

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday 16 June 2021

Present:- Councillor Clark (in the Chair); Councillors Barley, Baker-Rogers, Baum-Dixon, Burnett, A Carter, Cooksey, R. Elliott, Hoddinott and Yasseen.

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

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

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

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board of the new municipal year and the first since the Borough elections that had been held in May 2021.

The Chair noted the important role that scrutiny played in the Council's decision-making processes and emphasised that the scrutiny process should always be rigorous and conducted in non-partisan manner.

The Chair noted her thanks to former members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board for their work and to the previous Chair, former Councillor Brian Steele for the rigorous and independent manner in which he led the scrutiny at the Council.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 17 AND 18 MARCH 2021

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, held on 17 and 18 March 2021, be noted.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

5. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved: -

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for agenda item 8, Town Centre Masterplan implementation if reference is made to the exempt appendices attached to the report on the grounds that they involved the

likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 (financial and business affairs) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

6. YEAR AHEAD PLAN - QUARTERLY UPDATE AND PROPOSAL TO EXTEND THE PLAN

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 21 June 2021 that provided information on the on progress made in delivering the key activities as set out in the Council's Year Ahead Plan in the plan. The Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and the Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence attended the meeting to present the report.

The report noted that the Year Ahead Plan was the Council's plan for operating in and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and that it set out key activities for the Council for the period September 2020 to May 2021. The report stated that the plan detailed in the key activities that would be undertaken in order for the Council to support residents, communities and businesses through the ongoing challenges and uncertainties of the pandemic and also direct the Council's ambitious plans for Rotherham's future.

The Leader noted that of all the activities contained in the Year Ahead Plan:

- 36% (27) of the activities outlined within the Year Ahead Plan have been completed
- 47% (36) are on track
- 13% (10) are behind schedule
- 4% (3) are off track.

The Leader advised that the three activities that had been delayed had been impacted by the restrictions surrounding the pandemic. The Leader provided further information surrounding the activity that had been taking place to deliver on the actions detailed in the Year Ahead Plan. The Leader also noted the activity that had been carried out regarding the cross-cutting objectives contained in the plan regarding climate change and equalities. The Leader advised further that it was also being proposed to extend the Year Ahead Plan to November 2021 in order to provide time to develop a longer-term Council Plan that would establish medium-term priorities and actions.

A document that outlined progress against all the actions contained within the Year Ahead Plan was attached as an appendix to the officer's report.

Members asked for further information on plans surrounding flexible working at the Council, noting that working from home had been a very isolating and difficult experience for some members of staff. The Leader advised that while working from home had provided many advantages for staff, there were also disadvantages. The Leader noted the procedures

that had been put in place to support staff work effectively and comfortably from home during the pandemic and advised work would be continuing to look how the Council's existing pre-pandemic flexible working policies could be developed and strengthened. The Chief Executive noted that the feedback received from staff on the positives and negatives of home working would be used in the development of future flexible and hybrid working policies. The Chief Executive assured members that whatever policies were developed that the primary focus would always be to ensure that services were always delivered to residents in the most effective way.

Members asked whether the absence of office-based staff from Riverside House had negatively impacted on town centres businesses during the pandemic. The Strategic Director – Regeneration and Environment who was in attendance at the meeting advised that Rotherham town centre, was less dependent on office workers and their related spend than other town and city centres across the country so the impact of office staff at Riverside House and other town centre offices working from home had not been as significant for Rotherham.

Members asked whether work had been carried out to fully evaluate the impact of office-based staff working from home on Rotherham town centre and on the other local centres across the Borough. The Leader noted the national trend that had been seen in many cities and towns regarding increased trading and footfall in local centres as office-based staff worked from home. The Strategic Director – Regeneration and Environment advised that there was no data currently available on how the pandemic had impacted on footfall in local centres. The Leader reaffirmed the Council's commitment to local centres with further investment in local centres across the Borough and the roll out of high-speed internet across the Borough. The Chief Executive noted that for the Council that the pandemic had not introduced flexible and home working, but had instead accelerated trends and practices regarding how and where staff worked that were already in place.

Members asked for further information about planned activity to support small and medium sized business in the Borough as the Year Ahead Plan appeared to focus on supporting and attracting large businesses to the Borough. The Leader noted that the Council had a good track record of supporting small and medium sized business via established processes and the provision of business centres. The Leader advised that activity had been highlighted in the Year Ahead Plan surrounding large businesses as Rotherham had in the past struggled to attract large companies, and as such this was a priority in supporting the Borough's recovery from the pandemic. The Leader assured members that the Council continued to be fully committed to supporting small and medium sized businesses.

