

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**  
**Wednesday, 10th April, 2019**

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

Apologies were received from Councillors Cowles and Evans.

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

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

**8. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD HELD ON 13TH MARCH, 2019.**

**Resolved:-**

That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 13 March 2019 be agreed as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

**9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest by Members.

**10. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

A member of the public attended the meeting and indicated that he was trying to understand how there had been significant overspends on council budgets and how such overspends had been scrutinised.

In response, the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board advised that scrutiny regularly reviewed the budgets of all services through regular financial monitoring reports, but in particular in respect of the people led budgets in Adult and Children's Social Care. He stated that every local authority with responsibility for such services had endured the same level of overspending, but he could give assurances that scrutiny Members had been rigorous in monitoring the budget position of the Council.

In a supplementary question, the member of the public indicated that he could understand having to overspend to respond to unexpected events, but if he were responsible for large budget and knew that his service would face unexpected expenditure, would be able to come to scrutiny and ask for an increase in his budget during the financial year. The Cabinet was responsible for controlling budget and the role of scrutiny was to hold the Cabinet to account.

**11. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Chair advised that he intended to go into closed session during Item 6 (Request for Review of Response to Petition – Apologise to every individual who did not have an annual assessment under the Care Act 2014) to enable Members to debate the issues privately before returning to open session to determine the Board's position on the request.

**12. REQUEST FOR REVIEW OF RESPONSE TO PETITION - APOLOGISE TO EVERY INDIVIDUAL WHO DID NOT HAVE AN ANNUAL ASSESSMENT UNDER THE CARE ACT 2014**

Consideration was given to a request to review a response of the Chief Executive to a petition calling for an apology for every individual who did not have an annual assessment under the Care Act 2014.

Mr Liam Harron, Lead Petitioner, attended the meeting and made representations to the Board in support of the request to review the response of the Chief Executive to the petition. Mr Harron indicated that this had been a very personal petition following the death of close friends who had been very unsettled by the change processes in adult social care in Rotherham. He elaborated that he had been very shocked to receive information from the Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health ahead of the June 2018 Council meeting that 40% of persons with a learning disability had not had care assessment in the previous twelve months. The petition sought to encourage the Council to apologise for this failure and Mr Harron cited the Council's values and behaviours as being central to the request in the petition. He explained that the Chief Executive had not agreed and her response to him on 26 October 2019 had avoided the issue, which was that a lot of people with learning disabilities in Rotherham should receive an apology for not receiving the assessment that they were entitled to.

Members enquired as to whether Mr Harron was in possession of any updated figures in respect of the number of care assessments that had been undertaken to date. Mr. Harron indicated that he did not and that the information was out of date due to the length of time it had taken to get to this meeting to present the request for the review of the response to the petition.

Members considered the request and determined that the request for the review be noted, but not accepted. However, in making such a determination, Members shared the concerns that Mr. Harron referred to regarding the progress made by the authority in ensuring that annual assessments under the Care Act 2014 were on target. Scrutiny of improvements within Adult Social Care would continue to be a priority in the 2019-20 municipal year.

**Resolved:-**

1. That the request be noted and not accepted.
2. That the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board write to the lead petitioner to confirm the outcome of the request.

**13. HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER PREVENTION STRATEGY**

Consideration was given to a report which was submitted by the Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of determination by the Cabinet at its meeting on 15 April 2019 in respect of the proposed Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Prevention Strategy for the period from 2019 to 2022. It was reported that the strategy had been developed in consultation with stakeholders, residents and other council departments and would set the key strategic priorities for the authority in over the three year period to 2022.

It was noted there were six aims in the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-22:

- To support people with complex needs
- To prevent homelessness and offer rapid housing solutions to get people in urgent need rehoused quicker
- To increase support for young people to prevent homelessness
- To end rough sleeping and begging
- To improve access to tenancy support, employment and health support services
- To ensure there is sufficient decent emergency accommodation

Referring to an article in *The Guardian* published on 10 April 2019, Members sought assurances that the Council could afford meet its statutory responsibilities under homelessness legislation, particularly in the context of the authority's own financial position. In response, officers confirmed that the costs for implementing the new legislation were significant for all local authorities and they had recognised the need to increase resources into the service. Three additional staff had been appointed in the Homelessness team and additional temporary emergency accommodation had been identified too. The costs associated with this were significant, but it was affordable at present despite spending more than previously.

Members were quick to commend officers from the Housing Service and the Cabinet Member for Housing on a robust plan and reiterated that homelessness prevention required good, affordable housing. The Board enquired whether officers had considered using office spaces or empty retail spaces for housing. In response, it was explained that consideration was being given a Property Guardian Scheme, where a building would be taken over and people would live in it which would remove the need to spend more on security and reduce the likelihood of vandalism.

