

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday, 29th January, 2020

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Cusworth, R. Elliott, Jepson, Keenan, Mallinder, Napper, Taylor and Walsh.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Jarvis and Wyatt.

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

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

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Elliott declared a personal interest as a foster carer in relation to the agenda items on the Council Plan Performance and the Strategy to Increase In-House Foster Carers.

2. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

There were no questions from members of the public or press in respect of matters on the agenda for the meeting.

3. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

4. COUNCIL PLAN PERFORMANCE - QUARTER 2 (JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2019)

The Board considered the Council Plan performance report for Quarter 2 (July - September 2019) which provided an analysis of performance against 13 key delivery outcomes and 69 measures. At the end of Quarter 2, 28 measures (52%) had either met or exceeded the target set in the Council Plan, compared with 55% in Quarter 1. The direction of travel was positive for 30 (56%) of the measures calculated in this quarter, an improvement from the 53% figure for the previous quarter. Pressures arising from demand for social care remained a challenge, but good progress was seen on the measures under priorities 3 and 4 for Regeneration and Environment.

The focus for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board was on the 18 measures rated as red which were discussed on a priority by priority basis.

Priority 1

1A3 Number of Looked After Children

There had been a big improvement since the last quarter to just below the

target figure, with numbers reducing as predicted due to the actions put in place such as right child, right plan.

1A4 Proportion of families who rated Early Help as good or excellent

Members observed that performance on this measure had dipped and queried whether exit surveys were carried out with all families, including those who had not had a positive experience. It was agreed to doublecheck that everyone was offered the opportunity to feed back. Some would choose not to respond and as the numbers involved were small this made the measure liable to large percentage changes. Attempts were being made to encourage more responses and to make the survey more service user friendly.

1A5 Proportion of children on repeat child protection plans (within 24 months)

This was still below target although with an improved direction of travel and Members asked about work to identify who may go back on a plan and were concerned in particular about high numbers returning after 12 months. Specific work by the safeguarding lead looked at cases of returners, which could be due to unforeseen changes in family circumstances within a short period such as a new partner or other children joining the family. Sometimes people had been over optimistic in removing a child from a CPP and they would be put back on one. Children stayed on plans as long as was needed. Compared with neighbours on measures regarding repeats, Rotherham was slightly lower than middle, performing well on no repeat plans ever, but was still addressing some legacy issues which could mean possibly going back on a plan in their teens.

1B4b Permanent Exclusions - primaries

Officers agreed with the view that exclusion for a child was problematic, especially in primary school, with serious long term consequences and should be avoided at all costs. Exclusion rates were quite high but with a lot of actions taking place to support schools and families to avoid it being necessary.

1A7 Proportion of Looked After Children with disrupted placements

A concern was raised that the Intensive Intervention Programme could lose its funding. A joint review with the NHS would take place on all therapeutic interventions, so would be part of that work and evidence was needed to show it was making a difference, including feedback from participants.

1A8 Looked After Children placed within a Family Based setting.

Members challenged the progress with this measure and asked if newer data was more positive. Officers confirmed that too many children and young people were in the care system, with a high percentage in residential rather than family-based settings but the ratio changed daily. There had been some success in reducing total numbers but it depended

on where the children had come from when they stepped down e.g. from residential to family or family to own home. The most recent data does show an improvement to 79.3%

A general point was raised regarding the potential for making more up to date information available and officers agreed to revisit the cycle and timelines as it was nearly Quarter 3.

Priority 2

2A1 – Successful completion of drug treatment – opiate users

Clarification was sought on this measure and whether successful completion meant that the individual was no longer dependent and if they did go back into services if that would skew the figures. If people re-presented to services they would count again in the figures but treatment was becoming more successful as the number of re-presentations was lower than the national average.

2B7 New permanent admissions to residential/nursing care (adults) and 2B8 Total number of people supported in residential/nursing care (adults)

A question was asked about short term admissions and the reasons for these. Historically there had been short term admissions through the hospital pathway and a recent flurry of short term admissions becoming permanent had impacted on the measure. Positive respite and pathway changes led to some short term admissions.

2B2 Information and Advice at first point of contact (to prevent service need).

