SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Economic and Environmental Wellbeing Scrutiny and Policy Development Committee

Meeting held 23 April 2013

PRESENT: Councillors Helen Mirfin-Boukouris (Chair), Ian Auckland (Deputy Chair), Roger Davison, Neale Gibson, Bob Johnson, Steve Jones, Alf Meade, Joe Otten, Sioned-Mair Richards, Steve Wilson and Geoff Smith (Substitute Member)

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1.   APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1   An apology for absence was received from Councillor Terry Fox and Councillor Geoof Smith attended the meeting as the duly appointed substitute.

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.   PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

4.1   There were no public questions or petitions.

5.   CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION ON RURAL BROADBAND

5.1   The lead signatory to the call-in was Councillor Trevor Bagshaw and the co-signatories were Councillors Alison Brelsford, Joe Otten, Roger Davison and David Baker.

5.2   The Committee scrutinised the decision of Cabinet at its meeting held on 20 March 2013 which pledged to support rural communities to find appropriate solutions to issues related to broadband access and considered a report of the Chief Executive submitted to that meeting.

5.3   Cabinet:-

(a) recognised the importance of usable broadband access to the wellbeing of Sheffield's rural communities;

(b) noted that capital investment from Sheffield City Council is unlikely to be cost effective in delivering a solution;

(c) therefore, agreed that the City Council will support rural

communities to find appropriate solutions where communities:-

- Demonstrate demand;
- Are willing to come together and form community groups across rural Sheffield with other rural communities with similar needs (thus making solutions viable for internet providers); and
- Engage with Sheffield City Council through the locality management team (subject to resources), locality lead directors and other partners in the City to devise locally-appropriate solutions.

5.4   Attending the meeting for this item were Councillor Bryan Lodge (Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources) and Laurie Brennan (Policy Officer).

5.5   Reasons for Call-In

Councillor Trevor Bagshaw outlined his reasons for call-in was to have a wider public discussion on the issues raised at the Council Meeting which agreed the original notice of motion. The content of the report to Cabinet was significant for a large number of people across the City and he was seeking additional recommendations to deliver a result to many people who were disadvantaged by lack of access to broadband.

Councillor David Baker added that he was concerned about the issue of access to broadband for rural communities. The resolution from Cabinet seemed to be suggesting communities needed to come together to demonstrate need and they had already been doing this for some considerable time. He was concerned about how the Council could draw together the information which was already out there to demonstrate need.

Councillor Joe Otten commented that he was disappointed that the report didn't appear to outline much activity on behalf of the Council to assist rural communities. He appreciated advances in technology but commented that even five year old technology would be a step forward for some. There were opportunities to bid for funding which the Council appeared to be ignoring and fair access to broadband was vital to the regional economy.

Councillor Roger Davison added that he wanted to ensure fair access to broadband and speedy broadband across the City.

5.6   Public Questions

Mel Smart, a resident of Dungworth, commented that she felt she was discriminated against. No other communities had been asked to prove the level of take up for broadband if it were to be offered. The City Centre had superfast broadband. She believed that the money was

being spent on improving speeds for those who had access to broadband and not on those who did not have access.

5.7   Councillor Bryan Lodge, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, responded that the Cabinet report had been a response to a motion agreed at Full Council directing the Chief Executive to bring a report to the Council's Cabinet detailing progress in delivering broadband for rural communities and setting out future steps the Council can take to ensure access is fully rolled-out.

5.8   Councillor Lodge believed that it was difficult for Local Authorities as this was essentially a matter for private companies. However, the report stated that the Council would facilitate communities to come together to develop solutions. It was wrong to assume that everyone had access to superfast broadband in the City. He acknowledged the difficulties experienced in rural communities but there were examples of communities working together to develop solutions such as at Robin Hood Bay.

5.9   Councillor Lodge further commented that he believed that it was difficult to argue the case that the demand was there in rural communities as the Northern Community Assembly Plan did not highlight this as a priority in the area.

