

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday 16 March 2022

Present:- Councillor T. Collingham (in the Chair); Councillors Baker-Rogers, A Carter, Cooksey, Cowen and Yasseen.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Baum-Dixon, Burnett, Elliott, Pitchley and Wyatt.

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

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

120. WELCOME FROM COUNCILLOR COLLINGHAM, VICE- CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

In the absence of Councillor Maggi Clark due to illness, Cllr Tom Collingham welcomed everyone to the special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board in support of the Children's Commissioner's Takeover Challenge. After an absence of two years, the Chair was delighted to welcome members of Rotherham Youth Cabinet (RYC), councillors and officers to the meeting.

121. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from:

The Leader, Councillors Brookes and Cusworth.

122. INTRODUCTION AND PRESENTATION FROM ROTHERHAM YOUTH CABINET - CLIMATE CHANGE

Josie Brown from Rotherham Youth Cabinet assumed the Chair for the meeting.

She began by welcoming everyone to the annual takeover meeting and introduced a short film to outline the work of RYC. The Youth Cabinet was made up of young people aged from 11 – 18 years, working together to make a positive difference to young people across Rotherham. It was highlighted that RYC undertook consultation, research and campaigns to improve services for young people. This included mental health provision in schools, transportation and tackling hate crime. Amongst its manifesto priorities for the forthcoming year were climate change, mental health and tackling homelessness and poverty. An overview of RYC's members' regional work and in the National Youth Parliament was given, including attendance at the COP 26 conference to give a presentation showcasing the impact of climate change and work with the Department for Education's sustainability climate board.

Prior to questions being taken, Curtis Yip outlined the rationale behind the

choice of climate change as the focus of the meeting and welcomed the opportunity to discuss with Councillors and Officer, the authority's progress towards achieving net zero.

123. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH OFFICERS

The Chair invited questions from RYC members to Cabinet Members, members of the Senior Leadership Team and officers.

1. What is being done within schools and council buildings to reduce the amount of energy being used? How can this be reduced further?

The Acting Head of Change and Innovation invited the Assistant Director for Education to respond. It was outlined that the Council worked collaboratively with schools and used its influence as it was key to promote the impacts of climate change whether in terms of curriculum or in the assets they used. Schools were supported to work in a more energy efficient way with all new buildings using technologies or low energy solutions to make sure that they were sustainable and working towards carbon neutrality. Retrospective energy saving solutions were also applied to older buildings. Asset Management supported schools and academies with whom it has a service level agreement to improve energy efficiency and manage utility contracts.

Recently the government produced its draft policy in this area, [Sustainability & Climate Change: A draft strategy for the education & children's services systems \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92444/sustainability_and_climate_change_a_draft_strategy_for_the_education_and_childrens_services_systems.pdf), to inform future planning in this area and there was an expectation that both academies/maintained schools would reduce energy use in the long term to support climate change challenges.

The Head of Asset Management described how energy efficiency had been a priority for the Council for some time, The Council had reduced energy consumption and CO₂ emissions from operational by 65% from 14,589 tonnes CO₂ in 2014/15 to 5,034 tonnes CO₂ in 20/21. In 2019 a target was adopted by the Council to reduce carbon emissions from Council controlled assets and services to net zero by 2030. A heat decarbonisation plan had been developed, that focussed on converting fossil fuel heating systems to low carbon alternatives and at the same time reducing the electricity capacity of building by insulation, improved controls, lighting upgrades (LED) and installing on site renewable energy where feasible (including solar units on roofs). The Council approved a budget of £6.4m to decarbonise operational buildings. The budget will be used to secure additional Government funding and integrated with maintenance and capital programme budget to ensure decarbonisation was carried out efficiently and real progress towards net zero could be achieved by 2030.

2. What is the plan to combat plastic pollution across Rotherham and how is local action promoted?

The Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment noted that the Council should lead by example to minimise single use plastics. To that end, work was underway to establish the extent of single use plastics across the authority so action can be taken to reduce this. As a result of this activity, Council catering facilities were using wooden cutlery, using more glass-based products, encouraging refills and minimising waste packaging. However, it was noted that whilst single-use plastics were a concern, plastic were used in a range of products such as clothing and medicines which added to wider pollution. Consideration needed to be given how these issues were to be addressed long-term.