Members noted the crucial support that the Council's Food Banks and other services had played during the pandemic in supporting vulnerable

people and asked how prepared the Council was for supporting vulnerable residents when furlough and other support schemes ended. The Leader advised that crisis support would always be provided to those in critical need, as had been the case prior to the pandemic and that services that offered support to residents with longer term needs would also continue to be provided. The Leader noted that the best way to support local residents in the long term was to generate the economic activity that would create high quality jobs and prosperity across the Borough.

Members acknowledged the impact of the pandemic on the delivery of some of the actions contained in the plan but noted that the reasons for the activity of “£425,000 of investment in the borough’s other business centres” being off track appeared to be around problems with the allocated budget being insufficient and asked for further information about this. The Leader advised that the initial budget allocation for the project appeared to be insufficient and that work was ongoing to review the project to establish whether it could fit the allocated budget. The Leader noted that if this was not possible then the budget would have to be reviewed as the project included essential maintenance works that needed to be completed.

Members welcomed the activities contained in the Year Ahead Plan that focussed on neighbourhood working. Members asked how the planned youth-based activities over the summer would be communicated with residents. The Leader noted the importance of youth work activities being focused on local needs and communities and that the communication of activities would be based around local circumstances. The Leader noted the impact of austerity on the provision of youth activities but advised that the Council had created a new role to enable the coordination of Council youth service provision with the provision of partners in order to remove the potential for duplication and to enable the delivery of the services that were available to be maximised.

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council, the Chief Executive and the Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence for attending the meeting and answering member questions.

Resolved: -

- 1) That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
- 2) That Overview and Scrutiny Management Board members are consulted and involved in the development of both the format and the contents of the new medium-term Council Plan.
- 3) That Overview and Scrutiny Management Board members receive regular updates, at a frequency and in a format to be determined, on performance against the objectives contained in the new medium-term Council Plan.

7. EQUALITY ANNUAL REPORT

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 21 June 2021 regarding the Council's annual equalities report. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Community Safety, the Chief Executive and Finance and the Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence attended the meeting to present the report.

It was noted that publishing an annual equalities report was part of the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty with the report highlighting the Council's progress made over the past 12 months towards advancing the equalities agenda. The report also detailed key achievements and case studies from across the Council as well as outlining some next steps that would be priority areas of action to support the equalities agenda during 2021/22.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Community Safety and Finance noted that it had been an exceptional year, with the Council's focus being on responding to and starting to recover from COVID-19 pandemic. The Cabinet Member advised that the pandemic had exacerbated existing inequalities, with the most disadvantaged communities in the Borough being hit the hardest. The Cabinet Member noted that despite these challenges that throughout the Council's response to the pandemic, equalities had remained an important priority, and would continue to be a priority as the Borough moved into recovery.

The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence advised that the annual report had been structured around four key themes that were:

- Understanding and working with our communities.
- Leadership and organisational commitment.
- Responsive services and customer care.
- Diverse and engaged workforce.

The full Equalities Annual Report was attached as an appendix to the officer's report.

Members asked for further information on activity around equality issues for residents who were digitally excluded or who lived in rural areas of the Borough where access to public transport and high-speed internet was limited. The Cabinet Member agreed that digital exclusion right across the Borough was of concern and advised that work continued to address this in local communities. The Cabinet Member advised that there would always be residents who could not access services online and that as such it was essential that alternative methods of access were maintained to ensure all residents had an equal access to council services.

Members asked with regards to workforce development whether there were any jobs where the Council struggled to recruit women and whether the Council had yet employed its first female refuse collector. The Chief Executive advised that the Council had made great steps forwards in supporting women in the workplace and that it had put processes in place to ensure that the needs of women in the workplace were listened to and acted on, such as the equality champions programme. The Chief Executive advised that there were no particular problems in recruiting women to roles across the Council, including in areas of work that had traditionally been seen as male dominated and that recruitment processes and methods had been reviewed so as to attract and encourage more women to apply for roles. The Chief Executive noted however that the Council was yet to employ its first female refuse collector.

Members asked if there were any problems regarding discrimination regarding maternity issues at the Council. The Chief Executive advised that there was no evidence of serious problems around maternity and noted that the Council had a robust set of policies around both maternity and paternity.

Members asked how successful the Council had been in working with contractors to further the equalities agenda. The Cabinet Member advised that while it was still early days, that the Council's Social Value Portal had started to make an impact in encouraging contractors to employ local people.

Members asked for further information on the equalities training that would be provided for staff and how the Council would engage staff as well as residents in driving forwards the Council's equalities agenda. The Cabinet Member advised that equalities was a constantly developing area for the Council and noted key achievements including 95% of staff having completed equalities training and that all Council decision making reports included a full Equalities Impact Assessment that meant that equalities issues were always fully considered in decision making processes.

