

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
14th January, 2015

Present:- Councillor Read (in the Chair); The Mayor (Councillor Foden); Councillors Atkin, Cowles, Gilding, Gosling, Lelliott, Roche, Sims, C. Vines and Whelbourn.

Also in attendance : Councillor M. Hussain (Cabinet Member for Environment) and Councillor D. Beck (Cabinet Member for Business Growth and Regeneration).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Andrews and from co-opted members Mrs. L. Shears and Mr. B. Walker.

40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this meeting.

41. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

42. COMMUNICATIONS

There were no communications to report.

43. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 26TH NOVEMBER 2014

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission, held on 26th November, 2014, be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chairman.

44. WINTER WEATHER RESPONSE

Further to the minutes of the Council seminar, which had been held on Tuesday, 6th January, 2015, the Select Commission undertook further discussion about the Council's response to the severe winter weather conditions (snow, very low temperatures and ice) during the ten days' period beginning on Boxing Day, Friday 26th December, 2014.

The Chairman welcomed David Burton (Director of Streetpride) and Councillor Mahroof Hussain, Cabinet Member for Environment, to give an update about the Council's response.

In moving forward, a number of different worksteams had been identified, each with different aspects and individual responses to the recent snow.

The Cabinet Member had asked appropriate officers to look at the individual worksteams and review which areas in the future should be identified as specific issues.

A 'lessons-learned' approach had identified to look further at operational responses and communications and to make any changes should the events of the festive period occur again.

Procedure dictated that the weather forecast would be checked over a five days' period, to look at the probability of bad weather and the need for precautionary gritting. On this occasion, from the five days' weather forecast, there had been no prediction of snow.

The managed response over the festive period involving skeleton staff working as it should have done, the problem being the snow that arrived had caused more problems than expected.

Rotherham's gritters were out working around the clock to keep the network clear and no strategic routes were lost. Sheffield City Council had closed the Parkway for a period of time and the Highways Agency was forced to close parts of the M1 motorway.

In terms of waste collection, this proved to be more a logistical challenge to recover, as there was a 25% increase in waste to collect during the festive period than the normal amounts collected at other times of the year. In consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member information was released about when deliveries would be caught up.

Waste was seen by the vast majority of people as being the most important service provided by the Council and the level of disruption was under-estimated. The Council's contact centre had ten times the number of calls it normally experienced and with hindsight it would have been beneficial to include in the Frequently Asked Questions Section about the recovery plan when routine waste schedules were disrupted. An improvement team was looking at how the process could be improved to ensure a quicker response in the future.

The Council's website emergency banner about waste collections may not have had the desired affect for informing the general public and a speedier update to get the messages across was required.

The social media feeds for the Council, normally handled by the Communications Team, were inundated with messages, and these had then to be directed to the Operational Manager. Managing public expectations was an area operational management were dealing with, to prevent confusing messages being relayed in the future.

Messages and Elected Member briefings were normally channelled through the Communications Team. The importance of ensuring Elected Members had the latest information was stressed, as they could be the main conduit between the Council and the general public. A clearer understanding of getting those messages out quicker was warranted.

Items for further consideration included:-

- If a similar severe weather event occurred, a daily meeting between operations staff should take place.
- Scripts for the contact centre and media messages needed to be agreed with the Communications Team.
- The frequency of updates needed to be slicker.
- An officer taking overview of the messages received for co-ordination.
- Consider alternative models of informing the public on websites, such as the one used by Derbyshire County Council with key links to relevant documentation.
- An agreed process for informing Elected Members.
- Internet communications need to be improved.
- Liaison with regarding the use of social media.
- The Frequently Asked Questions Section on the website required updating.
- Development of the Snow Warden Scheme and the policy on salt bins.

A briefing note based on the information above would be prepared and circulated to all Members.

During discussion, Members of the Select Commission raised the following issues:-

(a) there are parts of mainland Europe which have much more severe weather and heavier snowfall than the United Kingdom. Are there lessons to be learned from the severe weather response undertaken in other European countries.

This country does not have such severe weather with the frequency with which it occurs in Europe. Therefore, local authorities undertake much less investment in the required vehicles, equipment and materials, which may only lie idle if the weather is not so severe. In addition, the wetter snow often found in the United Kingdom is more difficult to plough and to clear and causes more problems at freezing temperatures.

(b) Officers were thanked for their explanations about the severe weather response at Area Assembly meetings. There were public expectations to meet in terms of the provision of salt/grit bins and also the publication of up-to-date information about changes in refuse bin collection days.

(c) The Winter gritting routes should be reviewed alongside the bus routes. Although many bus routes are gritted as a priority, some routes may have been missed by gritting vehicles because of recent changes to bus routes (one example being Christchurch Road, West Melton, another in the Whiston area). Members asked that this issue be investigated immediately.

(d) The collection of recycled waste (blue bags and blue boxes) had suffered as a consequence of the Winter weather, although collections had recommenced, as scheduled, as the weather had improved during the first week of January 2015.

