

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
20th May, 2014

Present:- Councillor Whelbourn (in the Chair); Councillors Dalton, Falvey, G. A. Russell and Sims.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Beck, Currie, Gilding, Read and Steele.

132. MR. LEWIS E. SOUTH - FORMER DEMOCRATIC SERVICES MANAGER

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board stood in silence as a mark of respect for Mr. Lewis E. South, formerly the Democratic Services Manager with the Council, who had died recently.

133. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this meeting.

134. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

135. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2013-2014

Consideration was given to a report, presented by the Scrutiny Manager, containing first draft proposals for the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2013/14. Members discussed the format and contents of this draft report and suggested various amendments to the text and issues to be highlighted.

The report has three sections each for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and the four Select Commissions, featuring:-

- : the positive outcomes from previous scrutiny reviews
- : the work of scrutiny during 2013/2014
- : the scrutiny work programme for 2014/2015.

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

(2) That the proposed format of the Scrutiny Annual Report 2013/2014 be approved and the amended draft report be submitted to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to be held on 20th June, 2014, for further consideration.

(3) That, subject to resolution (2) above, the approved version of the Scrutiny Annual Report 2013/2014 be presented to Council on the 2nd July, 2014.

136. SCRUTINY REVIEW - DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS - SANCTIONS AND CONDITIONALITY REGIME

Further to Minute No. 106 of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 21st February, 2014, consideration was given to a report, presented by the Scrutiny Manager and the Policy Officer, describing the work of the review group, established by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and Chaired by Councillor Whelbourn, which had undertaken a scrutiny review of the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) sanctions and conditionality regime.

The scrutiny review group had been established in response to a concern raised within Rotherham Partnership's Welfare Reform Steering Group, Chaired by the Leader of the Council. Evidence suggested that potentially unfair implementation of sanctions was taking place and making the most vulnerable families within the Borough, more vulnerable. The purpose of the review was to ensure the DWP's conditionality and sanctions regime is implemented fairly, consistently and flexibly, reflecting the needs and circumstances of claimants, with increased transparency and more effective partnership working. The areas of focus for the review were listed in the report.

The key findings of the review were grouped under four headings: Communication, Flexibility and Discretion, Vulnerable Claimants and Local Working Protocol. There is one main recommendation of the scrutiny review, directed to the partners on the Welfare Reform Steering Group, which is to establish a local working protocol with the aim of ensuring complete fairness in the process of implementing sanctions in Rotherham.

Members debated the contents of the report of this scrutiny review, including the need to publicise the report of its findings and recommendations. It was noted that the review report had been distributed to the various organisations (eg: Jobcentre Plus, Citizens' Advice Bureau) which had participated in the review. It was agreed that the report be forwarded to the three local Members of Parliament, to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and to the Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary and neighbouring local authorities, with the aim that this matter be considered by Parliament and the Commons Select Committee for Work and Pensions.

Concern was expressed about the unwillingness of the Work Programme provider organisations to participate in this scrutiny review. There was additional concern about the issue of accountability, at national level, concerning the operation of the DWP sanctions and conditionality regime.

Discussion took place on a number of case studies of benefits' claimants.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the contents and findings of this scrutiny review be noted.

(2) That the report of the scrutiny review of the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) sanctions and conditionality regime, as now submitted, be referred to the Cabinet for further consideration.

(3) That the Cabinet's response to this scrutiny review be reported to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

(4) That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board shall continue its scrutiny review of the Department for Work and Pensions' sanctions and conditionality regime.

137. ISSUES REFERRED FROM AREA ASSEMBLIES

There were no items to report.

138. YOUTH CABINET/YOUNG PEOPLE'S ISSUES

There were no items to report.

139. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 25TH APRIL, 2014

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, held on 25th April, 2014 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

140. WORK IN PROGRESS

Health Select Commission:-

The Vice-Chair reported on the recent activities of the Health Select Commission:-

: scrutiny review of mental health services;

: scrutiny review of continence services.

Improving Places Select Commission:-

The Chair reported on the recent activities of the Improving Places Select Commission:-

: scrutiny review of improving the local economy;

: scrutiny review of procurement by the Council of goods and services from local suppliers.

Improving Lives Select Commission:-

The Chair reported on the recent activities of the Improving Lives Select Commission:-

: review of the pupil premium;

: review of school performance, especially at key Stage 2;

: study of child poverty.

141. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no formal call-in requests.