6.0   Laurie Brennan, Policy Officer, added that the Sheffield was a diverse City geographically and different solutions worked for different areas. The 4G rollout was currently taking place nationally and offered a better solution than cable broadband and this may be a solution for rural communities in the future.

6.1   Questions and comments were then made by the signatories to the call-in. Councillor Trevor Bagshaw commented that he was concerned that the Council and British Telecom (BT) had several times explored and evidenced the problems and this has not been communicated with communities. The report did not offer any active solutions to the problems. The Northern Community Assembly had funded a comprehensive review of economy issues within their area and had requested the Lead Director for the assembly to report back on local residents views of the problems. This had not happened which was why the notice of motion was brought to Council. There was a need for joined-up working at City Region level to access the funding available.

6.2   Councillor Bagshaw further raised the issue of schools and pupils such as those at Bradfield School being disadvantaged as a large part of their curriculum relied on children having access to the internet. Schools should consider becoming community hubs to allow their pupils to gain access to the internet outside of normal school hours.

6.3   Councillor Lodge commented that if a school wished to become community hubs that was an issue for the school itself and its

governors. However, this was a good example of possible solutions to problems in rural areas.

6.4   Councillor David Baker commented that he welcomed the idea of mobile phone technology being a possible solution for the future. However, this would not necessarily provide all services for the user. He then asked if the administration would collate all the information available and how they would proactively work with the communities to find solutions?

6.5   Laurie Brennan responded that the information would be collated and requested any information that local Members had be passed to him. Councillor Lodge stated that local Members should act as a conduit and the Council could then investigate a solution for that area or facilitate a meeting if necessary.

6.6   Councillor Roger Davison commented that it was important that the administration outlined what they were going to do and how they were going to do it and demonstrate that something had been done.

6.7   Members then asked a number of questions and officers responded as follows:-

- BT had specifically invested in 4G technology to offer Wi-Fi technology. This would be high speed not superfast.

- The report commissioned by the Northern Community Assembly set out the economic potential within rural areas.

- The issue around schools and the requirement to access the internet to complete homework was a broader issue which needed to be raised with the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families.

- Peak District National Park Authority had non-Member status on the City Region Authority and the Council could liaise with them as to broadband issues within the Sheffield boundary of the Peak Park.

- If the Council was able to gauge the level of need across the City, discussions could be held with partners to find affordable solutions.

- If any local Member was aware of any communities who had identified need and were seeking Council support they should draw this to the attention of the Cabinet Member.

Members of the Committee then made a number of comments as follows:-

- 4G would present part of the solution, depending on affordability.

- The problem was a City Region one and not just a City Council one.

- To address the problem may need the erection of masts which brought its own issues.

- IT was now seen as necessary for everything we do and IT poverty affected people in many different ways. A holistic strategy was needed to address the problems.

- Private companies inevitably required a return on their investment and the role of the Council was to act as a mediator between companies and local communities.

In conclusion, Councillor Bryan Lodge stated that the costs of signing up to Digital Region had proved prohibitive for many. A broader Digital Strategy was currently being worked on and the comments made at the meeting today would be fed into that. The Cabinet report being published and local Members being aware of the issues within communities would hopefully facilitate action. He was confident that affordable solutions were there and it would be a decision for individual companies what to provide.

RESOLVED: That this Scrutiny Committee:-

(a) agrees to take no further action in relation to the called-in decision;

(b) requests that a report be submitted to the September meeting of the Committee outlining progress made in facilitating communities to work together to develop local solutions;

(c) requests that the Children, Young People and Families portfolio actively engage with work being carried out around digital inclusion, and seek solutions to assist those pupils who are disadvantaged by lack of access to broadband; and

(d) requests that the relevant Cabinet Member raise the issue at City Region level.