The Strategic Director clarified the Council's communication campaign across social media and other streams, such as newsletters, to raise awareness. He welcomed the opportunity to meet with the Youth Cabinet to discuss on how plastic pollution can be tackled.

As an example of the Council's commitment to tackling plastic pollution, the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment outlined that recycled plastics were being used as resurfacing material for roads. The product was carbon neutral and locally produced.

It was noted that single use plastics were being used in the Council Chamber and suggested that action should be taken to introduce more environmentally friendly products for use in Council buildings.

3. Locally, how much waste is being recycled? How do you plan on improving this?

The Assistant Director for Community Safety outlined that that Rotherham was performing relatively well compared with its South Yorkshire neighbours in the proportion of waste that was recycled. This was currently running at around 45%. It was noted that as more people were working from home during the pandemic that while recycling rates had increased, there was also an increase in general waste.

The Assistant Director highlighted that there were a number of changes to national legislation as detailed in the Environment Bill which would have an impact locally on waste and recycling. These measures included 'producers pay' whereby manufacturers and retailers would pay for disposal of packaging which is anticipated to reduce the amount of plastic used; a deposit scheme for return of recyclable products and separate collection of food waste. In Rotherham, food waste was already composted in the waste treatments facility so discussions were underway to clarify if Rotherham would be exempt from this measure.

The Council was developing a communication strategy to raise awareness across the general population, targeting young people in particular. It was noted that reducing the impact of waste on the climate

was essential however, key to this was the reduction in consumption.

Clarification was sought what activities the Council had planned to mark the International Day of Recycling. It was noted that the Manvers facilities would be running events and promotions. The Youth Cabinet were invited to be involved in raising awareness and sharing key messages around future events.

A question was asked about the amount of waste recycled from Council buildings. It was outlined that the Council produced relatively low levels of waste through initiative such as 'paperless' working.

Further details were sought on how the compost from waste treatment and garden waste collections was utilised. It was outlined that it was sold for larger scale use for agriculture or landscaping.

It was clarified that 45% of total waste is recycled. The Local Authority was legally obliged to track the waste noting were recycled material was distributed and how non-recyclable waste was disposed. It was noted that waste contamination such as items placed in the wrong bin or food contamination is a significant issue which impacts on recycling rates.

Details were sought if there were plans to support textile recycling as a means to tackle the impact of fast fashion? In response it was outlined there were no plans to establish a specific facility in Rotherham as textile could be recycled at local recycling facilities, through charity shops and clothes banks. However, it was noted that there should be wider awareness about fast fashion to minimise consumption.

4. Most schools do not have recycling facilities, what is the council doing to make recycling bins accessible for schools and is it possible to provide more recycling bins in streets and public spaces

The Assistant Director for Education noted that there was mixed practice in schools. It was observed that there were several schools which had developed policies, demonstrated good social values, had good recycling facilities and separation of waste, and participated in 'eco' awards scheme such as 'Keep Britain Tidy'. The Council was influencing schools wherever possible through its waste policies, citing work in Thorpe Hesley and Eastwood. It was noted that there was a strong level of engagement in the primary sector, however, it was observed that there was more to be done in secondary schools and further education establishments.

It was thought that the DfE strategy would assist in setting out expectations for schools. The Assistant Director gave a commitment to promoting this agenda in schools.

It was noted that most schools have commercial contracts for their waste collection, so the Council has limited influence on these contracts. However, it was anticipated that forthcoming Environment Bill would have

a positive effect in as much as businesses, including schools, will have to contract for recycling services. The Council was sharing these developments with schools. It was also noted that it made business sense to recycle as it cost less money to recycle than to dispose of general waste.

Clarification was sought on future plans for on-street recycling. It was outlined that should a deposit return scheme be introduced it was likely that the public would return their recyclable waste directly so the need for on-street facilities would be lessened. Further direction from Government was awaited.

A suggestion was made to incentivise students in secondary schools to recycle. Examples of schemes run elsewhere in country were given. Citing the forthcoming deposit return scheme, it was thought that this could be used as a basis for incentives as there was a monetary return on the waste. A commitment was given to looking into this further.

