

ROCHDALE NORTH TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING Wednesday 7 February 2024

PRESENT: Councillor A. Ahmed (Chair); Councillors I. Ahmed, Ayrton, Faisal, O'Neill, Rana, Wazir and Winkler

OFFICERS: G. Coggin (Children's Services), K. Davies (Committee Services), S. McCoy (Rochdale Boroughwide Housing), M. Reynolds (Community Safety) and V. White (Townships)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Three members of the public and two representatives of Greater Manchester Police (GMP).

25 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gartside, Holly, Nisa and Zaheer.

26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

27 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business received.

28 ITEMS FOR EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

There were no items for exclusion of press and public.

29 MINUTES

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting of Rochdale North Township Committee held on Wednesday 8 November 2023 be approved as a correct record.

30 OPEN FORUM

There were no items raised in the open forum by the members of public that were in attendance.

PC Marvell, Greater Manchester Police (GMP), provided the Committee with an update on local policing matters within Rochdale North Township. The update included:

- Cannabis Farms – It was noted that cannabis farms were currently more prevalent and that GMP believed this was due to the financial gain involved with the criminal activity, especially in the current cost of living crisis. Numerous cannabis farms had recently been dismantled across Rochdale North Township;
- Shoplifting in Rochdale Town Centre – The Neighbourhood Beat Officer for the town centre had reported to PC Marvell that criminal activity was on the rise. Two of the top five offenders had been arrested

and one offender was still wanted. Criminal behaviour orders had been issued to hopefully deter criminal activity in the town centre and to ensure a safer environment for both residents and proprietors;

- Closure Orders - Residential properties in the Freehold area had received closure orders due to crime and disorder issues. Three applications were received in total and five people had been arrested.

Resolved:

That the update from Greater Manchester Police be noted.

31 ROCHDALE BOROUGHWIDE HOUSING

The Township Committee received a presentation from the Director of Property Services, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH), which detailed the current leadership structure of the organisation, its recovery plan and voluntary undertaking with the Regulator of Social Housing, and its plans for 2024.

Members were informed that an email address had been established that was dedicated to Members of Parliament and Councillor enquiries. The inbox was regularly monitored and RBH aimed to respond to enquiries within 24 hours from Monday to Friday.

The RBH Recovery Plan focused on five themes: Governance, Home, Tenant Involvement and Empowerment, Rebuilding Trust and Lessons Learnt. The Director of Property Services reported that 78% of the recovery plan had now been completed, for example through regular drop in sessions being arranged for customers (Rebuilding Trust), and through a range of recommendations that had been followed through (Lessons Learnt) such as the establishment of a damp and mould taskforce.

It was reported that 25% of RBH homes currently had evidence of damp and mould. The Committee were informed that additional funding had been secured by RBH to treat damp and mould issues in residential properties over the next few months. RBH would assess each home accordingly, ensuring that properties had appropriate ventilation to prevent further issues and addressing the root cause of damp and mould when repairs were completed.

Plans for 2024 also included the approval of a new Corporate Plan and Values, working efficiently with partners to deliver outcomes, engaging regularly with customers to understand their priorities, and delivering improvements to customer service such as through the Customer First programme.

Members sought an update on the regeneration plans for College Bank. The RBH representative informed the Committee that an update event for residents was last held in September 2023 and advised that a clear plan was in place to confirm the future of the homes at College Bank. If approved, the plan would avoid the demolition of any of the blocks and proposed the

refurbishment of all seven blocks over a period of five years. A further event would be organised for residents once RBH had more information to share.

Concerns were raised by Members in relation to repairs not being dealt with in a timely manner. It was noted by the RBH representative that repairs would always take priority, however that winter saw the greatest rise in the number of issues in properties. The RBH representative accepted that residents waiting up to one week for a repair was unacceptable and noted that residents were encouraged to call the 24/7 phone line, email RBH officers, complete the online contact form, or use RBH's emergency service where necessary.

Fly tipping being prevalent in some local areas was also raised as a concern as rodents were being attracted. Members were informed that tenancy management was an issue that required more resources, but that fly tipping would be noted as a point of concern.

Members also raised that it would be beneficial to allocate an RBH officer to each ward to enable regular contact with Ward Councillors in relation to concerns that had been reported.

Resolved:

1. That the presentation be noted;
2. That representatives of RBH attend a future meeting of Rochdale North Township Committee to provide an update that addresses the questions and comments raised by the Committee.

