

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday, 4th July, 2018

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Brookes, Cowles, Cusworth, Evans, Keenan, Mallinder, Napper, Sansome, Short, Walsh and Wyatt.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Walsh declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 (Community Energy Switching Scheme) on the basis that he was a corporate member of the Energy Institute.

Councillor Napper declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 (Allotments Self-Management) on the basis that he held an allotment with a parish council within the borough.

Councillor Steele declared a person interest in agenda item 8 (Allotments Self-Management) on the basis that he held an allotment with a parish council within the borough.

24. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

A question was asked by a member of the public concerning her view that there has been a lack of progress in resolving issues for a number of adult survivors of child sexual exploitation and how decisions were made. In response, the Chair indicated that he was aware of the various responses provided by the Leader of the Council on this subject and would follow up these concerns with the Leader outside of the meeting.

A question was asked by a member of the public in respect of decision making by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board in respect of requests to review petitions. In response, the Chair referred to the Constitution and its various appendices as being the guiding rules on how decision making worked within the Council. Furthermore, it was explained at the beginning of the meeting on 31 January 2018 that Members would go into closed session to deliberate the merits of the request received and the decision had been taken subsequent to that deliberation.

25. MODERN METHODS OF CONSTRUCTION PILOT TO BUILD AFFORDABLE HOMES

Consideration was given to a report due to be determined at the Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting on 9 July 2018 which sought approval to deliver 12 bungalows for older people through a pilot to test alternative modern construction methods.

It was reported that funding for the pilot would come from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and subject to confirmation, grant funding from the Sheffield City Region's Housing Fund. It was explained that 'Modern methods of construction' (MMC) was a generic term used to cover several different types of homes manufactured in a factory environment and either fully or partially assembled in the factory, or the component parts assembled on site. MMC could provide an efficient alternative to traditional construction methods for the following reasons:-

- Increased pace of delivery
- Quality and energy efficiency can be higher
- Some providers claim the costs are lower than traditional construction

Members noted that the MMC project was intended to achieve the following outcomes:

- 12 new Council bungalows for older people to rent
- Making the best use of HRA small sites to deliver new Council homes

The proposals received a broad level of support from Members. A number of questions were asked and assurances were provided in respect of the number of bedrooms, the implications of the 'Bedroom Tax' and the quality of buildings through modern methods of construction.

Members were supportive of the need to learn through this approach and sought to understand how flexible the buildings could be in respect of future technologies that may become available. It was confirmed that an element of future proofing would be required, along with a degree of flexibility to take on board new technologies as they developed.

Assurances were provided that there would be further reports as the proposals developed and Members would be provided with the detail of the sites concerned.

Resolved:-

1. That the Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That the Cabinet consider aligning this project with the work of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group on housing to avoid duplication.
3. That future proposals detail how the Council will market and promote the benefits of modern methods of construction for affordable homes.

26. COMMUNITY ENERGY SWITCHING SCHEME

Consideration was given to a report due to be determined at the Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting on 9 July 2018 in respect of undertaking a feasibility study for the development of a community energy switching scheme in Rotherham to reduce the number of people in Rotherham paying high tariffs for gas and electricity.

The overarching feedback from Members was that the proposal was a step in the right direction that would have the benefit of assisting the poorest with energy bills. Whilst it recognised that the proposed Cabinet decision related solely to the conduct of a feasibility study, Members were keen to see this delivered swiftly so that residents across the borough could benefit at the earliest opportunity from potential savings on energy bills.

Resolved:-

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That Cabinet encourage officers to deliver this project swiftly.
3. That, subject to the outcome of the study, consideration be given to the marketing and promotion of the scheme

27. ALLOTMENTS SELF-MANAGEMENT

Consideration was given to a report due to be determined at the Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting on 9 July 2018 in respect of the introduction of a self-management arrangement for allotments owned by the Council.

It was reported that the Council and Rotherham and District Allotments Association had worked together to review the current allotments service and explored possible alternative service models to drive long-term improvement. This had recognised the pressure the service had been under since 2011 arising from reduced public spending. The review gathered evidence to support the assessment of options, including a survey of existing plot-holders, an audit of Council-owned allotment sites, and information about management models in place elsewhere in Britain. Consequently, the Review concluded that the adoption of a self-management model offered the best prospects for service improvement and involving allotment users.

Members were very supportive of the proposal and sought assurances in respect of the future work that was proposed to be undertaken to widen the demographics of people with allotments on council owned sites. Further assurances were sought in respect of roles and responsibilities in the context of the statutory function of the Council and it was confirmed that the proposals were designed to pass operational decisions to the proposed alliance.

In response to a question from Members, it was confirmed that public liability insurance will be covered by the Council under the proposed alliance arrangements.

Resolved:-

1. That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That Improving Places Select Commission receive an update on the implementation of this project, at a time to be agreed by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Select Commission.

28. 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.

29. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:-

That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be held on Wednesday 18 July 2018 at 11.00 a.m. in Rotherham Town Hall.

30. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:-

That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in under paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

31. STRATEGIC PROPERTY - RIVERSIDE HOUSE LEASE

Consideration was given to a report to be determined at the Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting on 9 July 2018 which proposed the restructure of the lease for Riverside House. It was reported that approval was sought to delegate the final details and future lease arrangements for Riverside House to the Strategic Director – Regeneration and Environment, in consultation with the Strategic Director – Finance and Customer Services and the Assistant Director - Legal Services.

The principles of the proposed lease were detailed within the report and Members discussed financial issues associated with the recommended approach and the need to become more efficient in the use of assets owned by the Council.

Resolved:-

1. That Cabinet be advised that the proposal to restructure the lease arrangement for Riverside House be supported.
2. That Cabinet be recommended to take an “in principle” decision to approve the restructure of the lease arrangement for Riverside House and delegate authority as outlined in the published officer recommendations.
3. That efforts to co-locate more public services within Riverside House be supported.
4. That Overview and Scrutiny Management Board monitor the impact of the proposed change through the budget reporting process.