

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Thursday 19 January 2023

Present:- Councillor T. Collingham (in the Chair); Councillors Baker-Rogers, Cowen, Baum-Dixon, Cooksey, Elliott and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Clark, A Carter, Pitchley and Yasseen.

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

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

136. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 16 NOVEMBER 2022 AND 1 DECEMBER 2022

Resolved: - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 16 November 2022 and 1 December 2022 be approved as a true record.

137. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

138. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

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

139. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no exempt items on the agenda.

140. FUTURE PROVISION FOR HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRES

The Vice-Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment, The Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment, Assistant Director, Community Safety and Streetscene and the Head of Environmental Services to the meeting.

The report recommended an in-sourced delivery of customer facing sites and facilities, with these being supported by contracted haulage and disposal when the current Household Waste Recycling Centre (contract expires in October 2023).

Options considered include the contracting out of the services, alongside a range of internal delivery models. There were significant complexities attached to developing an in-house service in a highly regulated industry. However, there were also a range of potential benefits in terms of new services and more flexibility in delivering existing services, to meet the

needs of residents and the Council. The report recommended an in-sourced delivery of customer facing sites and facilities, with these being supported by contracted haulage and disposal. The procurement of a delivery partner to provide the HWRC service for up to three years, whilst also supporting the Council to develop and implement its in-house delivery model was also recommended. The haulage and disposal aspects of the contract would continue to be provided by the market beyond the in-sourcing of the front-end of this service.

The Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment introduced the report. He outlined that current arrangements were to end in October 2023 and therefore, alternative arrangements were needed. It was proposed that the service followed a different operating model. It was stressed that it was a good performing area.

It was noted that Rotherham retained good relationships with Barnsley and Doncaster Councils. However, it was difficult to deliver Rotherham Council commitments such as the Real Living Wage, Social Value priorities and enhance re-use/ recycling targets in the current contractual arrangements.

Should the preferred option be approved, there would be a transition period of three years, with staff becoming directly employed by the Council at that stage. A contractor would retain onward movement of waste.

There had been some public engagement on service delivery and soft market testing had been undertaken to establish if the option was viable.

The Vice-Chair invited questions from the Board and a discussion on the following issues ensued:

Clarification was sought of the level of risk attached to bringing the service in-house and what mitigations were being put in place to manage these. It was outlined that there was a range of technical competences required but this was being addressed. It was also recognised that work was needed to support staff to acquire technical skills. It was noted that there was a level of operational and financial risk in the waste disposal market that needed to be understood.

The commitments to the to the real living wage and re-use processes were welcomed. Clarification was sought if there was flexibility within contractual arrangements to stipulate that these could be delivered without taking on TUPE liabilities, training requirement and future pay awards. A view was expressed that the preferred option would cost more to the Council, with the authority assuming all of the risks. It was questioned if this option provided best value.

In response, it was outlined that the difference between the options was approximately £21k and the level of risk was not significantly more than

the current contract. It was felt important that the public engaged with staff who would be directly employed by the Council. It was noted that in-sourcing provision would give flexibility to the service longer term to make changes that may require contractual negotiations if the service was to remain outsourced.

In response to a query regarding staffing, it was outlined that there were no plans to change to change staffing levels but this would be subject to review. It was noted that safety would be a primary consideration.

Clarification was sought if there were any reciprocal arrangements with neighbouring authorities to allow use of recycling facilities. It was outlined that Rotherham collaborated with other Councils on issues but the decision to extend use to non-residents lay with the respective authority.

Resolved:

1. That Cabinet be advised that the following recommendation be supported.
 - 1) That Cabinet approve Option 3, which will provide for an in-sourced delivery of customer facing sites and facilities, with these being supported by contracted haulage and disposal, following an initial fully contracted service, and authorises the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment (subject to confirmation by the Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services) to agree the final delivery arrangements and subject to Council approval through the budget process.
2. That Cabinet be requested to explore the feasibility of having reciprocal arrangements for use of Household Waste Recycling Centres with neighbouring authorities

141. ROTHERCARD REVIEW

The Vice-Chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion, the Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services and the Assistant Director for Customer, Information and Digital Services to the meeting.