Although rated amber rather than red, Members observed that this measure had declined during the summer and queried whether with a target of 40% if 60% of people have to come back? This was an important measure in light of the Council's statutory duty. An access workshop had been held with staff regarding recording and about the changes to the conversation at the front door. It was a question of understanding thresholds and training staff. Reassurance was given that people were getting the right advice but the aim was to deal with 20% at the front door in Adult Care with the remainder signposted elsewhere.

Priority 3

No red measures were reported for Culture, Sport and Tourism which was performing well across all areas with high satisfaction levels in excess of targets. The intention was to devise more qualitative/descriptive performance indicators, including Members and the community in their development.

3A2 Proportion of positive outcomes for reported hate crimes

OSMB had held a performance sub-group on hate crime but assurance was sought on the direction of travel for the measure and what it actually measured. A positive outcome was where a report had been made and

action followed, so there could be various outcomes and conclusions. It was explained that this was data from the police but not necessarily a measure that the police would usually use. As more incidents were reported, with more third party reporting centres and more anonymous reports it became harder to deal with and the length of time could be problematic. The police favoured the shift to community solutions which could actually be tougher for the perpetrators. Improvement was anticipated from the new actions.

3A4b – Taxi licensing – vehicle and driver compliance in spot inspections
Members verified if this was something that would continue to be closely watched. The new policy had gone out for consultation and would be very stringent. Spot inspections were finding fairly minor compliance issues not major health and safety or safeguarding issues.

3B3 - Customer contact

Members had received feedback regarding brown bins that it was hard to get through on the 'phone to pay. Fly tipping seemed to have increased but it was positive to see prosecutions and would be good to see more punitive measures.

A concern was raised about the need for cleaning or refurbishment and renewal of road signs as dirty signage gave a bad impression of the borough to visitor and it was confirmed that bollard/sign cleaning had been discussed by the working group. It was clarified that the borough had been divided into two halves, east and west, for tasks such as tackling weed growth and a Member Seminar on zonal working would outline the more holistic approach.

Priority 4

4A5 Narrowing gap on working age economically active in the borough
Officers stated that the data related to a small sample and the challenge for the Council was via its influencing role rather than directly, through partnerships with Jobcentre plus and the Employment and Skills Plan. It was confirmed that with a long lead time in promoting economic development that would be a lag in the data.

Priority 5

5A1 Council tax collection and 5A2 Non-domestic (business rate) collection.

The service was confident it would achieve 98% for business rates by the year end, but less confident on 97% for Council tax.

5D7 Completion of Mandatory Equality Training

Quarter 2 data was 68% but the latest figure showed an increase to 82% and was expected to reach 95% by year end.

5D2 Sickness absence – days lost per Full-time Equivalent

Sickness rates were off target and workshops were underway with

managers to address this. The Chair reminded the Board that a performance workshop would be looking at this issue.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board hold further discussion on the report at the meeting to be held on 12 February 2020 prior to making any specific recommendations for future items in the work programme.

5. BUDGET CONSULTATION 2020-2021

The findings of the recent public consultation on the Council budget for 2020-21, which took place from December 13th 2019 to January 13th 2020, were presented to the Board. The report covered a breakdown of responses and issues raised through on-line consultation, social media comments and feedback from partners and other stakeholders.

Feedback consisted mainly of comments rather than suggestions, with issues raised similar to those that had emerged during the more in-depth consultation the year before when the two-year budget had been set. In terms of spending priorities, issues in respect of children and young people were mentioned most frequently by on-line respondents, followed by adults and older people; social care and social services; transport, roads and highways; and housing. The most common themes from social media comments focused on the value of the consultation and on transport, roads and highways. Partners had recognised that no major new proposals had been included since their involvement in the budget proposals a year ago.

Resolved: To note the findings as part of the overall budget discussions.

6. EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY 2019

Consideration was given to a report and presentation which provided an overview of the outcomes of the Employee Opinion Survey conducted in the summer of 2019 and the key actions identified as a result of the findings. The report compared outcomes from the 2019 survey with those of the previous survey undertaken in 2017. 32 questions within the survey also allowed direct comparison with BMG's Local Authority (LA) Benchmark of over 50 UK wide local authorities. 18 of these questions resulted in scores significantly above the benchmark, ten were in line and four below other authorities.

