SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 16 December 2015

PRESENT: Councillors Ian Auckland (Deputy Chair), Lewis Dagnall, Neale Gibson, Julie Gledhill, Roy Munn, Robert Murphy, Joe Otten, Ray Satur, Martin Smith and Paul Wood

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1   Apologies for absence were received from the Chair (Councillor Bob Johnson) and Councillors Ibrar Hussain, Helen Mirfin-Boukouris and Steve Wilson.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1   No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1   There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1   The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3rd November 2015, were approved as a correct record and, arising therefrom, the Chair stated that a briefing note on the implications with regard to the inclusion on the Council's Electoral Register being added to the eligibility criteria in terms of entitlement to assisted waste collections, had been circulated to members of the Committee.

5. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

5.1   Diana Stimely raised concerns with regard to bus timetables, following the recent changes, indicating that, in her view, this was caused by buses travelling across the City, and questioned whether the buses could run into town and return.

5.2   The Chair stated that this, along with other issues regarding the recent bus changes, would be considered by the Committee, at a meeting to be arranged, following referral of the issues from the Council meeting on 2nd December 2015.

6. BROADBAND AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

6.1   The Committee received a presentation from Edward Highfield, Director of Creative Sheffield, and David Oliver, Solutions Architect, Resources, on proposed plans for the provision of broadband in the City, together with the economic benefits. The presentation focused on the importance of broadband, what had been done

previously in terms of the installation of broadband in the City, what was being done at the present time and what the plans were for the future.

6.2   David Oliver reported on the importance and benefits of broadband, referring specifically to social and digital inclusion, the creation of new jobs, its ability to improve people's skills, enable existing businesses to grow and to attract new businesses to the City, and the reduction of local energy consumption. He made reference to the Council's Corporate Plan 2015-18, which indicated that Sheffield would become 'a superfast, digitally connected City' by being 'amongst the most connected cities in the UK, where businesses could access the technology to grow, making the City Region an attractive location to run a business and work in'.

6.3   Edward Highfield reported on the work undertaken in the past in terms of the installation of broadband, referring specifically to the Digital Region. He stated that Digital Region Ltd had initiated a programme in terms of the installation of broadband in 2005/06, having a target of 98% coverage across South Yorkshire but, unfortunately, the execution of the programme was not found to be financially viable, and was closed in 2013, with the Company going into liquidation in 2015. Mr Highfield reported on the impact of the closure of the broadband programme, indicating that it had resulted in major financial and reputational damage. It had affected attitudes to broadband across South Yorkshire, coverage had been reduced to 80%, there were no further plans to invest before 2017, whereas all other regions were investing in broadband, resulting in the region being left behind nationally.

6.4   In terms of current developments, David Oliver reported on the Rural Broadband Programme/Superfast Extension, a Government programme funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), Sheffield City Region and British Telecom, and subsidised the extension of the current BT network with no risk to Sheffield City Council.   The Programme would enable access to superfast broadband for 97.9% of premises, and access to basic broadband for the remaining 2.1%. There would also be access to superfast broadband for 79% of enterprise zones and business parks, and the roll out was ahead of schedule, with around 10,000 homes planned to have access by Christmas. Mr Oliver stated that the Programme excluded Sheffield City Centre.   In terms of the future of the Programme, it was stated that plans were at an advanced stage to increase overall coverage beyond 97.9% and to provide even faster broadband speeds - ultrafast - to enterprise zones and key business parks so that they become some of the best connected in the country. Mr Oliver stressed that the rationale for this aspect of the Programme was local economic growth and inward investment.

6.5   Members of the Committee raised questions and the following responses were provided:-

•   The guidelines in terms of what areas should be decided as rural were set by the European Commission and based on these guidelines, Sheffield City Centre (the area within the inner ring road) was not included in the Rural Broadband Programme. The fact that the definition of Sheffield City Centre was not as big as the definition used for city centres of other major cities, had

proved to be beneficial.

- The difference in the price between superfast and ultrafast broadband would mainly depend on the market. BT and other national Internet Service Providers (ISPs) would organise their own national advertising campaigns, which would include TV advertising. The Superfast South Yorkshire Project Team was planning to implement a local "demand stimulation" programme, including, for example, the organisation of various awareness events and visiting businesses in person to explain the benefits of superfast/ultrafast broadband.

- Regarding the roll out plan, the area defined as "commercial" on the Superfast South Yorkshire Roll Out Map was referring to where there was an existing superfast broadband service, provided by BT, Virgin or any other major communication companies, and which included the majority of Sheffield.