The Rothercard scheme was launched as an anti-poverty initiative in 1993 to prioritise support for Rotherham people living on a low-income by offering a discount on a range of Council services, as well as discounts on goods and leisure activities from a small number of other organisations. The current scheme had not been developed or promoted for some time which was likely to mean that some of the people who could most benefit from the scheme, were missing out. A review of the Rothercard scheme by a cross party Rothercard Working group had been completed. The findings from the review were set out in Appendix 1. The purpose of this

report was to set out the changes identified from the outcome of the review, which, once implemented, would deliver an improved Rothercard scheme.

The Cabinet Member introduced the report and outlined that the work undertaken to maximise the benefits for those residents eligible. He thanked members of the working group for their contribution to the review.

The Assistant Director noted that the scheme was originally introduced in 1993 and had not been reviewed in some time in line with technological developments or relevance of the range of offers. Applications for Rothercard were logged in 2017 to gain an understanding of what it was being used for. The report set out proposals to be implemented from April 1, 2023. It was intended that the working group would be reconvened on an annual basis to ensure that the scheme evolved and remained relevant for those who needed it.

The Vice-Chair invited questions from the Board and a discussion on the following issues ensued:

Clarification was sought about how the scheme would be publicised. A suggestion was made to add it to ward newsletters and publicise via school networks, social media pages, housing information etc. It was outlined that it would be targeted at residents in receipt of Council Tax support, including people receiving state pension. It was noted that further promotion was planned with under 21s.

It was noted that disabled people were often less physically active than non-disabled people and if scheme eligibility was extended, whether this may incentivise disabled people's access to leisure facilities. Further consideration would be given to how the scheme could be expanded and what discounts were available. A piece of work was being undertaken with Children and Young People's Service to look at gaps in provisions and how these could be addressed. It was suggested that consideration could be given to extending eligibility automatically to those in receipt of Education, Care and Health Plans (EHCPs) or other Council services.

Plans to engage local with businesses to offer discounts were welcomed. Details were sought of whether there were plans to undertake discussions with neighbouring authorities to expand provision. It was noted that this may take place in the future.

Clarification was sought about the application process and if this would exclude people without digital access. It was outlined that customer service advisers would complete the application on behalf of the customer should they be eligible and give consent. There would not be an online application and cards would be issued for those who did not have access to a smart phone.

Details were sought of the links to the wider cost of living workstreams. It

was noted that this was a consideration of the working group to ensure that discounted services were available to low-income households. It was also noted that the intention was to ensure that these were available across the Borough not just in the town centre. It would be possible to analyse ward data, category of user, what discounts are being taken up and frequency of use.

In response to a query about the level of discount for garden waste (proposed at 5%), it was outlined that this was a new discount. The level of take up and impact on the business model would be reviewed by the service in due course.

It was noted that some other local authorities ran discount schemes. The Assistant Director indicated that these had been considered in drawing together proposals and the service was committed to learning from good practice elsewhere.

Resolved:

1. That Cabinet be advised that the following recommendations be supported:
 - 1) That Cabinet approves the recommended changes set out in this report to deliver a new Rothercard scheme as detailed at **Section 3 (Options considered and recommended proposal)**.
 - 2) That Cabinet note the changes to the eligibility criteria and the improvements that will be delivered to make it easier for customers to apply for/benefit from the scheme by:
 - Automatically providing residents who qualify for Council Tax Support (with consent) with a Rothercard
 - Raising awareness of the scheme with those who have already qualified for Council Tax Support so they can be provided with a Rothercard should they wish to have one.
 - 3) That Cabinet approve the proposal to offer the following new discounts to Rothercard holders:
 - 10% reduction off the cost of a hot drink effective from 1 April 2023, at the following locations:
 - Clifton Park Museum Café,
 - Thrybergh Country Park Café
 - Rother Valley Country Park Café
 - 5% reduction on the cost of the 2024/25 garden waste collection service (1st bin only). This reduction will be applied from December 2023 when residents are invited to renew/subscribe for the collection service that will commence from 26th February 2024.
 - 4) That Cabinet approve the intention to engage with businesses

to explore the potential for developing a universal discount scheme that supports local businesses and retailers to benefit all Rotherham residents.

