Rotherham Ltd structure and were reintegrated into the Housing & Communities Service – Area Partnership Team.

The team consists of:

3 FTE Area Partnership Managers
7 FTE Community Involvement Officers
7 FTE Community Support Officers
1 FTE Parish Council Liaison Officer
3 FTE Resident Engagement Officers reintegrated from 2010 Rotherham Ltd and 100% Housing Revenue Account funded.

7.2 Proposals

7.2.1 Establishment of a consolidated Neighbourhood Partnerships & Engagement Service.

The change proposed is to merge the Area Partnerships Team & Corporate Community Engagement Service functions, with the combined service being re-branded as the “Neighbourhood Partnerships & Engagement Service”

The rationale for this change is to consolidate current community engagement and area partnership functions in one place to remove duplication of effort and create a new corporate ‘hub’ for community engagement and development. This proposal recognises the diverse role of the Area Partnership Team and the importance of an increasing focus on broader neighbourhood management based activity, community engagement and development, deprived communities interventions, increasing community resilience and promoting self-help.

The proposal will allow the targeted realignment of resources to areas of greatest need particularly the Deprived Communities areas, whilst retaining appropriate capacity within each of the existing Area Assembly localities to maintain service offer. This will be achieved through current Deprived Communities Coordinator arrangements, but with designated officers taking a day to day lead in each of the deprived communities with regard to neighbourhood management and development work.

To facilitate this proposal the existing Resident Engagement Officer and Community Involvement Officer posts in the establishment will be combined within one generic job description to ensure activity is managed and delivered in one place, strengthening coordination. The new post will be rebranded as ‘Neighbourhood Development Officer’.

The following staffing changes are proposed and will require appropriate consultation with staff and unions

- Transfer of the Area Partnership Team management responsibility from the Housing & Communities Manager to the Community Engagement Manager. The latter post to be rebranded Neighbourhood Partnerships and Engagement Manager. The expanded management role to include HRA related responsibilities such as management of associated staffing and resources linked to tenant engagement services, Area Housing Panels, Rotherfed etc.
- Unification of the current Resident Engagement Officer and Community Involvement Officer job roles within one generic job description. The posts will have a geographical focus including production and delivery of associated action plans.
- Community Support Officers rebranded Neighbourhood Support Officers. Current administration functions/responsibilities to be rolled back, through re-alignment with other services/ wider partners, in favour of increased capacity to focus on supporting neighbourhood development work, reflective of the grade.
- Formal transfer of the Schools Community Cohesion Officer post to the CYPS establishment as fundamentally the current work streams are related wholly to the schools curriculum and related project work.
- Transfer of 1 Community Engagement Officer to the Neighbourhood Crime and ASB Team within Housing & Communities Service.

7.2.2 Housing and Communities Service

As a result of the proposal to establish a consolidated Neighbourhood Partnerships & Engagement Service a number of changes are required to the current Housing and Communities Service structure and the teams that fall within the remit of the service, as follows.

As the 'communities' element of the service is being re-aligned, it is proposed that the retained functions within the service be rebranded 'Housing and Estate Services' and this will be reflected in the service managers revised job title 'Housing and Estate Services Manager'.

Neighbourhood Crime and ASB Team

As indicated above it is proposed to consolidate the Neighbourhood Crime and ASB function with the transfer of a post from the current Corporate Community Engagement Service. This will allow the alignment of work and resources dedicated to crime, Vulnerable Persons Unit (VPU), ASB, Hate Crime, community safety, Prevent and the Safer Rotherham Partnership. This will assist the continuing integration of the Vulnerable Persons Unit into the team following their move from Main Street Police Station to Riverside

House, where they are now co-located with the Neighbourhood Crime and ASB Team. The post to be transferred would be subject to a revised Job Description and job title, provisionally badged as 'Community Safety Coordinator'.

7.3 Next Steps

Staff and Union consultation would begin for a 30 day period after approval of the proposals. – July/August 2014

Finalise proposals – August/September 2014

Implementation – October 2014

8. Finance

During the preparation for this review, one member of staff sought voluntary severance, which created a saving of £11,500 which was accounted for during 2013/14 and by deleting the post from the establishment, the subsequent staffing budget thereafter has been permanently reduced by that value.

It is also proposed to realise savings of £30k from Community Engagement Service for the financial year of 14/15. These savings will be achieved from revenue budget adjustments within Corporate Community Engagement and proposals have been discussed and agreed with Finance.

Additional savings of £50k in 2015/16 will be achieved through reprofiling of the combined budget of the new Neighbourhood Partnerships and Engagement Service.

Changes to the existing job description of Resident Engagement Officer and Community Involvement Officer will also result in changes to the funding arrangements of the posts. The Resident Engagement Officer posts are 100% Housing Revenue Account funded; the Community Involvement Officer posts are split funded HRA 60% and General Fund 40%. Going forward all posts at this level would be split funded but the 60% HRA 40% General Fund split will need to be revisited to ensure no additional pressure is placed upon the General Fund.

9. Risks and uncertainties.

The proposed changes to the Resident Engagement Officer and Community Involvement Officer posts will require staff training and development, to ensure that service provision is not impacted upon.

It will be important to reassure elected members and Area Housing Panels that the changes will not adversely impact upon the current service offer to, for example, elected members, Area Assemblies and Area Housing Panels.

Any changes to job descriptions will require checking by pay and grading panel. However, it is not anticipated that there will be any changes to existing grades.

10. **Background Papers and Consultation.**

The proposals have been discussed with Human Resources and no immediate concerns have been raised, subject to usual staff and union consultation processes and pay and grading reviewing any changes to job profiles.

Financial Services have also been consulted.

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