It was anticipated that the Environment Bill would come into force in 2023-24. It was noted that Government was consulting with stakeholders regarding how the legislation would be implemented.

5. How is the council encouraging schools and academies to have a consistent and dedicated climate curriculum and what plans do you have to improve climate education for young people across Rotherham, who is responsible for implementing these plans and by when?

The Assistant Director for Education outlined that the national curriculum was set by the DfE. There was some flexibility in parts of the curriculum such as the Personal, Health and Social Education and Citizenship which could focus on the wider impact of climate change and net zero. There was also scope within the life sciences and geography to cover relevant issues.

Referring to a previous question, the Assistant Director referred to some of the exciting developments within primary schools and examples of community-based approaches taken to raise awareness and cascade knowledge. The learning from this initiative has been shared with other schools in the wider multi-academy trusts. It was noted that the Strategic Director and officers met regularly with the Regional Schools Commissioner and there were opportunities to ask for this agenda to be prioritised and raise key issues.

Clarification was sought if Rotherham could develop its own award scheme, citing the Climate Leader's Award as outlined in the DfE's draft strategy. It was noted that Calderdale's Youth Cabinet had developed its own scheme that had been rolled out in schools. The Assistant Director indicated that he was happy to meet with members of the Youth Cabinet to look at how this could be applied in Rotherham.

6. How do you plan on involving the wider community ie adults, in tackling climate change and how are you raising awareness about the need to recycle and how to recycle?

The Council was developing a communication and engagement plan to canvas views from the public. The Council had set two ambitious targets for the Council to be net zero by 2030 and the wider borough to be net zero by 2040. The consultation process undertaken by the Council on its Council Plan indicated that there was a very strong view from the public that climate change was an important issue. However, this was not full understanding of the terminology around 'net zero'. There was a commitment to engage with communities to make it meaningful. Examples were given of engagement with community groups including the Youth Cabinet.

Wider work with the region were cited and assurance was given that best practice would be sought on a local, regional and national level. Work was underway with Council staff to promote their understanding of carbon literacy and increase knowledge. The value of ongoing engagement with forums such as the Youth Cabinet was cited.

Clarification was sought on what action would be taken to engage with Black, Asian and Minority Communities on these issues. In response, it was noted that existing networks would be involved and suggestions on how this work could be enhanced were welcomed.

7. What action is taking place to improve the reliability, accessibility and affordability of public transport given the huge role it will play in decarbonising our travel?

The Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment cited the tram-train network as a significant development in decarbonising transport. The Council was committed to working with South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority to pursue this agenda. It was noted that the MCA worked with the private bus companies regarding routes to ensure that there was coverage across the sub-region including those routes which may not be commercially viable. The Council was bidding for infrastructure projects to install bus lanes, a further tram-train stop and a new station on the Waverly development to improve reliability. It was noted that these developments would take some time to come on stream.

The Chief Executive outlined the disappointment of the South Yorkshire MCA at the amount of funding available from national Government for the sub-region. It was presenting a considerable challenge to maintain the reliability of current public networks and support the development of environmentally sustainable transport in the future.

It was noted that members of the Youth Cabinet also sat on the MCA Youth Cabinet and had influenced the introduction of the 'Zoom Day Travel Pass'. This was a concessionary pass for 18-21 years which, due to lack of funding, was not forecast to renew. It was noted by a Youth

Cabinet member that the free travel for under 18s was also very popular and a positive initiative to decarbonise transport for younger people. It was asked if the Council could advocate through the MCA and other forums, for their continued use.

The Chief Executive reiterated the challenges of keeping the network running had to be the key priority. She noted with regret that the lack of funding had meant that initiatives that would have been supported could no longer be committed to.

8. What has/is being done to improve the distribution of electric car charging points across Rotherham to ensure a smooth transition to net zero?

It was outlined that the distribution of charging points was key to encouraging more people to use electric vehicles (EV). The impact of EV was highlighted with a single vehicle over a 12-month period saving 2000kg of carbon. Therefore, if more people were to use EVs the impact could be significant.

Rotherham had been proactive in the introduction of charging points with 30 fast chargers for public use. There were an additional 32 for use for council staff and council vehicles. A number of these are net zero drawing power from solar panels.

