

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday, 2nd October, 2019

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Cowles, Cusworth, R. Elliott, Jarvis, Mallinder, Taylor, Walsh and Wyatt.

Apologies were received from Councillor Tweed.

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

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

58. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2019

It was noted that the minutes of the previous meeting would be presented for approval at the next meeting on 16 October 2019.

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members in respect of items listed on the agenda.

60. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or press.

61. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

62. UPDATE - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

Consideration was given to an update report in respect of the 2019-20 work programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board. The work programme had been developed following a Scrutiny Chairs' work planning session held on 19 June 2019 with Cabinet Members and the Strategic Leadership Team. Since that point, Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) had held ongoing discussions to refine its draft work programme.

Members noted the content of the work programme and the work undertaken to date in the current municipal year. Furthermore, it was agreed that update reports on the progress against the work programme would be submitted to ordinary meetings of the Board.

Resolved:-

1. That the work programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be noted.
2. That updates be provided to each 'ordinary' meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on the progress of the work programme and for further prioritisation as required.

63. STATUTORY GUIDANCE ON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Consideration was given to a report presented by the Head of Democratic Services and Statutory Scrutiny Officer which summarised the key points outlined in the guidance and was to submitted to provide an opportunity for members of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) to comment and determine any learning or improvements that can be made to overview and scrutiny in Rotherham.

It was reported that the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) had published new statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny in local government in May 2019. This new guidance for local (and combined) authorities stressed the role of scrutiny committees in holding decision makers to account and its importance in supporting the successful functioning of local democracy.

Reflecting on the content of the statutory guidance, Members were of the view that scrutiny was in a healthy position in Rotherham. Suggestions were made that the way in which Members volunteered to be members of the Select Commissions did not take account of the skills sets of the individual members. It was also suggested the use of external, expert technical advisers may be helpful in some areas of scrutiny.

In summary, the Chair proposed that a working group be convened later in the municipal year to review the authority's position against the statutory guidance with a view to making recommendations for improvements to be implemented at the commencement of the 2020-21 municipal year.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.
2. That a working group be established by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board later in the municipal year to review the statutory guidance and inform proposals for improvement.

64. CHILDREN'S SERVICES FINANCIAL MONITORING AND REVIEW 2019/20

Consideration was given to a report detailing financial monitoring and review activity for 2019/20 in Children & Young People Services. The directorate was implementing a two-year budget recovery plan to reduce the budget pressures from previous years (£15.7m in 2018/19) and deliver budget savings. The budget pressure at the end of July was £4.9m and adverse movement of £600k in the period, and whilst the Looked After Children number of 634 was just below the budget profile (638) for this period, the placement mix of having too many placements in residential care was leading to budget pressures.

Members recognised that the main indicator for future spend in Children and Young People's Services was a positive and safe reduction in the numbers of looked after children. It was recognised that as a demand led service, it was impossible to predict exactly what would happen, but there was assurance that the service was aware of the challenges and doing a lot of work to address them. Members asked the Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Neighbourhood Working as to how confident he was that savings could be achieved in the timescales agreed. In response, the Cabinet Member indicated that he was very confident that the savings target would be met, however he was only quite confident on when the savings would be met.

Following on, assurance was sought on the recruitment of new foster carers. In response, officers confirmed that they were fairly confident. The offer was competitive and the authority was doing much better in terms of the package for foster carers than previously. It was noted that there had been a significant increase in visits to the fostering website and indications were positive. There was more visibility and transparency in relation to the recruitment and there was evidence of recruitment from the independent foster agency sector.

Members expressed concern at the figures in respect of the Dedicated Schools Grant and sought assurances in respect of arrangements for monitoring. In response, officers confirmed that it was monitored at internal budget monitoring meetings, at Improving Lives Select Commission and the Rotherham Schools' Forum also had oversight of the budget too. A recovery plan had also been submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) and it was anticipated the DfE would introduce a monitoring programme.