(e) Members asked that this Authority's unit cost per dustbin, for refuse collection, be reviewed and compared with the costs of other similar local authorities.

(f) Although communications ought to be improved, both in terms of refuse collection and for the operation of bus services, the Select Commission acknowledged the efforts of the Streetpride workforce to ensure that the principal highway network in the Borough area had remained passable by vehicles, during the severe weather. There had been no serious accident nor injuries reported.

(g) Reference was made to the driver of the gritting vehicles and refuse collection vehicles having ultimate responsibility for the safety of the vehicle. Many side roads and estate roads had been impassable during the worst of the weather period in late December 2014.

(h) There was a suggestion that the use of the volunteer snow warden scheme, involving local residents, ought to be increased.

(i) Members considered that it is preferable to adhere to the scheduled days for refuse collection, for ease of understanding by the general public. It was noted that some refuse collection vehicles had been transferred to assist with the backlog of collection in other parts of the Borough area, resulting in a shorter amount of time spent on the collection of waste. The high winds during early January 2015 had caused litter and refuse to spread along residential roads.

(j) There had been very good assistance provided for aged persons' centres, to help elderly people cope with the severe Winter weather.

(k) There had been no noticeable impact upon schools, because the worst of the weather had occurred during the school holiday period and the weather had improved by the beginning of the Spring Term in January 2015.

(l) There should be further consideration of the disruption to bus services (eg: Manor Farm estate, Rawmarsh), both via this Council's Transport Liaison Group and also the Rotherham Bus Partnership, so as to improve communications with the travelling public.

Resolved:- (1) That the explanation of this Council's response to the severe Winter weather, experienced during late December 2014, be noted.

(2) That a scrutiny review of the Council's Winter weather response be undertaken by a review group comprising Councillors Atkin, Gosling, Sims and Read and the review shall consider the development of Elected Members' protocols about unexpected weather events, so as to assist in the dissemination of information to the general public.

(3) That a further report about the Council's Winter weather response, including communications with the general public, be submitted to a future meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission.

45. ROTHERHAM GROWTH PLAN - CONSULTATION

Further to Minute No. 35 of the meeting of the Cabinet Member and Advisers for Business Growth and Regeneration held on 12th January, 2015, consideration was given to a report and presentation from the Economic Development Manager, concerning the draft Rotherham Growth Plan, for which there is currently a consultation process including relevant stakeholders and interested parties. The consultation period ends on Friday 30th January, 2015. The report described the ambitions of the Rotherham Growth Plan, which are:-

: stimulating the local economy and helping people into work;

: protecting the Borough's most vulnerable people and families, enabling them to maximise their independence;

: ensuring all areas of Rotherham are safe, clean and well maintained;
and

: helping people to improve their health and well-being and reducing inequalities within the Borough.

In addition, Members noted the principal themes of the Rotherham Growth Plan, which are similar to those of the Sheffield City Region Strategic Economic Plan:-

- Growing existing and developing new businesses.
- Skills for employment.
- Social inclusion and combating poverty.
- Employment Land and Housing.
- the Rotherham town centre.
- Transport.

The presentation included the following salient details:-

: the restructuring of the local economy so that it will be more resilient and building a strong private sector;

: the creation of more jobs which are accessible to Rotherham residents;

: development of high-level skills; raising productivity and wages; attracting new businesses to the Borough area, which have growth potential;

: the Advanced Manufacturing Park (Waverley) and the Dearne Eco Vision are important areas and unique developments within the Borough; all parts of the Borough area should benefit from economic growth; Rotherham should be a place where people want to live, work and visit;

: various statistics were displayed, comparing Rotherham with the Sheffield City Region local authorities and also with national data (eg: the percentage of school pupils achieving 5 GCSE A*-C passes has shown considerable year-on-year improvement for more than a decade; yet, Rotherham does not fare as well in terms of the higher Level 4 qualifications);

: the period of the Growth Plan is from April 2015 to 2025 and will link to the Sheffield City Region Strategic Economic Plan;

: bids for funding are made to the Local Growth Fund and the new European programmes;

: delivery of the priorities of the Local Strategic Partnership and of the Borough Council;

: Increased Gross Value Added (more money in local economy) for the Borough area;

: Growth Zones - areas where the majority of new jobs will be located and more housing constructed (eg: Dinnington and the A57 corridor; the Dearne Valley; more businesses attracted to the Rotherham town centre; the new Bassingthorpe Farm development; Templeborough and the Lower Don Valley as part of the Rotherham-Sheffield Economic Corridor);

: Transformation Projects (the Advanced Manufacturing Park Innovation District; the proposed HS2 railway station at Meadowhall; Rotherham town centre developments (markets; cinema; Forge Island; Rotherham College of Arts and Technology university campus and delivery of degree courses; Pithouse West leisure scheme (Rother Valley); the 'Man of Steel' iconic sculpture and the public campaign for 'Heart of Steel' donations of money;