Overall the staff survey results demonstrated positive progress across the Council since the last survey in 2017, with significant improvements against 57 questions, which reflected the work done by middle managers and heads of service. No areas had declined corporately when compared with the 2017 survey results. The composite score for workforce engagement had improved from 65% in 2017 to 69% and the roadshows led by the Leader and Chief Executive had played a part in this improvement.

The major area for improvement related to internal communication between units or departments within the Council, as only 21% of respondents rated this as good (18% in 2017) compared with 42% in the BMG LA Benchmark. Large scale pieces of work such as customer and digital transformation, which would necessitate a whole council approach, would provide opportunities to bring people together.

Senior management visibility was another area for further work, including teasing out who employees would class as a senior manager when asked this question as perceptions varied. Other lower benchmarking scores were for job satisfaction and work-life balance. It was observed that employees with 11-20 years' service and those on Bands D and E reported lower levels of job satisfaction, which would merit further investigation into underlying reasons.

Members explored several issues in relation to the survey and questions:

- Lengthy survey with 73 questions which could be a deterrent to completion – People were given time to complete the surveys at work and guidance had been sought from BMG regarding industry standards but it had been important to compare results with 2017.
- Encouraging more responses from employees based away from Riverside House or alternative ways of capturing their views – Follow up work would try and ascertain reasons for non-completion, particularly in Regeneration and Environment which had the lowest response rate despite a strong drive to encourage responses.
- If people had answered the questions about senior management visibility in terms of their more immediate manager that was also a concern as they would be less likely to see senior managers. - Anecdotally it seemed many employees, particularly front-line staff, had answered in respect of managers in the tier above their first line supervisor. A framework was required around management visibility, supervision and one-to-ones across the organisation, coupled with more work on communications.
- Variation in the numbers of tiers of management – This was being looked at and it was generally accepted practice to have six tiers from the Chief Executive to front line staff.
- Top level policy and the context for senior managers' decisions – This linked into communications and cascading messages throughout the organisation. Managers needed to spend time with their teams, explaining decisions. Inconsistencies existed in this regard so there was further work to undertake.
- Concern that only 30% of employees were aware of what other

departments did after several years of rolling out the “one council” message – Much depended on people’s roles and although good cross-directorate work and communication was in place, such as in social care commissioning, some silos still existed. Work was needed on the narrative and Rotherham story, with a corporate induction programme under development, including new starters and existing staff.

- Dialogue with other LAs where they obtained better responses – Best practice elsewhere was considered.

Resolved:-

- 1) To note the Employee Opinion Survey results, particularly in relation to improvements made since the 2017 survey.
- 2) To note next steps, including further work to explore the results and co-create action plans to address areas for improvement (corporately and within directorates).

7. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES - UPDATE ON THE HIGH NEEDS BLOCK

OSMB considered a paper which highlighted the increase in numbers of Education and Health Care Plans, the growth in demand for specialist provision and the resulting financial implications for the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant. The High Needs Block Recovery Plan aimed to bring in-year expenditure in line with the annual budget allocation and focus on a longer-term plan to contribute to reducing the cumulative deficit.

Phase 1 of the SEND Sufficiency Strategy was in place and Phase 2 would be coming in to help mitigate against high unit costs. Nevertheless, the report showed a variance from the recovery plan of £1.9m with £3.3m estimated pressures on the High Needs Block, even allowing for money being redirected from the Schools Block. Particular pressures were in relation to social care placements, Independent Specialist Providers and provision at Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

Rotherham’s PRUs (Aspire and Rowan) had both achieved good Ofsted inspection ratings. In addition to meeting mainstream school exclusion provision the PRUs were good at responding to those with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, which added to the pressures on places as they supported both cohorts. Budget pressures were not solely attributable to permanent exclusions but also to the growing numbers with SEMH needs. The service needed to review specialist places and the current offer to ensure it met local needs, as well as looking at funding, work which was taking place through the SEND Sufficiency Strategy and another piece of work due to commence.

A question was asked about the prospects of being able either to extend the building at Rowan or to build another classroom to accommodate more children and reduce the need for out of borough provision. It was confirmed that the review of alternative provision would consider those arrangements and if funding became available for capital investment the service would be well placed to act following positive engagement with providers.

