

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday, 24th April, 2019

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

Apologies were received from Councillors Evans, Napper and Short.

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

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

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair, Councillor Steele, declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 (Request for Review of Response to Petition – Webcasting at Overview and Scrutiny Management Board) on the basis that he had provided a response to the Lead Petitioner which was due to be the subject of the Board's consideration.

19. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

A member of the public put a question to the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to confirm whether he had any knowledge of an organisation called Common Purpose. In response, the Chair confirmed that he did not have any knowledge of the organisation.

As a supplementary question, reference was made to concerns raised by a number of unnamed individuals in relation to Common Purpose during a BBC Radio Sheffield debate in 2014. The questioner indicated that he had met with the former Leader of the Council and the former Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services, who had been on training delivered by Common Purpose. As a result of this concern, the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board was asked whether he would be prepared to look into that specific case and any other officers who had been on such training and what expense had been incurred by the authority.

In response, the Chair indicated that this was a difficult question answer and asked the questioner to put his concerns in writing to him and the Head of Democratic Services. With regard to the reference to the former Leader of the Council and the former Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services, the Chair indicated that he could not respond in respect of those individuals who were no longer part of the authority. He indicated that he would follow up with officers after receipt of an email from the questioner, but offered no promises or assurances that the issue would be pursued any further.

20. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

21. REQUEST FOR REVIEW OF RESPONSE TO PETITION - WEBCASTING AT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Consideration was given to a request for a review of a response of the Assistant Chief Executive to a petition in respect of webcasting at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board. The lead petitioner, Mr L. Harron, addressed the meeting in support of his request for the review and referred to his surprise and that of other members of the public to the fact that Members' deliberations in respect of petitions were conducted privately, with the webcasting facility being switched off. He considered this to be a deeply unsatisfactory process. Whilst he accepted the Chair's view in respect of uncertain cases, he considered that the overriding principle should be that business should be conducted in public and be transparent. It had been explained to Mr Harron that the decision in respect of public deliberation rested with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on the basis that the Council's constitution was silent on the matter. The petition process was at the heart of how Rotherham had to improve its engagement and democratic processes.

The Vice-Chair, who had taken the Chair for this agenda item, indicated that he intended to invite the Board to deliberate this petition in public and would request that the webcasting facilities be left on so that this could be filmed and broadcast on the Council's website. Furthermore, he explained that not all Council meetings were webcast and gave the example of the Audit Committee, which was not webcast. The official and legal record of proceedings at Council and committee meetings were the minutes recorded by Democratic Services. Webcasting had been introduced as an aide to further open up proceedings in meetings, but was not there to replace the official minutes.

Members indicated that the process was not established for the satisfaction of any individual or group, but the rules were established to get business done. A compromise situation was recommended that the principles of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 should be applied to the deliberations of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board. This position was unanimously supported by the Board.

Resolved:-

1. That the request for the review of the Assistant Chief Executive's response to the petition in respect of webcasting at Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be supported.

2. That all deliberations in respect of petitions at the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be conducted in public other than where the provisions of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 in respect of the exclusion of the press and public were applicable.

22. CHILDREN'S SERVICES FINANCIAL MONITORING AND REVIEW 2018/19

Consideration was given to a briefing note submitted on behalf of the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services detailing the significant financial pressures on placement budgets and in the delivery of key social work services due to the number of children in the care system. It was reported that the budget pressure had been increasing month on month due to a steady rise in looked after children numbers, but numbers and the budget had stabilised linked to the various projects instigated by the directorate. At the end of February the projected overspend was £15.7m which in the main reflected pressures on staffing, transport and placement budgets.

Members queried the level of consultancy spend incurred within the directorate. In response, the Strategic Director confirmed that there were no consultants employed in the directorate, however commissioning of third sector organisations was undertaken. Admiration was expressed at how the directorate had reduced the level of agency spend and Members sought to understand if there was a level which was anticipated to be adequate and financially sustainable and what role there would be for technology to release further efficiencies. In response, the Strategic Director indicated that the budget assumed that there would be small, essential use of up to 15 agency staff posts per year. In doing so, this would ensure that caseload levels were at the right level and would maintain the authority's position below the national average in respect of agency usage. Mobile technology was being explored to make the service more efficient and an example was given of social workers using tablets or smartphone technology to access the social work case management system when they were out on visits.

Members recognised that spend was being better accounted for and referred the two major overspends which arose from independent placements and external placements and sought assurance that work was underway to keep placements within the local economy rather than out of borough. In response, it was acknowledged that there were better approaches to recruiting and creating residential type provisions and options were presently being developed for consideration by Cabinet later in the year.

Assurances were sought that the authority was no longer losing foster carers in the first year to 18 months of service. In response, the Strategic Director confirmed that a lot of work had been done to ensure that the authority appointed the right foster carers and focusing on retention as well as recruitment. More detailed proposals would be submitted for Cabinet consideration in the summer, but there remained much to do in order to strengthen the approach and have a competitive offer.

Reference was made to the report detailing major budget pressures in respect of transport and Members sought clarification as to the specifics of those pressures. In response, the Strategic Director confirmed that it principally related to the transport of looked after children to and from school, using whatever was the most appropriate form of transport and helping young people to become independent travellers.

Clarification was sought in respect of the funding gap arising from income expected from the Rotherham Clinical Commissioning Group. In response, the Strategic Director explained that the income predicted was what the CCG might contribute to individual packages of care. Work was underway with the CCG to develop a much better understanding of which organisation would fund which part of an individual care package. It was noted that work would also take place to strengthen the transitions process to help mitigate pressures and reliance on the CCG.

Members queried whether any vacant social work posts were not being recruited to presently. In response, the Strategic Director confirmed that there were no posts being held vacant to mitigate budget pressures in respect of children's social care.

Resolved:-

1. That the update be noted.

23. UPDATE FROM SPOTLIGHT REVIEW FOLLOWING THE OFSTED INSPECTION OF ADULT COMMUNITY LEARNING

Consideration was given to a report submitted by the Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services which responded to the findings and recommendations of a spotlight review undertaken by the Improving Lives Select Commission in March 2018, which followed the Ofsted Inspection of Adult Community Learning in June 2017.

The purpose of the review had been to seek assurance that there was a clear understanding of the issues leading to the inadequate judgement in June 2017; that the issues arising from the inspection had been addressed; and that there were clear plans in place to ensure that adult learners have pathways to secure employment or skills training.

The conclusions and recommendations made by Members were based on information gathered from the spotlight review and examination of related documentation. The report and recommendations were submitted to Council in July 2018.

Under the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, the Cabinet was required to respond to any recommendations made by scrutiny and this report is submitted to provide the response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

Resolved:-

1. That the Cabinet response be noted.

24. YOUTH CABINET/YOUNG PEOPLE'S ISSUES

The Chair thanked Members for their attendance and participation in the Children's Commissioner Takeover Challenge with the Youth Cabinet on 2 April 2019. A report detailing the recommendations was being prepared and would be signed off by the Youth Cabinet in due course.

Resolved:-

That the update be noted.

25. CALL-IN ISSUES

The Chair reported that there were no call-in issues for the Board to consider following recent Cabinet meetings.

26. URGENT BUSINESS

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

27. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:-

That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be held on Wednesday 15 May 2019 commencing at 11.00 a.m. in Rotherham Town Hall.