6.   **CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION ON THE MODERNISATION OF THE PLANNING AND HIGHWAYS AND CABINET HIGHWAYS COMMITTEES**

6.1   The lead signatory to the call-in was Councillor Ian Auckland and the co-signatories were Councillors Joe Otten, Roger Davison, Colin Ross and Andrew Sangar.

6.2   The Committee scrutinised the following decision of Cabinet, at its meeting held on 20 March 2013, to change the delegation for highways decisions and also a

report of the Executive Director, Place submitted to that meeting.

6.3   RESOLVED: That Cabinet:-

(a) adopts Option 1 within the report and recommends to the Leader that she amends her Scheme of Delegation to record the fact that decisions reserved to the Cabinet Highways Committee are also reserved to an Individual Cabinet Member and to reflect the proposals in Appendix A regarding increased officer delegations; and

(b) authorises the Director of Development Services, in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member and Director of Legal Services, to make the practical arrangements necessary to introduce the new executive transport and highways decision making arrangements following amendment of the Leader's Scheme as proposed above.

6.4   Attending the meeting for this item were Councillor Leigh Bramall, Cabinet Member for Business, Skills and Development and John Bann, Head of Transport, Traffic and Parking Services.

6.5   Reasons for Call-In

Councillor Ian Auckland commented that, in the past, highway decisions had been taken at meetings of the Planning and Highways Boards. Legal advice had suggested that these decisions should be taken at executive level. The Cabinet Highways Committee which was then introduced enabled constituents' involvement through the ability to make representations and enabled decisions to be made more effectively.

Councillor Auckland believed that the proposals would prevent people attending on an ad-hoc basis to draw the attention of Cabinet Members to an area of concern. It was clear that transport matters regularly engaged the public and the proposals seemed to be a step backward from the previous arrangements.

Councillor Auckland further stated that he had called the decision in as he had questions about how the new arrangements would work in practice.

Councillor Colin Ross added that the proposals appeared to be removing an opportunity for the public to interact with the Council. It was not clear from the policy briefing the opposition had received how the new system would operate and he was therefore seeking clarity of this.

6.6   In response, Councillor Leigh Bramall commented that people were living in different times now where levels of public concern were unprecedented. The new system would be the most democratic of all the Core Cities where the majority had a completely delegated process. Councillor Bramall believed that it was important to maintain the right for the public to make representations. Regular scheduled meetings would be maintained.

6.7   Members of the public would be required to pre-register to make representations

and this could be done up to 24 hours prior to the meeting. If there was a substantial level of public interest a meeting of the full Cabinet Highways Committee could be called.

6.8   If members of the public or local Councillors had questions about an issue or a scheme they could contact Councillor Bramall outside of the meeting or through other avenues such as Full Council or the Cabinet meeting. He believed that local Ward Members would be given a greater opportunity to be involved in the process than previously. The Cabinet Advisor would attend meetings along with the Cabinet Member to provide advice where needed.

6.9   Questions were then asked from signatories to the call-in and responses were provided as follows:-

• Meetings of the Committee will still be held in public. If there was a particular contentious item the Cabinet Member may decide to call a meeting of the Cabinet Highways Committee.

• Members of the public who pre-registered to speak at the meetings would not be required to disclose the nature of their representation prior to the meeting, just that they wished to speak.

• Funding for small schemes had now ended. Schemes put forward by Community Assemblies would be scored based on various criteria and ranked in terms of priority. Local Ward Members could still feed priorities through.

• It was not planned at this stage for meetings to take place in the evenings.

In conclusion, Councillor Bramall stated that the new system would maintain public access to meetings. He did not accept the view that there would be any reduction in the public involvement and it put more responsibility in the hands of local Members to work with their constituents.

RESOLVED: That this Scrutiny Committee:-

(a) agrees to take no further action in relation to the called-in decision; and

(b) requests that a review of the new arrangements be undertaken in a year's time following implementation.

7.   DATE OF NEXT MEETING

7.1   The date of the next meeting of the Committee is to be confirmed.

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