Members sought assurances that Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) would be able to get a grip on the continued overspend in the face of ever growing demand and expensive out of borough places and that the service was doing all it could to address these issues. Various factors were involved including budget allocation and the SEND Code of Practice which had a strong emphasis on parental preference and was quite difficult to challenge. If parents expressed a strong wish for specialist provision, there was a risk of this resulting in a costly case at tribunal if not provided. Several actions as outlined in the report would come together like a jigsaw puzzle over time resulting in a levelling off of demand and a balanced in-year budget. However, officers were cautious over the timescale for reduction of the deficit.

Resolved:

- 1) To note the growth in Education Health and Care Plans in Rotherham and the increased demand for specialist education provision.
- 2) To note the financial model proposed in the High Needs Block Deficit Recovery Plan.
- 3) To note the arrangements for the management of the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit.
- 4) To note the recent Education and Skills Funding Agency Consultation on changes to the conditions of the DSG Grant.

8. UPDATE ON THE STRATEGY TO INCREASE IN-HOUSE FOSTER CARERS AND RELATED BUDGET PROFILE AND TARGETS

As part of their regular in-year budget monitoring the Board considered a report from Children and Young People's Services which identified activity to increase the number of in-house foster carers, and the impact this would have on the fostering targets and budget profile. Although the ambition was to have children placed in family-based settings wherever possible, it also had to be recognised that the nature of some children's experiences was such that they needed alternative provision.

Family-based settings included independent foster carers and in-house foster carers and Rotherham had been less effective in recruiting the latter or in managing that demand. Inevitably each year some people also decided to cease fostering for a variety of reasons. Actions were taking place, which should see increased requests for the Fostering Panel to meet, but would take a while to come to fruition. These included:

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- revised fees and allowances payment scheme for in-house foster carers to encourage additional placements within existing approved fostering households
- Muslim Foster Carer project
- allocated capital funds for Pathways to Care to deliver adaptations to the homes of foster carers, allowing them to have an additional child in placement.
- strategic partnership with Brightsparks

The work with Brightsparks was praised but a question was posed regarding the capacity of assessment teams and of the panel to get people through more quickly for approval to become foster carers, subject to the necessary safety checks. This was being looked at and the work with Brightsparks had helped as it was also in their interests. Each side provided challenge to the other on performance and outcomes, including how quickly people were moving through the process. It was an issue of performance management rather than team capacity. In follow up, Members inquired about the average time from expression of interest to taking the first child once approved. The aspiration was for 12 weeks from when a person submitted their papers to panel approval, which was welcomed by Members if that timescale could be achieved.

Resolved:

- 1) To note the fostering placement budget and target profiles for in-house fostering and independent fostering placements.
- 2) To note the activity that will increase the number of foster carers in the final quarter of 2019/20 and throughout 2020/21.

9. YOUTH CABINET/YOUNG PEOPLE'S ISSUES

The Governance Advisor informed the Board that the theme for the Children's Commissioner's Takeover Challenge on 12th March, 2020 had been confirmed by Rotherham Youth Cabinet as hate crime.

It was also reported that the intention was to have an update on the response to the last Children's Commissioner's Takeover Challenge: Young Carers at the same meeting.

10. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS - JANUARY TO MARCH 2020

Consideration was given to the Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period from January to March 2020 detailing the decisions to be taken by the Cabinet over that three-month period. Members identified the following two reports for pre-decision scrutiny at the meeting on 12 February 2020: December Financial Monitoring, and Budget & Council Tax 2020-21 and Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Cllr Cusworth confirmed that progress on developments with the Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy would be reported at Improving Lives

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and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Resolved:- 1) That the Forward Plan of Key Decisions from January to March 2020 be noted.

2) That the following reports be presented for pre-decision scrutiny on 12 February 2020:-

- Budget & Council Tax 2020-21 and Medium Term Financial Strategy
- December Financial Monitoring

11. CALL-IN ISSUES

The Chair reported that there were no call-in issues requiring the Board's consideration.

12. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no matters of urgent business to discuss at the meeting.

13. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved:- That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board take place on Wednesday, 12th February, 2020, commencing at 11.00 a.m. in Rotherham Town Hall.