Reference was made to the gap in provision for homeless persons with dogs and also provision for armed forces veterans. In response, it was acknowledged that there had been a gap in provision for homeless persons with dogs, but work had been undertaken to identify suitable accommodation which could be cleaned and hold more durable furniture. With regard to provision for armed forces provision, it was explained that Housing Allocation Policy gave the highest priority to such persons, but it was acknowledged that awareness of this provision was limited and needed to be better communicated.

Clarification was sought as to whether an evaluation had taken place in respect of the pilot in letting homeless persons sleep at Rotherham Fire Station. In response, it was confirmed that the pilot had worked very well and officers had been pleased at how well it had gone. Processes and protocols were now being drafted to ensure that it would work effectively in future, but overall the pilot had been very positive.

In response to a question in respect of the policy on the non-payment of rent, it was confirmed that the Housing Allocations Policy prevented an individual from being eligible for the housing register for a period of five years following eviction from a council property. In a follow up question, Members queried whether anyone had been made homeless as a result of eviction by the Council. In response, it was explained that the Financial Inclusion Team help people with debt management and signpost to other advisory services. Whilst there had been evictions, this was very much the last resort and individuals were given every opportunity to address their debt prior to eviction proceedings. Where an eviction occurred, the Homelessness Team would then work with individuals to address their situation.

Reference was made to the impact of Universal Credit and Members sought to understand how individuals could get into rent arrears if there was a requirement for payment by direct debit. Clarification was also sought in respect of the approach to dealing with homelessness during periods of extremely cold weather. In response, officers confirmed that the majority of rough sleepers were in accommodation during the recent cold spell of weather. With regard to the query on rent arrears, officers explained that the approach of the authority was to assist in developing sustainable tenancies and resources had increased for housing income collection, with half of that team working on financial inclusion and assisting tenants with managing their finances. In this area, performance was more better than in previous years and every effort was being made to reduce the turnover of tenancies. Direct debits were helping to mitigate the arrears that tenants were facing and discussions also took place with tenants to established card payment systems to manage their finances better.

**Resolved:-**

1. That the Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
2. That further reports on outcomes against the strategy be submitted to the Improving Places Select Commission.

**14. FEBRUARY 2018-19 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT**

Consideration was given a report submitted by the Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services which set out an improved financial position compared to that previously reported in February 2019. It was based on actual costs and income for eleven months of the financial year with forecasts for the final month of 2018/19. It was noted that financial performance was a key element within the assessment of the Council's overall performance framework, and was essential for the achievement of the objectives within the Council's policy agenda.

Members enquired as to approach adopted where savings were not achieved and how the budget would be balanced. In response, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and Finance indicated that the savings would have to be found from reserves.

Reference was made to the continued reduction in funding for Public Health, whose ring-fenced budget had reduced by a further £430k. In response, officers advised that when central government had issued four year provisional allocations, it also gave notice of the reductions in funding for Public Health. The next financial year would be the final year of the settlement and it would be reduced again by a similar amount.

The Board identified overspends in Legal Services and sought assurances from officers in respect of actions being taken to reduce the level of spend. In response, it was confirmed that a lot of recruitment was taking place for this service area following a restructure and there had been successful recruitment for a number solicitor positions which had reduced reliance on locums.

Reference was made to the overspend in Children and Young People's Services, with a pressure of £15.7m based on numbers remaining stable. At the present, the number of looked after children stood at 645 and officers were invited to give a view as to how concerned they were that the numbers in the budget and the number of looked after children would reduce. In response, it was confirmed that the budget and the number of looked after children would be closely monitored in the new financial year. Reference was also made to the two year plan within the Children and Young People's Services directorate to drive down costs and delivery against this would be analysed on a daily basis.

**Resolved:-**

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services be invited to a future meeting to provide details on the plans to deliver budget savings in that directorate.

**15. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS - APRIL TO JUNE 2019**

Consideration was given to the Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period from 1 April to 30 June 2019 which detailed all decisions to be taken by the Cabinet. Members were invited to identify items for pre-decision scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board during that timeframe.

**Resolved:-**

1. That the Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period from 1 April to 30 June 2019 be noted.
2. That Members advise the Head of Democratic Services of items that should be referred for pre-decision scrutiny prior to the publication of the relevant agenda.

**16. URGENT BUSINESS**

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

**17. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING****Resolved:-**

That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be held on Wednesday 24 April 2019 at 11.00 a.m. in Rotherham Town Hall.