32 NEED FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES 2024 - 2027 AND NEED FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES 2024 - 2028

Consideration was given to two reports of the Director of Children's Services which informed the Township Committee of the work undertaken by the Council in planning for primary and secondary school places from 2024 – 2028 in the Rochdale Borough.

It was noted that Cabinet had approved the recommendations as outlined in the reports on 19 December 2023.

In regards to Rochdale North Township, it was reported that although the birth rate had dropped by over 100 births per year, the area forecast for Reception intake classes remained at approximately 730 until 2027/28. With 789 places available, it was expected that there would be a minimum of 45 places spare; plans would continue to be reviewed as too much spare capacity could be an issue.

From the 2024 intake, Rochdale North pupil admissions were being reduced by a total of 30 places through reductions in intakes at both Meanwood Primary School and St Vincent's Primary School. Intake reduction would assist the schools in adequately managing their staff and finances through per-pupil funding allocation.

Rochdale North Township saw one of the largest flows out of the township at secondary school transition. The combined Rochdale and Pennines Township areas saw that, on average, 10.5% (or 217 pupils) left the borough for secondary education.

Members queried how data is calculated for school admissions when parents applied for a secondary school that was out of their catchment area. The School Place Planning Manager noted that the authority's admissions system worked off parental preference. For example, a place would be offered at a school with a further travel distance outside of the statutory parameters - within three miles for children aged 8-16 and within two miles for children aged under 8 - if it was at the parent's request and there were places available.

Resolved:

1. That the report on the Need for Primary School Places 2024 – 2027 be noted;
2. That the report on the Need for Secondary School Places 2024 – 2028 be noted.

33 TOWNSHIPS PLAN

The Township Committee gave consideration to a report of the Director of Public Health and Communities which informed that the Council Plan 2028 had been agreed.

The process had included carrying out a review of the Council's values and behaviours which were Proud, Passionate, and Pioneering. The priorities were agreed as People, Places, Planet and Performance. The Council Plan would gather aspirations and ideas together as a focus for decision makers, Council Services, partner agencies, and the voluntary and community sector active in the Rochdale Borough.

In line with the Council Constitution and the delegated arrangements to the Townships, Members felt that the Council Plan would guide, direct and detail the use of devolved budgets, including Township Revenue and Capital Funds.

Following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Co-operation and the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of each of the five Township Committees, the Townships and Communities Manager informed that it had been agreed that the creation of a new Townships Plan with priorities for each of the five Townships was unnecessary.

Resolved:

That the priorities of the Townships be approved as in line with the Council Plan and that no separate Townships Plan be required.

34 REVIEW OF ROCHDALE NORTH AND ROCHDALE SOUTH TOWNSHIPS AREA FORUMS

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Public Health and Communities which asked the Committee to consider the work of Ward/Area Forums and whether they remained fit for purpose.

The Townships and Communities Manager reported that area forums were developed in 2002 and that a total of ten remained active in the following wards: Balderstone & Kirkholt, Bamford, Brimrod/Marland/Sudden, Castleton, Central Rochdale, Healey, Kingsway, Milkstone & Deepish, Norden and Spotland & Falinge.

Members were informed that there had been a number of challenging and difficult area forums in recent months, with meetings increasingly being used as a vehicle to challenge the authority, the authority's partners and individual officers.

The issues that were discussed at area forums were also repetitive in most cases, with the same matters being focussed on by residents at each meeting. The matters raised were often outside of Council control which resulted in dissatisfaction, mistrust and occasionally unrest for residents.

The Chair invited two members of the public in attendance, Mr. Morrell and Mr. Lord, to make representations in relation to the item.

Mr Morrell and Mr Lord expressed the view that area forums did remain fit for purpose and raised concern that there was no alternative recommendation to consider, such as existing forums being reviewed and restructured. The successes of some forums was noted and the value of forums for local communities was highlighted.

The Chair thanked the members of public for their representations, however it was noted that most forums were attended by the same small number of residents and that increased aggressive behaviour by some members of the public, which brought the safety of the officers in attendance into question, was unacceptable.

Each of the Township Committees included an 'Open Forum' on the agenda and this was an available option for residents to attend and raise matters of concern.

Resolved:

That Rochdale North Township Ward/Area Forum meetings in Central Rochdale, Healey, Norden, and Spotland & Falinge be discontinued from April 2024.