

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
7th March, 2018

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Cowles, Brookes, Clark, Cusworth, Napper, Sheppard, Walsh and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Evans, Mallinder and Short.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

113. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sheppard declared personal interests in item 5 (Proposals for consultation on the implementation of the Early Help Strategy: Phase Two and Phase Three) and item 6 (Fees and Charges 2018-19) in respect of his role as a school governor.

114. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions received from the public or press.

115. TO CONSIDER WHETHER THE PRESS AND PUBLIC SHOULD BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING DURING CONSIDERATION OF ANY PART OF THE AGENDA.

The Chair reported that there were no items on the agenda which would require the exclusion of the press or public from the meeting.

116. PROPOSALS FOR CONSULTATION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EARLY HELP STRATEGY: PHASE TWO & PHASE THREE

Consideration was given to a report which was due to be determined at the Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting on 12 March 2018 that sought approval to consult on the proposals for the implementation of Phase Two and Phase Three of the Early Help Strategy, which would deliver savings of around £500k over the next two financial years by redesigning services and introducing a borough wide Intervention Hub to deliver a more sustainable and cost efficient service in the future.

Members expressed frustration that the report did not include a diagram outlining the structural changes expected from the implementation of the proposal. It was explained that structural charts would be made available as part of the consultation. Furthermore Members sought clarity in respect of the timescales for consultation with the public and with staff. It was explained that there would be 90 days of consultation and staff would have the same opportunity to inform proposals during the consultation

period, just as the public would. In reality, the public consultation last for 60 days and a further 30 days would follow for staff consultation.

Clarification was sought in respect of the proposal to co-produce new service specifications that would reflect the alternative approach. It was explained that the authority sought to examine the potential for greater involvement with the community and voluntary sector to identify where partnership arrangements could be strengthened and where the market could be developed. Such an approach would require a different approach to procurement and commissioning to work with partners to improve outcomes with streamlined services and co-delivery.

Members sought clarification in respect of the equalities analysis detailed within the report and suggested that the Equality Act had been misrepresented. It was recommended and accepted that the equality impact assessment required review as certain protected characteristics had been listed incorrectly or misinterpreted.

Further assurances were sought that a reduction in the number of heads of service would not impact on the quality of service provision. It was confirmed that the proposal had already been tested and proved to be manageable due to a head of service being absent from work on grounds of ill health for a period of time.

Resolved:-

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported, subject to the following insertion being made:

That consultation with staff be undertaken over 60 days to coincide with the period of the public consultation.

2. That, following the consultation, the final proposals be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Management Board prior to consideration by the Commissioner.

117. FEES AND CHARGES 2018-19

Consideration was given to a report which was due to be determined at the Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting on 12 March 2018 that proposing the level of fees and charges for the 2018/19 year.

It was reported that the Budget and Council Tax 2018/19 report approved by Council on 28 February 2018 had included a recommendation that all Council Fees and Charges be increased for 2018/19 by the September 2017 CPI increase of 3%, other than Fees and Charges which were set by national statute and that lists of all Fees and Charges proposed for 2018/19 are submitted to Cabinet in March for approval. It was noted that the Cabinet had already agreed Housing Revenue Account Rents and Service Charges for 2018/19 at its meeting on 15 January 2018 and

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agreed Allotment Rents for 2019/20 at its meeting on 19 February 2018. It was further reported that there was a statutory requirement for the Council to notify allotment tenants of fees and charges increases a year in advance. Some specific increases to fees and charges were consulted on as part of the 2018/19 budget consultation and were included within the 2018/19 budget as specific budget savings:-

- Planning Fees
- Riverside House Café
- Civic Theatre
- Parks & Country Parks

Members raised concerns regarding pest control and made specific reference to the protection of bees, which were increasingly considered to be an endangered species due to the use of pesticides. In response, it was explained that the Council charged for the services it provides in respect of pest control, but assurances would be provided outside of the meeting in respect of the way in which bees' nests were removed.

A query was also raised in respect of the School Music Service and the reasons why the 3% increase had not been applied in this area. In response it was confirmed that the authority wished to avoid potentially pricing some families out of accessing that service.

Clarification was sought in respect of the fees and charges for town centre markets and what consideration had been giving to stall holders in the context of decreasing footfall in the town. In response, Members were reminded that the additional income from the markets service was part of the overall budget saving agreed by Council on 28 February, which had also been subject to scrutiny in December 2017. Reference was made to the long-term ambitions for the town centre and Members were reminded that the regeneration process would take time. When the bigger projects were delivered, it was anticipated that the improved town centre offer would improve footfall and business for all traders.

Members were keen to ensure that all proposed changes to fees and charges were implemented effectively and expressed a desire for a future paper outlining how income targets had been met later in the year.

Resolved:-

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendation be supported.
2. That a report be submitted in September 2018 outlining progress in meeting income targets arising from the increase in fees and charges as part of the budget setting process.

118. CUSTOMER ACCESS STRATEGY AND SUPPORT FOR ALL CUSTOMERS

Consideration was given to a briefing paper which provided an overview of the previous, current and future situation regarding customer access and support of all customers. This paper summarised proposed plans that were to be developed to ensure all customers were able to access services regardless of their personal circumstances.

Members noted that access to customer services would be through a digital first strategy, which meant that the Council would adopt a preference for customers to access services through a self-serve digital channel. It was confirmed that this would never exclude customers who could not or would not use that channel from receiving services. Furthermore, the Council was developing a new Customer Access Strategy, which would aim to help as many customers as possible to access services digitally and discuss with partner agencies how the Council could support those who find digital access challenging.

Concerns were expressed at how this would work with people who could not read or read well or did not have functioning English as a first language and assurances were sought in respect of how those people would be able to access services. In response it was explained that the number of people who in those categories had not been quantified, but it was a piece of work that was underway to inform the developing Customer Access Strategy. Reference was made to the potential to use translation tools online, but it required further testing before being confirmed as a route for people who did not speak English as a first language.

Reference was made to the complications of the digital application process associated with Universal Credit, which had yet to be fully rolled out across the borough by the Department of Work and Pensions. In response, it was noted that government had been working to develop digital access for a number of year and the Council was some way behind in the process and would look to learn lessons from central government and from across local government to better inform the development of digital access to services.

Members also expressed concerns regarding public access to digital services in council buildings at the present time and the need to ensure that these were always accessible to ensure that confidence could be increased in service users. In response, it was agreed that reliable equipment would be required to ensure that this could be maintained.

Further information was sought in respect of digital practice within the local voluntary and community sector. It was confirmed that there was a lot of really good work already underway in the borough with partner agencies, much of which was some way ahead of the Council's current

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position and had already done a lot of work to build relationships with more vulnerable groups of people to improve digital inclusion.

In response to a query concerning practical action, it was explained that all service areas in the Council were being challenged to become more digital, more customer focused and more efficient at the same time. Members welcomed this and were pleased to learn that a large number of business cases had been developed by service areas wanting to improve their digital offer and presence.

Resolved:-

That the update be noted.

119. TO DETERMINE ANY ITEM WHICH THE CHAIRMAN IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY

The Chair reported that there were no items of business requiring urgent consideration.

120. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING - WEDNESDAY, 21ST MARCH, 2018 AT 11.00 A.M.

Further to the resolution of the Council at its meeting on 24 January 2018, the Chair reported that the Chief Fire Officer and the Vice-Chair of the South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority had been invited to attend the next meeting on 21 March 2018 to answer questions in respect of the operation of the second appliance at Rotherham Fire Station.

Resolved:-

That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be held on Wednesday 21 March 2018 commencing at 11.00 a.m. in Rotherham Town Hall.