The Cabinet Member advised that staff and community engagement would need to be developed even further as the Council worked towards obtaining the 'Excellent' accreditation within the Local Government Association Equalities Framework. The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence noted that equalities issues and considerations were front and centre to the Council's Year Ahead Plan. The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence advised that for the Council to develop its staff further with regard to equalities that more bespoke training for different groups of staff would need to be offered so that every staff member could play a full role in advancing the Council's ambitious equalities agenda.

Members asked how the objective contained in the plan for Rotherham to be an antiracist town would be achieved. The Cabinet Member advised

that all elected members needed to work as role models and challenge racist actions and behaviour in their communities. The Cabinet Member noted that it was essential that elected members were proactive into getting out and influencing positive behaviour, for example in engaging with schools.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Community Safety, the Chief Executive and Finance and the Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence for attending the meeting and answering member questions,

Resolved: -

- 1) That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
- 2) That Overview and Scrutiny Management Board members are provided with the training and information to enable them to provide effective scrutiny and oversight of the equalities agenda at the Council in order to ensure the best equalities outcomes are obtained for both residents and Council employees.

8. FINANCE UPDATE

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 21 June 2021 that provided an update on a number of financial matters, including those related to Covid-19. The report had been provided as an interim update following on from the approval of the Budget and Council Tax 2021/22 report to Council on 3 March 2021 and in advance of the Financial Outturn 2020/21 and Financial Monitoring 2021/22 reports that were scheduled to be considered by Cabinet in July 2021. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Community Safety and Finance, the Assistant Director - Financial Services and the Head of Corporate Finance attended the meeting to present the report.

The report provided a narrative surrounding the Council's finances and how they had been impacted by the pandemic in areas including:

- the revenue Budget Financial Outturn 2020/21
- Business Support Grants
- Self-Isolation Payments
- Hardship Fund
- Covid Grants for 2021/22
- Adult Social Care Client Contributions
- Payments to Suppliers.

Members asked with regard to the distribution of Business Support Grants whether any analysis had taken place to establish how useful the grants distributed had been to the businesses that had received them. The Cabinet Member advised that the Council had and would continue to

engage with businesses to offer support. The Head of Corporate Finance advised that work had been carried out with local businesses throughout the period of the pandemic in order to ensure that the uptake of grants and rates relief had been maximised and that this work had been supplemented by the work of the Council's Business Support Team. The Head of Corporate Finance noted that there had not yet been an analysis of the impact of grants and other business support activity but advised that this work was planned to be carried out.

Members asked for further specific information that had not been included in the report regarding the value of the funding received for Business Support Grants and the total value of the grants paid out to local businesses. The Head of Corporate Finance advised that this information was publicly available and had been included in previous reports to Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

The Head of Corporate Finance advised that the vast majority of financial support for businesses that had been made available to the Council to distribute had been accompanied by set eligibility criteria from the Government and that this had meant that while the Council may have returned some funding to the Government that this has been because insufficient eligible applications had been made due to the set criteria. The Head of Corporate Finance assured members that the funding that had been made available for discretionary support, with application criteria set by the Council locally had been fully utilised.

The Assistant Director - Financial Services noted that at the start of the pandemic due to the urgency to get financial support to businesses the calculations completed by the Government on how much funding to make available to each local authority to distribute in their area had been completed very quickly, and as such may have resulted in more funding being issued that could possibly be claimed by businesses in each area.

Members noted how the pandemic had brought them into contact with businesses of all sizes in their local areas and the work that they had carried out to support them to access the funding that they were entitled to. Members noted that their experiences had highlighted how bureaucratic the processes had been for claiming support despite the efforts of the Council to make the processes as straightforward as possible and noted with concern how difficult this had made it for very small businesses, such as childminders to claim support. Members agreed that processes in future for any grant funding should be made as accessible as possible for those without the resources and financial expertise of larger businesses. The Head of Corporate Finance assured members that the application processes for businesses had been made as simple as possible with a single application process that then enabled Council officers to assess which schemes of support each business was entitled to.

Members noted the often chaotic situation regarding business support that

had been created by the tiered approach to restrictions in autumn 2020 and asked whether it would have been possible to issue support to all businesses registered to pay business rates, rather than businesses having to make a claim for support. The Head of Corporate Finance advised that the criteria of these schemes had required businesses to provide evidence that they were trading, as being registered for business rates alone would not have evidenced this requirement.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Community Safety and Finance, the Assistant Director - Financial Services and the Head of Corporate Finance for attending the meeting and answering member questions.

Resolved: -

- 1) That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
- 2) That a further report be brought to the October 2021 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board regarding the allocation of Covid related business support grants.

9. TOWN CENTRE MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Consideration was given to a report that was submitted for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting scheduled for 21 June 2021 that provided an update on the delivery of the Town Centre Masterplan and that also sought Cabinet approval for the funding and implementation of Phases 2, 3 and 4 of the public realm improvements. The Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy, the Strategic Director – Regeneration and Environment and the Assistant Director - Planning, Regeneration and Transport attended the meeting to present the report.