£647k has been approved to extend the infrastructure for on-street hubs or hubs in the community. Plans were in place to introduce ultra-rapid points. It was also highlighted that partners had developed charging points for staff or customers. Several supermarkets had installed publicly accessible points as part of planning obligations.

The Council was keen to collaborate to ensure that there was a wide coverage of charging points across the borough and these were evenly distributed.

The development of street hubs was welcomed as it was anticipated that this would encourage more use of the electric element of hybrid vehicles. A further question was asked if the charging points used renewable energy. In response, it was outlined that this was encouraged as far as possible. Information was sought if the Council had any influence on the inappropriate use of free charging points. It was noted that Council charging points were metered for use. It was the responsibility of retailers to determine what action they wish to take to minimise inappropriate use of their facilities.

9. What green jobs are available for young people to either take as a vocational pathway or being created in Rotherham?

The wider skills agenda had created opportunities for “green jobs”. Rotherham was taking an innovative approach, for example building carbon neutral houses on the Waverly development. It was noted that the

new school in Waverly had been built to low-carbon standards. It was emphasised that the Council did not have statutory responsibility for this area however, worked with schools to influence the skills agenda. The “North Star” science initiative was bringing schools and industry together to work on projects that would lead to new jobs which would be aligned to low carbon or net zero targets. ‘T’ (technical) level qualifications would be introduced in some Rotherham in the next 18 months. These qualifications would be aligned to career pathways, particularly engineering. The MCA was developing its skills agenda which would reflect to its net zero ambitions. It was also noted that the National Career Service and associated websites, could direct young people to careers in low-carbon industry or services as a career option. For example, a career’s fayre was being hosted at Magna with jobs linked to low carbon industry, science and technology and the environment.

10. Can you explain what is being done in Rotherham to tackle the nature emergency and improve wildlife recovery?

The Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment highlighted that the Council had developed plans to address this issue and gave some practical examples as illustration.

- The work around Forge Island had found an otter living in the river which demonstrated that the river had a diverse eco-system.
- Money had been committed from the budget to continue the wildflowers planting by roadsides.
- Further discussions had taken place with ecologists to establish how planting can promote biodiversity. Additional funding had been allocated to tree-planting, with over 22,000 trees planted over the winter period by the Council and its partners.

The Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion outlined the other benefits of tree planting, namely soil enhancement, carbon capture, flood prevention, shading in urban areas as well as a positive impact on health and well-being.

11. How is the council working with other groups and organisations to tackle the intersectional factors around climate change?

The Council was committed to engaging with communities to ensure that action to tackle climate change and transitioning to net zero was done fairly and inclusively so that existing inequalities were not exacerbated. Examples were given of elected members working on local ward priorities.

Through her work with other local authorities and in coalition with organisations such as Friends of the Earth, the Chief Executive outlined examples of how Councils could influence and support Government policy. There was proactive work with Government to examine how pilots and funding streams can be used creatively however, necessarily there

would be areas of work that could not be progressed because other essential services and statutory responsibilities had to be prioritised. It was noted that a major challenge was to deliver the climate strategy within existing financial priorities and manage expectations accordingly.

It was highlighted that the Council had different roles at different levels. It had the power to deliver its climate strategy in areas where it had direct influence. It also had a role as a community leader to articulate its ambitions to the MCA, the region and Government. In terms of maximising private investment to create jobs, the authority could influence the debate but ultimately decisions would be made against the context of national policy and commercial interests. The challenge of delivering the decarbonisation agenda, was to ensure that issues within the Council's control could be delivered at scale and within financial resources and for areas outside its direct remit, for the Council to use its influence effectively.

12. Are there plans for schools and council buildings to have consistent approach to green technology such as solar panels?

It was noted that the Council did not have direct responsibility for the installation of green technology in existing school buildings. However, for new builds, these would need to be compliant with environmental standards, energy efficiency and use of sustainable materials. Some of the multi-academy trusts would have existing plans to install green technologies such as installation of LED lighting.

In respect of Council buildings, each asset was examined to see how green technology could be applied. The Head of Asset Management referred to an earlier response outlining the Council's decarbonisation targets. An investment of £1m had been allocated to develop a solar farm to offset energy use elsewhere. It was anticipated that this development would generate considerable financial savings as well as supporting the Council's net zero targets.

