

COMMUNITIES, REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING Tuesday, 21 May 2024

PRESENT: Councillors Brown (in the Chair), Ellahi, Nisa, Place, Rana, T. Smith, West, D. Williams and P. Williams

OFFICERS: Kuiama Thompson (Director of Public Health and Communities), Paul Moore (Assistant Director Economy), Donna Bowler (Assistant Director Place), Richard Duddell (Senior Project Officer – Rochdale Development Agency), Fabiola Fuschi (Senior Governance and Committees Officer)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Amanda Newton (Chief Executive, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing) and Kevin Brady (Chair of the Rochdale Boroughwide Housing Board)

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Besford, Bromfield and Taylor.

Councillor T. Smith attended the meeting as substitute for Councillor Bromfield.

In the absence of both Councillors Besford and Taylor, respectively Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee for municipal year 2024/25, the Committee appointed Councillor Brown to chair this evening's meeting.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

3 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no items of urgent business received.

4 ITEMS FOR EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

There were no items for exclusion of press and public.

5 MINUTES

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 5th March 2024 be approved as a correct record.

6 GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINES AUTHORITY SCRUTINY MINUTES

7 GMCA OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES OF 21ST FEBRUARY 2024

Resolved that the minutes of the GMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21st February be noted.

8 GM POLICE FIRE AND CRIME PANEL MINUTES OF 30TH JANUARY AND OF 21ST MARCH 2024

Resolved that the minutes of the GM Police Fire and Crime Panel held meetings on 30th January and on 21st March 2024 be noted.

9 GMCA JOINT HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES OF 17TH JANUARY 2024

Resolved that the minutes of the GMCA Joint Health Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17th January 2024 be noted.

10 TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE COMMUNITIES, REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Resolved that the terms of reference of the Communities, Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

11 ROCHDALE BOROUGHWIDE HOUSING: RECOVERY PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee considered a progress report of the Chief Executive of Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH).

The Chief Executive of RBH and the Chair of the RBH Board were in attendance and informed the Committee on the organisation's recovery plan following the Coroner's report into the death of Awaab Ishak and the subsequent downgrade to a non-compliant regulatory status by the Regulator of Social Housing in December 2022.

The RBH representatives outlined the progress against the Recovery Plan and Voluntary Undertaking that had been agreed with the Regulator of Social Housing to ensure that RBH returned to regulatory compliance and delivered safe homes for its customers.

The Recovery Plan was underpinned by a deep cultural change that the organisation had undertaken, under its new leadership, during the last 12 months. The Recovery Plan consisted of 13 actions relating to five different themes: Governance, Home, Tenant Involvement and Empowerment, Rebuilding Trust and Confidence and Lesson Learnt.

The RBH representatives provided details of progress against each of the five themes. In particular, they referred to the changes to the rules that govern RBH to ensure the setting of the corporate strategy and accountability for performance of the organisation sits with the Board. Additionally, the recruitment of ten non – executive directors, including the Chair, to ensure the Board is skills based to meet the challenges the organisation faces. RBH representatives also referred to the strategic approach to damp and mould and additional investment to deal with prevention activities.

RBH representatives informed of the structures that had been established to enable customers' engagement to inform RBH services and formally including customers as members of the Customer Services Committee, a sub-committee of the Board.

Members thanked the RBH representatives for the update and acknowledged progress to date against the Recovery Plan also noting that RBH had significantly improved communication and engagement with Ward Councillors and tenants. However, Members expressed their disappointment at the lack of elected members' representation on the RBH Board. RBH representatives informed the Committee of the ongoing conversations at local, regional and national level to find ways to engage with elected representatives; they reiterated that, as part of the RBH's improvement journey, the board's membership required strong social housing background and skill sets. Elected members were invited to apply for the two existing board's vacancies.

The Committee brought to the attention of RBH representatives some additional matters such as anti-social behaviour and land maintenance, update on College Bank, opportunity for community groups to access funding streams for community projects, tenants being requested to pay rent deposit in advance in order to access social housing and benefits being paid in arrears, putting tenants in a difficult financial position and neighbourhoods housing officers' turnover. RBH representatives gave assurance that plans and actions were in place to address these matters and that the completion of the Recovery Plan was conditional to the ability of RBH to tackle some of these issues.