- 5) That Cabinet approve the intention to introduce an electronic alternative to a paper based Rothercard.
 - 6) That Cabinet notes the intention to undertake an annual review to assess how the scheme is benefiting residents and helping deliver improved outcomes.
2. That consideration be given to extending the eligibility criteria to include:
 - i. young adults (up to the age of 24 years) with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs); and
 - ii. care leavers.
 3. That further work be undertaken to ensure that the initiative aligns with the 'cost-of-living' workstream and neighbourhood agenda and ward priorities.
 4. That as part of the planned Rothercard annual review, consideration be given to:
 - i. the number of disabled people participating in the scheme and if extending the eligibility criteria could encourage more disabled people to apply; and
 - ii. the feasibility of increasing the level of discount on garden waste collections.

142. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

The Vice-Chair introduced the Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services and Head of Finance to the meeting. The Chair had requested them to give a technical update in advance of the Committee's consideration of the 2023/24 Council Tax and Budget proposals. A copy of the presentation had been circulated to Board Members.

The Strategic Director outlined that she had previously reported to Cabinet in November on planning assumptions and the impact that inflationary pressures, rising energy costs, the pay award and market volatility had had on the Council's medium term financial planning. An £18m overspend was forecast at that point. Prior to this, it was assumed that the previously approved budget savings remained deliverable within the agreed profile. It was noted that through temporary savings and other measures, the forecast overspend had been reduced to £9.5m. Any overspend at year end would be funded from reserves. It was noted that most Councils were facing similar pressures.

In respect of the Government's Autumn Statement, it was noted that the adult social care grant had increased. Funding earmarked for adult social

care reform would be retained and made available for wider social care inflation and demand pressures. The council was also allowed to retain the estimated £3m Fair Cost of Care grant. The statement gave capacity to uplift Council Tax to 2.99% and the Adult Social Care Precept to 2%, creating a maximum increase of 5% for 2023/24 and 2024/25. The Household Support Fund would continue for a further year which would result in £4.9 million for the Council.

Following the Provisional Financial Settlement, revisions had been made to the MTFs. The key headlines from the settlement were the New Homes Bonus had been extended for a further year, the Adult Care Grant was higher than anticipated and there had been an inflation increase in the Revenue Support Grant. Additional funding was also provided to adult services to support pressures within domiciliary care.

In order to balance remaining gap, the Council needed to consider savings, fees and charges, council tax and reserves. It was noted that there was a shortfall over the next three years between the Council's expenditure and income. This equated to £6m shortfall each year

The Vice-Chair invited questions from the Board and a discussion on the following issues ensued.

Clarification was sought on the increased fees and charges if these were in line with the rate of inflation. It was outlined that this would be in the region of 10%. It was noted that the pay award had been determined nationally.

In preparing the MTFs, all assumptions were checked to ensure that they were reasonable. Adjustments would be made depending on circumstances. The current pressures could not be anticipated.

Clarification was sought about the nature of temporary savings and if any of these could be longer term. In response it was outlined that all options were being considered. An example was given that temporary savings may be made through delays to recruitment and on review a decision may be taken to delete the post, achieving longer term savings.

Details were sought on the level of Council Tax rise required to meet the budget gap. Each percentage rise to the base accrued approximately £1m and therefore, to balance the £6m gap through increases to Council Tax, it would require an 8% increase per year over the next three years. This level of increase would require a referendum.

Clarification was sought if consideration had been given to capital projects that could give revenue savings or asset sales to raise funding. The Strategic Director outlined that such actions were longer term and savings for 2023/24 would not be realised within those timeframes. Assurance was given that invest to save schemes were delivered as quickly as possible and were under constant review.

The current assumption was that £9.5m would be required from reserves to balance the budget. However, it was anticipated that this would reduce further as the temporary savings were realised.

The Vice-Chair thanked Officers for their presentation.

Resolved:

That the presentation be noted.

143. WORK PROGRAMME

The Board considered its Work Programme.

Resolved: - That the Work Programme be approved.

144. WORK IN PROGRESS - SELECT COMMISSIONS

This item was deferred.

145. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS - 1 JANUARY 2023 - 31 MARCH 2023

The Board considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2023.

Resolved: - That the Forward Plan be noted.

146. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no call-in issues.

147. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items.

148. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved: - That the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board will be held at 10am on Wednesday 8 February 2023 at Rotherham Town Hall.