

ROTHERHAM MBC CORPORATE “*FRESH START*” IMPROVEMENT PLAN

PROGRESS UPDATE SUMMARY REPORT (TO END OCTOBER 2016)

Purpose of this report

1. In line with the Secretary of State’s reporting requirements, this Appendix provides the Departments for Communities & Local Government and Education with a progress update on the implementation of the two-year “Fresh Start” Improvement Plan, as at the point of the end of October 2016. It follows the summary reports provided as part of the previous Commissioners’ update reports to Government.
2. The previous Commissioner report (in August 2016) provided a specific update on the implementation of the “Fresh Start” Plan at the end of the first 12-month phase of activity, through to May 2016; as well as an initial progress report on the re-focused “Phase Two Action Plan”, as endorsed at the Cabinet and Commissioners Decision Making meeting on 11th July 2016. This latest progress report reflects the continuing improvement activity over the first five months of this second phase.

Background: requirements of the original Directions of 26 February 2015

3. The original Secretary of State Directions of 26th February 2015 required, “under the direction of the then-appointed Managing Director Commissioner and Children’s Social Care Commissioner”, improvement plans to be prepared and submitted to Government within 3 months (i.e. by 26 May 2015). The Directions went on to specify that the plans must set out the *“measures to be undertaken, together with milestones and delivery targets against which to measure performance, in order to deliver rapid and sustainable improvements in governance, leadership and culture in the Authority, in the Authority’s exercise of its overview and scrutiny functions and in its performance of services, thereby securing compliance with the best value duty and securing the performance of the Authority’s children’s social care functions to the required standard”*.
4. A detailed improvement plan for specific improvements in Children’s Social Care at the Council was prepared and first submitted to Ofsted in February 2015, under the direction of the then Commissioner for Children’s Social Care, Malcolm Newsam (first appointed by the Secretary of State for Education to the Council in October 2014). Following the formal appointment of other Commissioners to Rotherham after the 26 February 2015 Directions, a further, Council-wide improvement plan was prepared – “*A Fresh Start*” – covering the improvements required across the entire organisation following the findings of Dame Louise Casey’s Corporate Governance Inspection (CGI) report.
5. The Directions also set out a specific requirement for the Secretaries of State to be provided with progress reports on the plans, agreed with the Lead and other Commissioners, at 6 monthly intervals following the date of the Directions; with the first progress report on the corporate “Fresh Start” plan provided as part of the Commissioners report to Government dated 26th August 2015.

Links to the Commissioners' "Mission Statement"

6. In light of the requirements in the Directions, a key outcome identified in the Commissioners' Mission Statement for their work in Rotherham, published 4 March 2015, is (Outcome 7): *"A successful Improvement Plan. Others care about Rotherham's progress. We want to ensure credible, honest progress is recognised"*.

Rotherham's corporate Improvement Plan: "A Fresh Start" (May 2015)

7. The organisation-wide 'Fresh Start' Improvement Plan was developed as the "sister plan" to the Children and Young People's Services Improvement Action Plan, through a process led by Commissioners in consultation with Elected Members, senior management, wider Council staff, key partners and external advisors on behalf of the Local Government Association (LGA). A final draft of the Plan was submitted to the Secretaries of State for Communities & Local Government and for Education on 26 May 2015.
8. The Plan's improvement actions are grouped in line with the following four themes, recognised as essentials of an effective, modern local authority:



9. The Plan covers a two year period, through to May 2017, with 2015/16 a first phase "transition" year where the focus was on putting in place the basic building blocks that the Council needed to move towards a culture of continuous improvement in line with its best value duties. Some outline actions for "Phase 2", from May 2016, were also set out to reflect the need to embed a more positive

culture and strong leadership, which were to be reviewed in the light of experience with the first, transitional phase.