13. How are you ensuring that council houses are environmentally friendly and energy efficient?

The Strategic Director for Adult Social Care, Housing and Public Health outlined that a fifth of overall carbon emissions were from homes. The Council owned and managed more than 20,000 homes (17% of total), therefore it was important that council homes were as energy efficient as possible. This would contribute to meeting the net zero carbon target and help residents who were affected by fuel poverty and by rising energy bills.

The Council had invested into its housing stock in recent years, including programmes to replace boilers and district heating, lighting systems, home insulation, windows and doors, all of which improve energy efficiency. Partners were also required to have environmentally friendly waste disposal methods. Advice and support were provided to tenants on

how to reduce the amount of energy they use in their homes.

The Council has also successfully bid for approximately £3m from central government, to contribute towards a programme to improve the energy efficiency of homes in East Dene and Maltby. Further work was planned to focus on least energy efficient housing stock.

It was highlighted that over half of council homes did not reach EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) band C or better. To address this, the Council had developed a 'Housing Roadmap to Net Zero' to inform the Council of the type of works needed (for example air source heat pumps, solar panels and additional insulation). It had also identified what investment would be required to deliver this and how this can be achieved within allocated budgets.

It was noted that new Council homes built or acquired would have a higher EPC rating and levels of thermal efficiency. Consideration had been given to ensure that new homes are 'zero carbon' or 'zero carbon ready'.

Clarification was sought on the number of council houses that were properly insulated and had efficient boilers. Anecdotal evidence was provided which suggested that some people living in existing stock had inefficient heating and damp houses. In response, details were given of work undertaken to improve insulation. It was noted that around 12% of complaints across the stock concerned damp. Work was being undertaken with damp specialists to identify how this can be tackled. It was noted that boilers were replaced on a planned basis.

14. What consideration has been made to introducing alternatives to single use plastics in school canteens and public buildings, for example leisure centre vending machines, cafes etc

The Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment recognised that there was more to be done in this area and a commitment was included in the Council's Year Ahead Delivery Plan to tackle single use plastics across council buildings and events.

It noted the schools determined the requirements and specification of their catering contract either with the Council's Catering Services or other private sector providers. It was noted that school councils and the Youth Cabinet could have an influence on the use of disposable plastics. The Catering Service was working proactively with schools to minimise the common types of single-use plastics in the catering environment as appropriate. Similarly, the local leisure centres fell under an existing long-term contract with the private sector and so the Council had limited control over the purchasing of catering items.

However, within its own buildings and events, the Council had already made some good progress across our Culture, Sport & Tourism services,

such as Clifton Park Museum, Country Parks, and the Civic theatre. The changes that had already been made at these sites to replace plastics with paper or wooden alternatives.

The Senior Governance Advisor summed up the next steps. The notes from the meeting would be collated and the Youth Cabinet would meet to determine any formal recommendations they would wish to make to the Council for a response. Some points that had emerged were highlighted that could be the basis for recommendations:

- That Youth Cabinet are invited to visit the waste treatment centre at Manvers.
- That the Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment meets with members of the Youth Cabinet to discuss plastic waste /pollution and action to minimise single use plastics
- That the Assistant Director for Education works with the Youth Cabinet to look at the feasibility of developing an environmental awards scheme for schools
- That Council officers work with the Youth Cabinet to strengthen its engagement strategy with young people, specifically young people from BAME communities or other hard to reach groups.

In summary, Cllr Tom Collingham thanked everyone for their attendance, contributions and amazing questions. He looked forward to working with the Youth Cabinet on developing their recommendations and report which would be submitted to this Board in due course. In addition to the draft recommendations, he asked that there was an examination of preceding years' takeover challenges and a report submitted on their impact in Rotherham.

Resolved:

1. To note the outcomes from the CCTOC discussions.
2. That a report be submitted to a future meeting of Overview and Scrutiny outlining the recommendations from the Youth Cabinet arising from this meeting.
3. That a report be submitted to a future meeting of Overview and Scrutiny outlining the outcomes and impact of previous Children's Commissioner's Takeover Challenges.

124. 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 23 March 2022 at Rotherham Town Hall.