In introducing the report, the Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy detailed the background surrounding the history and implementation of the Town Centre Masterplan that had first been approved in 2017. The Cabinet Member advised how the development of the masterplan had highlighted the critical importance of public realm enhancements to help encourage and improve movement and connectivity, particularly between Forge Island and the wider town centre, and also to improve the physical environment and experience within the town centre, and as such had identified a package of public realm improvements to be delivered.

The Cabinet Member noted that the elements of Phase 1 of the scheme that had been approved in December 2019, and had included the redevelopment of Bridgegate, Frederick Street and College Street, were currently either complete or were in progress.

The Cabinet Member advised that the locations proposed for improvement as part of the public realm improvements were:

- Phase 2 - Howard Street (Frederick Street to Market Square), Effingham Street.
- Phase 3 – Forge Island Riverside Gardens and Upper Millgate.
- Phase 4 – The Markets Development, Market Square, Upper Howard Street, Drummond Street and Eastwood Lane

It was noted that a separate report to Cabinet seeking approval for the Markets and Library redevelopment, as well as Phase 4 of the Public Realm improvements would be presented later in 2021.

The officer's report detailed the work that was being proposed to be carried out in Phase 2 as well as providing information on the consultation processes that had been completed.

Members welcomed the ongoing implementation of the Town Centre Masterplan and the positive impact that it was having. Members asked what support was in place for the businesses that would be impacted during the implementation of the public realm improvements. The Strategic Director – Regeneration and Environment advised any business impacted by the construction works would be worked with closely in order to minimise any potential disruption to the operation of their business. The Cabinet Member noted examples of businesses that had been assisted to relocate as part of the implementation of previous elements of the Town Centre Masterplan.

Members asked about the plans for public seating included in Phase 2 of the masterplan. The Strategic Director advised that the overall amount of seating available in Rotherham town centre would increase with the implementation of Phase 2 and noted that consultation would take place with relevant stakeholders on the design of the seating installed.

Members highlighted the clear focus in the proposed plans of how the layout of seating and lighting in the town centre had been designed in order to reduce opportunities for antisocial behaviour. Members noted that providing a diverse day and night time offer, that appealed to a wide range of people and brought them into the town centre would however be a more positive way of discouraging and removing opportunities for anti-social in the town centre. The Cabinet Member noted the consultation that had taken place with the police to ensure that the public realm plans discouraged anti-social behaviour and advised that the Council's focus on bringing more residential developments into the town centre would positively impact on how the town centre was used both in the day and night time.

Members asked for further information on the range of factors that had been considered in the public realm designs as it appeared that the reduction of anti-social behaviour had been the primary consideration in design. The Cabinet Member noted the other factors that had been

considered but stated that it was essential that the reduction of anti-social behaviour should be a major consideration. The Cabinet Member however noted that many improvements such as increased lighting, and the lighting of buildings were both beneficial in reducing anti-social behaviour and in making the town centre more attractive and appealing.

Members asked whether the plan was flexible enough to adapt to the post-pandemic environment and the acceleration in the changes in shopping habits and how town centres were used. The Cabinet Member noted how Rotherham town centre had been diversifying over a number of years to have a varied offer and many independent retailers and businesses, and as such was in a more prepared position for the post-pandemic high street environment than many other towns.

Members asked how important it was to ensure that the town centre was easily accessible by public transport from all parts of the Borough. The Cabinet Member noted the success of the tram-train, the significant improvements to Rotherham interchange and the success of the parking strategy but noted the importance, and also of the significant difficulties of working with transport providers to ensure good bus services from all parts of the Borough into the town centre.

Members welcomed the increase of residential developments in the town centre and asked whether there were plans for the developments of lifelong and accessible housing that would be suitable for older people in the town centre. The Cabinet Member assured members that discussions with the Cabinet Member for Housing would take place on this issue.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy, the Strategic Director – Regeneration and Environment and the Assistant Director - Planning, Regeneration and Transport for attending the meeting and answering member questions.

Resolved: -

- 1) That Cabinet be advised that the recommendations be supported.
- 2) That Overview and Scrutiny Management Board members are further consulted on the number, location and design of the public seating areas contained in the Town Centre Masterplan.
- 3) That in addition to protecting established trees and replacing any unhealthy or dying trees, that consideration be given to increasing the overall number of trees in the Town Centre.

10. WORK PROGRAMME

The Board considered its Work Programme.

Resolved: - That the Work Programme be approved.

11. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Board considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions 1 June – 30 August 2021.

Resolved: - That the Forward Plan be noted.

12. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no call-in issues.

13. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business.

14. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board will be held at 11am on Wednesday 14 July 2021 at Rotherham Town Hall.