Implementing the “Fresh Start” Improvement Plan (Phase 1, “Transition”)

10. The Council developed an implementation strategy for the “Fresh Start” Plan, building on the outline governance arrangements set out within the Plan document itself – i.e. a “Joint Board” of Commissioners and Members to oversee and challenge progress, drawing upon a supporting Officer Group. The Joint Board has met on a regularly, broadly monthly basis since July 2015¹ to review progress, seek clarification on actions being taken and, where justified, agree any amendments to delivery timescales. Its membership includes all Commissioners alongside the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, as well as the leader of the opposition political group in Rotherham. It is chaired by the Lead Commissioner, Sir Derek Myers.
11. The delivery strategy for the first phase of the Plan included appropriate “RAG” ratings for each specific action – 132 in total - to help demonstrate the practical achievement of key outputs and milestones and help manage the implementation of change. Clear and accountable project leads were set out for each individual action, and progress monitoring reports have been provided to all Joint Board meetings; and have further featured within the Commissioners’ progress reports to Secretaries of State.
12. As noted in the August 2016, 18-month Commissioners progress report to Government², an overall, first year assessment of phase one progress was considered at the Joint Board meeting in May 2016. This set out that 82% of the identified improvement actions (108) were assessed as substantively completed. 18% of the actions (24) were identified as areas of focus to be carried forward into Phase Two, which represented a combination of priorities that had longer-term timescales; and/or where the Joint Board had agreed a deferral into the second phase, either because of a reassessment of their implementation timescales (e.g. due to interdependencies with other work-streams) or where delivery had been delayed. The August 2016 Commissioners’ report also set out some of the key, tangible achievements during phase one.

An agreed “Phase 2” Plan (from May 2016)

13. The Joint Board also considered a draft “Phase Two Action Plan” at its meeting on 23rd May 2016, which was subsequently endorsed in a wider, public setting at the Cabinet and Commissioners Decision Meeting on 11th July 2016³.
14. While the original, formal responsibility for the development of the original “Fresh Start” document rested with the Managing Director Commissioner, a key feature of the arrangements for Phase Two is the clear ownership of implementation by the

¹ Public records of the Joint Board meetings are made available on the RMBC website at www.rotherham.gov.uk/info/200009/performance/998/see_our_plan_to_improve_rotherham/2

² See in particular Appendix B of the August progress report, available online at www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/3167/commissioners_18_months_progress_report_2016_appendices

³ See www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/3096/rotherham_improvement_plan_phase_two

new Chief Executive and Strategic Leadership Team (now substantively in place since August 2016). All Assistant Directors at the Council are also actively engaged in the supporting officer governance, which informs the progress reporting to the Joint Board. Critically, the Council's "M3" (middle) management tier has also been proactively engaged in the process of finalising the Phase Two plan, in order to embed understanding about its aims, objectives and milestones, and to ensure that its delivery is a shared responsibility and endeavour across the entire organisation.

15. The Phase Two action plan⁴ sets out 20 broad improvement objectives, supported by 99 specific milestones and key dates in order to track and measure the progress being made. The objectives and milestones represent a clarification of the 21 outline "phase two" actions included within the original "Fresh Start" document, as well as the continuing focus on those 24 actions carried over from phase one (see paragraph 15 above)

Monitoring of Phase 2 progress and delivery (to October 2016)

16. The Joint Board met in July, September and most recently on 7th November 2016 to review Phase Two performance and progress. As part of this the Joint Board has also agreed a programme of "deeper dive" discussions on specific, key elements of the Phase Two action plan (including those associated with the Council-wide review of commissioning, and the digital and customer services review).
17. At the most recent Joint Board meeting it was reported that 27% of actions had been completed in the first five months of phase two, with a further 57% on track for delivery in line with the required milestones and standards. One milestone out of the 99 was flagged by officers as at risk of missing the original delivery timescale, with the reasons explained to the Board as part of a "deeper dive" discussion on the Council-wide review of the commissioning function (and where the Board was satisfied with overall progress being made towards finalising this review by March 2017). Work on 14% of the phase two milestones is not yet due to have started
18. **Headline Phase Two achievements at this 5 month stage includes:**
 - i. **The finalised 2016/17 Corporate Plan for the Council** (and accompanying Performance Management Framework), as agreed at the Council meeting on 13th July 2016; as well as the establishment of regular, **quarterly public reports on performance**, which have now been published for Quarter 1 (considered at the Cabinet and Commissioners meeting on 12th September 2016) and, most recently, Quarter 2 (for consideration at the Cabinet and Commissioners meeting on 14th November 2016).
 - ii. To help support the delivery of the new Corporate Plan an LGA peer review took place in early July of the Council's **performance, research and intelligence functions**. A final report from the review was produced at the end of August 2016 which was considered at the Joint Board in

⁴ See www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/file/3096/rotherham_improvement_plan_phase_two

September; and is now informing new staffing arrangements being put in place from November 2016.