- The Superfast South Yorkshire Team was planning to increase overall coverage beyond 97.9% to provide even faster broadband speeds to enterprise zones and key business parks, such as the Advanced Manufacturing Park (where this was permissible in the scheme), so that they become the best connected in the country.

- Broadband was on offer as part of the Digital Region Programme, but the take-up was not sufficient to make it financially viable. One of the issues with Digital Region was that it was a stand-alone network, separate to BT. The Rural Broadband Programme would use BT's existing network, which would be expanded. In addition, any financial risks, particularly relating to the level of take-up, would be faced by BT.

- There was a good working relationship between the Sheffield City Council Streets Ahead Team, Amey and BT, which included a joint working protocol between the two parties. The Rural Broadband Programme was currently three to five months ahead of the planned schedule.

- At the start of the Programme, an exercise was undertaken in terms of the identification of the intervention area on the basis that public money could not be spent on providing coverage in those areas where BT or Virgin had existing broadband coverage.

- In terms of future plans for the City Centre, the Council would not be able to fund the installation of broadband as using public money would contravene current state aid rules. However, a number of new companies, including Sheffield-based companies, had recently increased its wireless broadband coverage in the City Centre. It was envisaged that there would be a private sector solution for most of the businesses and major residential developments in the City Centre. However, the Council was considering a range of options for residents and businesses further to increase choice.

- There was a list of postcodes that define the City Centre areain terms of those

addresses not included in the Programme.

- Discussions were taking place with colleagues in the Planning Service in order to see if it was possible to include the provision of broadband to new developments and major renovations in planning policy in some way.

6.6   RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

(a)   notes the information reported as part of the presentation, and the responses to the questions raised;

(b)   thanks Edward Highfield and David Oliver for the presentation;

(c)   welcomes the progress made in connection with the Rural Broadband Programme and recognises the need for the City Centre to be at the heart of the plans in terms of attracting businesses and trade to the City; and

(d)   requests an update report in respect of the Programme, together with details of the contract change request, to be considered at a future meeting or circulated to Members for information.

7.   WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

7.1   The Policy and Improvement Officer submitted a report attaching the draft Work Programme for 2015/16.

7.2   The Chair referred to the issue regarding bus services, specifically to the motion passed at the Council meeting held on 2nd December 2015, referring the issue to this Committee, and suggested that a special meeting be held to discuss the issues prior to a meeting of the Sheffield City Region Combined Authority Transport Committee to be held on 29th February 2016, to consider the effects of the recent changes. Councillor Neale Gibson suggested that it would be better to scrutinise the revised proposals made at the meeting of the Transport Committee and therefore, the issues should be discussed at this Committee's scheduled meeting on 16th March 2016.

7.3   RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

(a)   notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the comments now made;

(b)   agrees that the issues regarding the recent bus changes, including the views of the six petitioners who submitted petitions on the issue at the Council meeting on 2nd December 2015, be considered at its scheduled meeting on 16th March 2016.

(NOTE: Prior to the passing of the above resolution, an alternative motion, moved by Councillor Ian Auckland and seconded by Councillor Rob Murphy, in the following form, was put to the vote and negatived:-

"(b) agrees that the issues regarding the recent bus changes, including the views of the six petitioners who submitted petitions on the issue at the Council meeting on 2nd December 2015, be considered at a special meeting to be held prior to the meeting of the Transport Committee on 29th February 2016."

The votes on the alternative motion were ordered to be recorded and were as follows:-

For the motion (4)   -   Councillors Ian Auckland, Rob Murphy, Joe Otten and Martin Smith.

Against the motion (6)   -   Councillors Lewis Dagnall, Neale Gibson, Julie Gledhill, Roy Munn, Ray Satur and Paul Wood

8.   SHEFFIELD MONEY

8.1   The Committee received and noted a report of the Director of Policy, Performance and Communications, containing details on the background to the establishment of Sheffield Money as an organisation, and providing an initial update on the progress from the first six weeks of trading.

9.   MATTHEW BORLAND

9.1   The Chair reported that Matthew Borland, Policy and Improvement Officer, was attending his last scheduled meeting of the Committee, as he would be starting a new job at the University of Sheffield on 15th February, 2016.

9.2   RESOLVED: That the Committee places on record its thanks and appreciation for the excellent work undertaken by Mr Borland, whilst in the post of Policy and Improvement Officer during the last two years.

10.   DATE OF NEXT MEETING

10.1   It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday, 17th February 2016, at 5.00 pm, in the Town Hall.

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