: issues from the scrutiny review of the local economy : key objectives are income generation and employment creation; SMART targets; the emphasis on opportunities and qualifications for young people;

: the Rotherham Growth Plan is jointly owned by partner organisations and has strong links to Local Plan; it is necessary to communicate the details of the Growth Plan effectively to the Council's partners and stakeholders;

: Funding – the European Programme 2014 to 2020 (£160 m over six years); the Government's Growth Deal of £320 millions; the Sheffield City Region Investment Fund (SCRIF) and the Infrastructure Investment Plan (IIF) are to fund capital projects; the Rotherham Growth Fund itself and the Rotherham Economic Regeneration Fund (RERF);

: Both the Local Strategic Plan and the Borough Council will be asked to approve the Rotherham growth Plan; the Plan becomes effective on 1st April, 2015, with the development of projects and interventions;

: sources of funding will have to be identified and secured; the Growth Plan will be monitored and progress reports submitted to Elected Members at intervals of six months.

During discussion, Members of the Select Commission raised the following issues:-

(a) reference to the Government's creation of Enterprise Zones. The Rotherham Growth Plan does include areas such as Enterprise Zones.

(b) Members appreciate the intentions in respect of job creation and apprentice training; are there safeguards in respect of wage levels, payment of the living wage and the avoidance of 'zero hours' contracts. The intention is to attract high quality companies which will offer jobs for local people at acceptable remuneration levels and avoiding 'zero hours' contracts.

(c) the importance of the 'visitor economy' and ensuring that the Rotherham Borough area is marketed and promoted effectively for possible tourists/visitors. The Local Economic Partnership has a Sport and Leisure element and the establishment of a Tourism Advisory Group is under consideration. The Council's membership of the 'Welcome to Yorkshire' organisation may not continue. The Chamber of Commerce intends to establish a Tourism Partnership, based on the example at Barnsley. The Department for Local Government Yorkshire and Humber has also produced a visitor strategy for use by local authorities. Major attractions are important (eg: the 'Man of Steel' sculpture and the leisure development at the Pithouse West site.

(d) reference to the Rotherham College of Arts and Technology university campus and whether the Dearne Valley College is a viable alternative (the former nursing school premises are currently vacant).

(e) a number of textual corrections were mentioned.

(f) a question about the Dearne Eco Vision and planning controls in relation to new buildings (officers will reply after the meeting).

(g) the length of time during which job creation will occur, with delays to lead-in time for employers settling in Rotherham and the uneven creation of jobs. The creation of some 10,000 new jobs is anticipated, which will depend heavily on the timescales of substantial new developments (eg: the proposals in the A57/Todwick area under negotiation).

(h) the types of jobs which may be created (eg: in construction). Appendix 5 to the submitted report provides details of the different sectors in which the jobs may be created.

(i) Ensuring that the skills are available amongst the local workforce, so that employees are not brought in from elsewhere; the proposed university campus will help to develop people to achieve Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications. There must be work with local schools, so that pupils are made aware of training prospects locally. The Select Commission noted that the proposed university itself will provide an extra impetus for training, as has been the case with Barnsley and its partnership with the Huddersfield University. The existence of a student population and the consequent need for accommodation will benefit the Borough area. There will eventually be the organic growth of jobs.

(j) The training and study should be supplemented by learning in the workplace. The Rotherham Growth Plan is ambitious and the training centre at the Advanced Manufacturing Park, as well as the proposed university campus, must provide high skills training.

(k) To ensure the effectiveness of the Advanced Manufacturing Park and its impact on local employment, there must be emphasis upon the science-based curriculum in schools, because these are often perceived as being difficult subjects to study. Local authorities (including Rotherham) do ensure that appropriate staff visit schools and encourage the take-up amongst pupils of the stem science subjects.

(l) A suggestion that craft subjects, such as woodwork and metalwork, should also be taught in schools. The importance of the Advanced Manufacturing Park was again emphasised, in addition to the proposed development on the A57/Todwick site. It is vital that jobs requiring a diverse range of skills, in different employment sectors, should be available for local people.

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

(2) That the following issues now discussed by the Improving Places Select Commission shall be included in the consultation on the Rotherham Growth Plan:-

(a) The importance developing existing businesses and also attracting new businesses to the Rotherham Borough area;

- (b) Skills for employment and progression - to ensure that local people have the correct skills for the jobs which are available;
- (c) To ensure that there is local control over skills development;
- (d) The importance of social inclusion and employment prospects;
- (e) Obtaining the agreement in principle from employers to commit to payment of 'living wages';
- (f) The Dearne Eco Vision and clarification of planning controls in relation to new buildings;
- (g) Rotherham town centre – to include reference to the independent retail offer and to possible increase in the 'leisure offer' in the town centre, which will be part of the imminent review of the town centre masterplan;
- (h) To emphasise the importance of Transport links, including the HS2 high speed railway and the tram-train development between Meadowhall, Rotherham and Parkgate;
- (i) To include reference to the Enterprise Zones in the Rotherham Growth Plan.