- iii. The 2016/17 Corporate Plan also set out **new staff values and behaviours**, informed by a programme of staff engagement and which have been further reinforced by a new **Workforce Strategy**. An underpinning action plan to ensure the delivery of this strategy is now being finalised, for completion by the end of December 2016.
- iv. A **staff “pulse survey”** was conducted over the summer of 2016 to help determine (alongside other forms of engagement, such as focus groups) the views of the Council’s workforce on the improvement being delivered and where further support is needed. Directorate-level reports and action planning is in place to address the key findings in partnership with employees.
- v. The Council has now agreed a number of **headline communication and engagement campaigns** for the year ahead, to raise awareness and promote greater interaction with local communities. A key element of this is an ongoing programme associated with the Council’s future budget challenges and what this could mean for local communities and partners, which begins from November 2016.
- vi. A new **Safer Rotherham Partnership Plan** was endorsed by the Partnership’s Board in June. Alongside this the Partnership has agreed specific mechanisms to monitor the impacts of activity in line with the Prevent duty, following the production of a Prevent Duty action plan and performance framework. New staffing structures to support an enhanced focus at the Council on community safety issues is also now in place, with officer leadership provided by the recently appointed Strategic Director and Assistant Director.
- vii. An agreed **Scrutiny Programme** for the current year has been set out; and the introduction of new “pre-decision” scrutiny has been seen by elected members as a particular success in enhancing transparency over the Council’s decision-making processes.
- viii. The delivery of a **full induction programme for newly elected councillors** following the May local elections, with ongoing member development remaining a priority throughout the year (including peer mentoring for Cabinet and other lead members, such as Scrutiny Chairs and the leader of the opposition political group). A dedicated, member-led group has been established, with Cabinet Member leadership, to examine all aspects of member development; and a full evaluation of the programme will take place in early 2017.
- ix. A **new vision and principles for neighbourhood working** was agreed at a Cabinet and Commissioners meeting on 10th October 2016, with work now taking place on the new support arrangements required to take this work forward. Work on a supporting, Council-wide policy statement on community engagement and cohesion is also now underway, in

anticipation of forthcoming central Government announcements in this area of public policy.

- x. A new **Equalities and Diversity Policy** for the Council was agreed at the Council meeting in July 2016, with an accompanying officer group established and chaired by the lead Cabinet member to ensure that actions and understanding is embedded in all service areas. A more detailed delivery strategy and action plan has been written, following engagement with stakeholders over the summer of 2016; and which the officer group will monitor on an ongoing basis from November 2016.
- xi. A renewed Compact to promote **more effective working between the Council and the voluntary and community sector** is also now being finalised following a period of public and stakeholder consultation which took place from August to early November 2016. Work will now continue to finalise the new Compact and alongside it promote greater awareness amongst managers, officers and elected Members.
- xii. Work is also being finalised on a new, long-term **Rotherham Together Partnership ‘Community Strategy’** – bringing Partners across Rotherham together around shared commitments and priorities – which will be finalised in early 2017. This is being supported by the establishment of collective Partnership public engagement events.

Conclusion

- 19. This report summarises the key headlines of the implementation of the corporate “Fresh Start” Improvement Plan between the end of May 2015 and the end of October 2016 – 5 months into the second phase of activity and performance monitoring.
- 20. Consistent and positive progress was made in Phase One, to ensure that the building blocks of an effective local authority were put in place. This is now setting the scene for Phase Two, where the focus is more clearly on embedding strong leadership and a more positive culture of improvement.
- 21. Ongoing challenge and oversight with regard to the implementation and delivery of Phase Two will continue to be provided via the Joint Board, and within a new context of clear Chief Executive and senior Strategic Leadership Team ownership of all objectives and activity.
- 22. Importantly, progress with the Phase Two plan will also now be linked to the “normal running” of the Council through the new Corporate Plan and Performance Management Framework, with each complementing the other. The Council has committed to refreshing this Corporate Plan for 2017/18 onwards, and this provides the opportunity to further mainstream remaining improvement activity through the Corporate Plan’s public performance monitoring and management arrangements, which are now in place.