

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Council
2.	Date:	22 May 2015
3.	Title:	Rotherham Improvement Plan
4.	Directorate:	All

5. Summary

5.1 Enclosed at **Annex A** is a draft Improvement Plan for Rotherham MBC, produced by commissioners in line with the requirements of their appointment, as set out in the Secretary of State Directions published on 26 February 2015.

5.1 The Plan represents a “sister” document to the detailed Children and Young People’s Services Improvement Board Action Plan. It is the Council’s organisation-wide response to the Professor Alexis Jay Report (26th August 2014), the Ofsted reports of 19th November 2014, the Corporate Governance Inspection (CGI) report by Louise Casey CB (4th February 2015) and the Secretary of State Directions for improvement issued to the Council on 26th February 2015.

5.3 In addition to addressing the performance issues identified in these reports, the Plan has been shaped by the commissioners’ developing views, since their appointment, on the most urgent improvement actions required to deliver a “fresh start” for Rotherham. It has taken into consideration a range of discussions with leading councillors, input from a staff corporate working group and soundings from members of the LGA Improvement Board.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Prior to the submission of the Improvement Plan to Government by the requested deadline of 26 May 2015, Council members are asked to:

- a) Consider and approve the content of the Plan for submission to Secretaries of State
 - b) Confirm their individual and collective commitments to fulfilling the elected member roles in delivering the improvements set out within the plan
 - c) Approve the proposal for a Joint Board of commissioners and leading elected members (supported by a corporate officer group) to oversee delivery of the Plan within the Council
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7. Proposals and Details

7.1 As part of the Secretary of State Directions on 26th February 2015, which confirmed the appointment of five Commissioners to Rotherham MBC to take on all Executive and other specific decision-making functions at the Council in the light of the CGI report, a specific requirement was set out as follows:

“To prepare, under the direction of the Managing Director Commissioner and Children’s Social Care Commissioner, improvement plans (which may include or draw upon action plans prepared before the dates of these Directions), and within 3 months of the date of these Directions to agree these plans with the Lead and other Commissioners and submit them to the Secretaries of State”

7.2 The Directions went on to specify that the improvement plans should set out the measures to be undertaken, together with milestones and delivery targets against which to measure performance, in order to deliver “rapid and sustainable improvements in governance, leadership and culture” in how the council operates, delivers its services and, specifically, exercises its scrutiny functions. The aim of the Directions is to secure the council’s full compliance with its best value duty and secure performance of Children’s Social Care functions to required standards.

7.3 Since their appointment, therefore, commissioners have been collaborating on an Improvement Plan – a final draft of which is enclosed for elected members’ attention and consideration at **Annex A**, prior to its formal submission to Secretary of States on 26th May.

7.4. The Plan – entitled “*A Fresh Start*” - aims to address the various corporate improvement priorities across the entire organisation identified in the light of the Secretary of State’s Directions and, specifically, the CGI report published by Louise Casey that drew itself upon the earlier Professor Jay and Ofsted reports.

7.5 The Plan seeks to outline and address these improvement priorities in such a way that complements the detailed ‘Children and Young People’s Services Improvement Board Action Plan’ which was first submitted to Ofsted in February 2015 following the appointment to the council in October 2014 of Commissioner Malcolm Newsam by the Secretary of State for Education.

7.6 In terms of format, the actions and milestones contained within the Plan are broken down into two “phases”, as follows:

- a) Phase 1 – “*Transition*” - from May 2015 to 2016, delivering many of the essentials of an effective, modern council; and
- b) Phase 2 – “*Strong Leadership, New Culture*” – from May 2016 to May 2017, where improvements are embedded via revitalised political and managerial leadership.

7.7 Inevitably, at this early stage in the improvement journey, the actions and milestones are necessarily “front-loaded” within the first, transitional phase – but the Plan will be a live document, able to be amended and updated as required as key aims and objectives are achieved and further clarity is reached on future actions required.

7.8 In line with the requirements set out in the Secretary of State Directions, this Plan must be submitted to Government by 26th May 2015. Following this, formal progress reports are required to be submitted to the Secretaries of State at 6 monthly intervals following the date of the original Directions, with the first of such reports being due 26th August 2015 and 26th February 2016.

7.9 In addition to the formal progress reports on the Improvement Plan, the Secretary of State Directions also require commissioners to submit a review of whether it would be appropriate for any Council function exercisable by them to be returned to the authority. There is no precise timescale set for this initial review – the Directions specify “as soon as practicable” after 26th February 2015 date – though further reports on this potential “hand back” of functions are required every three months after the first review. The Improvement Plan, therefore, aims to establish a clear rationale for this, which may be linked as appropriate to future Improvement Plan progress reports from August 2015.

7.10 Internally, it is proposed that the governance of the Plan will be through a Joint Board of commissioners and leading elected members; supported by an officer Corporate Improvement Plan Board, which will be linked to the Strategic Leadership Team. Meetings will be scheduled once the Plan is signed off by Government. There will also be the opportunity for Scrutiny to examine the Plan’s implementation.

7.11 In addition, the commissioners wish to continue a relationship with membership of the Rotherham Improvement Board, which was set up with the LGA prior to commissioners’ arrival, using them as a sounding board and further source of constructive challenge.

8. Finance

8.1 Many of the actions contained within the Plan are cost-neutral, but where there may be financial implications in terms of critical investments these will feature as part of the process to set a new Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the council, alongside a renewed budget-planning process for the three years from 2016-17. A transformation reserve exists in the Budget for 2015-16 which is available to draw upon to assist with the Plan’s implementation in the short term. Further details on the MTFS process will be addressed in a separate report to members at a later date.

8.2 Some elements of the Plan’s implementation will also be dependent on the Organisational Review that commissioners will be presenting, including details of the associated financial implications, to the Council meeting on 4 June.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

9.1 The actions contained within the Improvement Plan in many cases address previous shortcomings in the council’s risk management processes, so will be a key means of improving the authority’s approach to assessing and managing risk going

forward. Close contact will be ensured, therefore, with the council's risk and audit functions in the implementation of the Plan moving forward.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

10.1 The content of the Improvement Plan will directly inform and represent in its own sense a core element of a revised performance and policy framework for the council moving forward – from a refreshed Corporate Plan through to service-level service and improvement plans, team plans and individual workers' personal development. There will be further discussions with members about the revised performance framework.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

- Independent inquiry into CSE in Rotherham, by Professor Alexis Jay (26th August 2014)
- Ofsted Inspection of Services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers *and* the Review of the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Board (19th November 2014)
- Louise Casey Corporate Governance Inspection report, on the council's ability to deliver on its best value obligations (4th February 2015)
- Secretary of State Directions to the Council (26th February 2015).
- Children & Young People's Services Improvement Board Action Plan
- DCLG Best Value Statutory Guidance (September 2011)

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