Resolved:

1. That the progress report be noted;
2. That it be noted that RBH Representatives may be required to attend future meetings of this Committee to further report on progress against the organisation's recovery plan.

12 ECONOMY DIRECTORATE PLAN 2023-24: QUARTER 4

The Committee considered 2023/24 quarter four performance report for the Economy Directorate.

The Assistant Director (Economy) and the Senior Project Officer – Rochdale Development Agency were in attendance and addressed the Committee's questions about empty commercial properties across the Borough, Heywood Town Centre Masterplan Projects, Middleton Town Centre Masterplan Project, Tonge Hall and other projects within the Townships.

It was noted that, following some changes to the Council's leadership structure in January 2024, Neighbourhoods services had been split between the Economy Directorate, the Corporate Services Directorate and the Public Health Directorate. Hence, directorate plans' performance reporting arrangements for 2024/25 would reflect this change and this Committee would oversee service performance of the newly established Economy and Place Directorate and some aspects of the Public Health and Communities Directorate.

Resolved that the information be noted.

13 NEIGHBOURHOODS DIRECTORATE PLAN 2023-24: QUARTER 4 PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Committee considered 2023/24 quarter four performance report for the Economy Directorate.

The Assistant Director (Place) was in attendance to present the information and to answer the questions of the Committee.

It was noted that, following some changes to the Council's leadership structure in January 2024, Neighbourhoods services had been split between the Economy Directorate, the Corporate Services Directorate and the Public Health Directorate. Hence, directorate plans' performance reporting arrangements for 2024/25 would reflect this change and this Committee would oversee service performance of the newly established Economy and Place Directorate and some aspects of the Public Health and Communities Directorate.

Members queried progress against the establishment of a Community Wealth governance framework and the review impact and further opportunities for Artificial Intelligence.

Resolved that the information be noted.

14 PUBLIC HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES DIRECTORATE PLAN 2024-25

The Committee considered the Public Health and Communities Directorate Plan 2024-25.

The Director of Public Health and Communities was in attendance to present the information and to answer the questions of the Committee.

In reviewing the plan, the Committee discussed with the Senior Officer some topics of relevance for scrutiny and policy development which would be included in the Committee's work programme 2024/25:

- Inequalities Framework - the co-producing of the Inequality Framework for Rochdale to support the suitability assessment tool, plus Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) - deliver year 3 changing futures programme to support multiple disadvantaged groups;
- the Neighbourhoods plan – neighbourhood partnership and how to develop links with the five townships (Formalise the structures, by which the Developing Neighbourhood Partnership model, can support Townships, in delivering against the Council Plan Priorities).

Resolved that the information be noted and the topics discussed be considered for inclusion in the Committee's work programme for 2024/25.

15 ECONOMY AND PLACE DIRECTORATE PLAN 2024-25

The Committee considered the Economy and Place Directorate Plan 2024-25.

The Assistant Director (Economy) and the Assistant Director (Place) were in attendance to present the information and to answer the questions of the Committee.

In reviewing the plan, the Committee discussed with the Senior Officers some topics of relevance for scrutiny and policy development which would be included in the Committee's work programme 2024/25:

- Progress against Action 4 – Create Vibrant Town Centres
- Progress against Action 6 - Take positive action in response to the Housing Emergency
- Progress against Action 1 – Sub-action reducing digital inequalities.

Resolved that the information be noted and the topics discussed be considered for inclusion in the Committee's work programme for 2024/25.

16 WORK PROGRAMME PLANNING 2024/25

The Committee considered the topics listed in the draft work programme 2024/25 and the areas of work highlighted by Senior Officers during the presentation of the Directorate Plans 2024/25 at this evening's meeting.

Members also considered poverty as a theme of relevance for this Committee, with the view to ensure that all Council's services and their partners worked effectively together to mitigate the impact of the cost of living crisis.

Resolved that a draft work programme 2024/25 be compiled following this meeting. The work programme would be further discussed at the next meeting of the Committee in July 2024.