

SELF REGULATION SELECT COMMISSION
19th February, 2015

Present:- Councillor Wyatt (in the Chair); Councillors Cutts, Ellis, McNeely, Reeder, Rushforth, Wallis and Whelbourn.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Currie.

47. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at the meeting.

48. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no members of the public or the press present at the meeting.

49. COMMUNICATIONS

Caroline Webb, Senior Adviser (Scrutiny and Member Development) reported that at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 13th February, 2015, the subject of the Select Commissions' work programmes had been discussed in light of the appointment of the Executive Commissioners.

The Board had agreed, pending any instruction of statement of intent by the Commissioners, that future meetings of the Select Commissions should be considered on a case by case basis. The work commenced by the Commissions as part of the 2014/14 work programme should be completed, resources allowing, however the remaining areas of the programme not started be suspended for the present time.

In light of the above, the Management Board had taken the view that the budget review group and further work on consultation by the Self Regulation Select Commission should be suspended pending further details.

Councillor Ellis stated that were 2 areas of the Select Commission's work in particular that should not be lost sight of both of which had been alluded to in the Corporate Governance report. Firstly delegated decision making between officers and Members and those delegated powers to officers that were not reported and secondly the work of the review group on Standing Orders and looking at the different models of governance.

The Chairman agreed and suggested that they be passed to the Management Board.

Councillor Ellis felt that Scrutiny's role needed to be clearly set out in relation to the multi-agency response to address Child Sexual Exploitation.

Caroline Webb reported that one of the recommendations from the recent two day review work of the Management Board was to have a dedicated sub-group to look at the plans for the improvement activity that was being undertaken. The comments made with regard to ensuring information was communicated to Members and a clear direction of the activity taking place would be fed to the sub-group.

50. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 8TH JANUARY, 2015

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 8th January, 2015.

Arising from Minute No. 42(6)(6) (Capital Programme Monitoring 2014/15 and Capital Programme Budget 2015/16 to 2016/27), it was noted that a briefing note had not been provided as yet on the new integrated Housing Management IT system.

51. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING FOR THE PERIOD ENDING 31ST DECEMBER 2014

Further to Minute No. 131 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 4th February, 2015, consideration was given to a report presented by Anne Ellis, Finance Manager, which provided details of progress on the delivery of the Revenue Budget for 2014/15 based on performance for the first nine months of this financial year. It was currently forecast that the Council would overspend against its Budget by £2.103m (+1.0%); an improvement of £873k since the last report to Cabinet in December (October monitoring report).

The current forecast outturn included the costs of implementing recommendations from the Jay report and the Ofsted Inspection to the extent known. It was an evolving picture with the proposed restructure of Children's Services currently out to consultation. If recruitment to the final structure commenced during February or March, there were likely to be additional costs incurred which were not currently reflected within the report. Costs which would be borne by the Council in respect of the Corporate Governance Inspection were still unknown; the Chief Executive had written to the Government asking for an estimation of the Inspection costs and a response awaited.

The main reasons for the forecast overspend were:-

- The continuing service demand and cost pressures for safeguarding vulnerable children across the Borough.
- Cost pressures arising from some schools converting to academies.
- Continuing Health Care income pressures and demand pressures for Direct Payments within Older People and Physical and Sensory Disability clients.

- Additional costs of responding to the Jay report and Ofsted recommendations

The forecast outturn figure included in the report reflected staff cost savings for the staff who had left the Council during 2014/15 through Voluntary Early Retirement or Voluntary Severance together with the savings accrued through the moratorium on non-essential spend implemented on 2nd September, 2014, which would continue until the end of March, 2015.

Continued close management of spend remained essential if the Council was to deliver a balanced outturn and preserve its successful track record in managing both its in year financial performance and its overall financial resilience.

It was hoped that the Council could deliver a balanced budget with the overspends being aligned. The Council's revenue reserves would have to fund any additional costs.

Resolved:- That the current forecast outturn and the continuing financial challenge for the Council to deliver a balanced revenue budget for 2014/15 be noted.

52. RMBC "FACING THE CUTS, DELIVERING ROTHERHAM'S PRIORITIES" 2015/16/2016/17 - PUBLIC/EMPLOYEE CONSULTATION FINDINGS

Asim Munir, Community Engagement Officer, presented the key headlines from the recent 'Facing the cuts, delivering Rotherham's priorities' consultation that had taken place to help inform the Council's budget for 2015/15 and 2016/17 which had been active since 1st November to 31st December, 2014.

The consultation had been undertaken through input from a number of teams across the Council including Corporate Finance, Housing and Neighbourhood Area Partnerships and Engagement Service and Communications and Marketing. Rotherham residents and partner organisations had been asked to give their views on how the Council's budget should be spent and where reductions should be made on the following three priority areas:-

- Protecting our most vulnerable children and adults
- Getting people into work and making work pay
- Making our streets cleaner and better

The consultation had also asked whether people would support an increase in Council Tax.

The report set out the methods of consultation utilised and a summary of the findings for the consultation with the public, partners, voluntary and community sector and employees.

The impact of the findings would be mitigated through robust research methodology and analysis of findings, balancing qualitative and quantitative research methodologies distinguishing between respondents (such as Council employees, businesses, voluntary sector and the public) and a communication strategy that supported the consultation exercise.

All services would be encouraged to use the online forum as an integral part of their public consultation to ensure the momentum from the last two years was maintained. This would ensure that the response rate rose and improved as some momentum was lost between the last two budget consultation exercises when the online form was closed down.

Discussion ensued on the report with the following issues raised/highlighted:-

- Work had commenced on linking the suggestions into budget saving proposals
- Feedback to participants would be provided once the budget had been agreed
- There had been a reduced response as to that previously but it was thought the timing may have had an effect – it had been scheduled for August, 2014

Resolved:- (1) That the headline messages arising from the analysis of the budget consultation be noted.

(2) That the development of a communications plan to ensure that the Council is proactive in communicating both the results and the impact on decision making to the public and employees be supported.

53. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Self Regulation Select Commission take place on Thursday, 26th March, 2015 at 3.30 p.m.