Assurances were sought in respect of actions being taken to address the £500,000 overspend in respect of transport. In response, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the directorate would continue to do what it had been doing, but it would be a slow process to save money. A significant amount of work had been undertaken to look at individual journeys and it was felt that the savings would be realised and a number of short term actions were expected to realise impact.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be accepted.
2. That a further report be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 29 January 2020 in respect of fostering and the High Needs Block.

65. COUNCIL PLAN QUARTER 1 (APRIL TO JUNE 2019) AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Consideration was given to the Council Plan Quarter 1 Performance Report for the period from April to June 2019. It was reported that at the end of Quarter 1, 31 measures had either met or had exceeded the target set in the Council Plan. This represented 55% of the total number of measures where data was available or where targets had been set. This was a significant improvement in performance compared to Quarter 1 2018-2019 where only 47% of measures hit their targets. The priority area with the highest proportion of targets met was Priority 4 (Extending opportunity, prosperity and planning for the future) where 75% of measures (where data is available or where targets have been set) were marked as on target. The direction of travel was positive for 29 (53%) of the measures calculated in this quarter. This was noted as an improvement compared to the 51% figure for last quarter and 45% in Quarter 1 2018-2019.

Referring to the measure in respect of repeat child protection plans, Members sought clarification as to whether any work had been done to establish how effective interventions have been. In response, officers indicated that a substantial amount of work had taken place, with reviews occurring through practice learning days and developing a culture of learning in the service. In response to a supplementary question, officers were not wholly confident that plans were not revisiting issues that were considered to have been previously resolved.

Members sought to understand the rationale behind the projected increase in missed bins. In response, officers indicated that performance was not where they wanted it to be, but context was important given the significant change in the service that had occurred. It was noted that officers were aware of the areas where collections were being missed. On this basis, they were confident that performance would be under the target figure before the end of the calendar year.

The Board sought assurances around the system in place to ensure that teachers understood the needs and issues of looked after children. In response, officers indicated that every school had identified leads for looked after children and each child had a personal education plan. It was recognised that transitions from one class to another or one school to another could be very complex for children, and teachers needed support in challenging difficult behaviours.

Members queried the level of compliance in respect of safeguarding requirements for hackney carriage/private hire licence holders. In response, officers confirmed that there was 100% compliance and that the policy provided for a licence not to be issued without a check from the Disclosure and Barring Service.

Surprise was expressed that only 8 homes had been delivered against the target of 175 and sought to understand what the timeframes and plans were for delivery. In response, officers confirmed that it was not a linear process and it was not expected to be a problem in delivering against the target. Construction programmes at Braithwell Road in, Maltby and the Bellows site at Rawmarsh would contribute significantly towards the delivery of the target. It was noted that pre-fabricated home were not included in the delivery plan.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.

66. ANNUAL COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS REPORT 2018-19

Consideration was given to the annual report on compliments and complaints received by the Council during 2018-19 in line with statutory requirements and identify key trends within complaints and compliments over a five year period.

Members welcomed the report and were particularly pleased to see the learning and trends identified, specifically referencing the opportunities for improvement. It was noted that Members often received compliments arising from their casework which was not being recorded and felt that this was an area for improvement. It was also suggested that the recommendations from the Local Government Ombudsman annual report could be incorporated into the report in future. In response, officers confirmed that this could be done in future.

Reference was made to avoidable contact and the work that the authority was undertaking to reduce calls to the Council. In response, it was confirmed that work was underway, but it was difficult to quantify volumes as data was manually recorded presently. The new system to improve customer experience had recently been procured and when operational would provide greater insight on this.

In summarising the Board's views, the Chair congratulated officers on an excellent report which was easy to read and the improvements in complaints handling were welcomed. Customer Access would continue to be a focus for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board throughout the municipal year.

Resolved:-

1. That the report be noted.

67. CALL-IN ISSUES

The Chair reported that there were no call-in issues arising from the recent Cabinet meeting held on 16 September 2019.

68. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair reported that there were no matters requiring urgent consideration by the Board.

69. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:-

That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board be held on Wednesday 16 October 2019 commencing at 11.00 a.m. at Rotherham Town Hall.