

Nigel Slack - Unanswered Questions from 17th November 2021

Answers in italics from Councillor Cate McDonald – Executive Member for Finance and Resources

Questions to Co-operative Executive Committee Meeting

17th November 2021

Q1 The briefing attached to this question outlines my comments and concerns about the recent Land and Property Plan passed by the Labour Party members at the last Co-operative Executive Committee Meeting on the 20th October 2021, whilst the Green Party Members abstained. The questions below are also embedded in the comments document but are reiterated here for clarity.

1a Have Exec members had the chance to see and debate the final 'plan' and to approve the document signed off by the Co-operative Executive Member for Finance and Resources ?

Yes, all Exec members and all political parties have been briefed and provided with the opportunity to comment.

1b Who will be the Corporate Landlord in the executive model?

The Council acts as Corporate Landlord.

1c The plan suggests it is “Inspired by successes delivered through our previous plan “Assets for our Communities...”. What examples are there to illustrate this?

There are numerous examples across the Council's Estate including managing lettings to hundreds of community and third sector groups; managing commercial space in Heart of the City; Sheffield Olympic Legacy Park, Devonshire Quarter and Carbrook; acquiring land and buildings for delivery of social housing; working with other public sector partners to look at opportunities for co-location and delivery of shared services. Specific examples can be seen through the decisions published on the Councils website. E.g., lease of the GII listed Old Coach House in Hillsborough to Age UK to enable Heritage Lottery funding to be secured to repair and find sustainable new use for this important heritage asset; acquisition of property to enable the delivery of accommodation for Care Leavers; delivery of the Woodseats library and GP hub.

1d There is not a single mention of the City's history & heritage assets at all in this plan. A dangerous and damning omission that undervalues the visitor economy potential for the city in helping “improve lives and create a place which works for Sheffield's people. “ Will this be addressed in the sub-policies and in which policy area will it fall?

Whilst this document does not provide a specific strategy for managing the Council's heritage assets, the Council recognises the importance of heritage assets in its care. The listed status of any assets is considered as part of decision making and historic assets are recognised as an important part of the city's heritage.

1e How will Property Services engage with City residents to make them part of the decision-making process?

As a Council, we are committed to inclusive decision making and will be exploring with Local Area Committees how best local people can input into decisions the Council makes.

1f In modernising the estate will repurposing and refurbishing be at the top of the priorities since, from an environmental point of view, these are generally better options than demolition and new build?

Repurposing and refurbishing are considered as options in any decision making and many buildings have been successfully reused and repurposed across the estate, however it is not always possible to do so. Each building/asset will be assessed on its merits and the decision to refurbish or reuse will be informed by any appropriate assessment and surveys.

1g In modernising our city what evidence has been gathered that 'major developments' are still the right solution to the market for workspaces and retail?

All developments take account of market conditions at the time and assessments are made as part of any decisions taken. Clearly the market changes regularly and even more so in the light of the recent pandemic.

1h In tackling the climate emergency to what outside organisations is Sheffield listening and from what outside sources might investment or other funding be available?

The Council has been working with a number of external organisations to develop its approach to addressing the climate emergency. Our Green City Partnership Board, which included representation from both our Universities, Sheffield Chamber of Commerce, the South Yorkshire Climate Alliance, Community Energy England and the Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust, oversaw the development of our pathways to zero carbon evidence base and final report. This work itself engaged with a number of Sheffield organisations, including business and community organisations. Our draft 10 point plan for climate action has a commitment to create a panel of advisors to help us develop our plans and Interventions. Through this we will set up a panel of independent experts to give professionals, researchers and people and businesses who are already leading the way in reducing their emissions

the opportunity to help us to develop policy and interventions that work for Sheffield and for the planet.

1i Will the city adopt a 'make the developer pay' approach?

Through a combination of a new Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and the new Local Plan, we are intending to introduce a number of requirements on new development that will help to reduce carbon emissions and respond to the effects of climate change (e.g. more energy efficient buildings; renewable energy generation, electric vehicle infrastructure, tree-planting, sustainable drainage systems). Many of these measures will add to the cost of development, so in that sense the developer is 'paying'. Under national planning policy, the Council will be required to assess whether the cumulative impact of the Local Policies is likely to make development economically unviable.

1j In 'our framework' will council reflect the changing work profile, likely to remain even after the pandemic and reverse the damaging centralisation of services for a more 'neighbourhood' approach for service engagement for the public?

As part of the Workplace of the Future project the Council is looking at how best to deliver services, take account of new working practices and assess how services can be delivered in local neighbourhoods.

1k In unlocking money, what work has been done to identify and what are the surplus estate assets proposed for disposal in 2022/23 financial year?

The Council is currently reviewing its estate and identifying which assets it should retain and which can be made available for other uses. The list of available assets for disposal is circulated to Local Ward members in line with the Council constitution on a bi-monthly basis.

1l In managing our estate Council commit to “Be transparent in the decisions we take – we recognise the importance of good standards of governance in public authorities and the need for robust processes to guide decision making we will be transparent in the decisions we take to ensure we can legitimately withstand challenge.”

What will this look like?

Decisions on management of the Council's estate are made in line with the Council's constitution and the Leaders Scheme of Delegation.

Detailed policies will be developed over the next 12 months however decisions will be brought through the process as set out in the Council's constitution.

1m In the clear approach to asset management, there are so many questions but to highlight just 3:

“Gather, record and maintain information about the estate to provide sufficient information to make decisions “ Is this really not available? How have decisions been made in the past without such information?

The Council holds a wealth of information about its assets and has recently undertaken an assessment of the condition, use and suitability of the estate to inform decision making.

“Only hold the minimum estate required for service delivery. Reducing inefficient, underutilised and unfit property through timely demolition (where appropriate) and disposal thereby avoiding ongoing associated costs “

Businesses of all sizes have recognised the danger of being too lean, emergency impacts like the pandemic and the climate emergency need quick responses and that is not possible without a bit of fat in the system. Will Council ensure property decisions are made with this in mind?

Yes

“Ensure any lettings for community use are based on sound business cases, meet needs of the community and city and are viable and sustainable “ What support will be offered to community and social enterprises to ensure a level playing field against corporate interests?

There isn't a defined policy in place, however if a prospective tenant were to come forward asking for some form of flexibility / favourable terms, each case would be considered on its individual merits, with particular regard to what they were planning to do with the building.

For example, if a prospective occupier was looking to deliver something that supported Council policy OR helped to fill a void and enabled delivery of something that helped to support Council policy. Alternatively, there might be scope for flexibility in instances where the legal status (e.g. charitable organisation) of the applicant might enable them to access grant funding to ultimately improve the asset e.g. Heritage Lottery etc. that we as a Council were not eligible to apply for.

1n In what success looks like, clarity is needed about the 'range of sources' Council will use to build the evidence base. Is there any clarity available?

The Council currently measures its performance through a range of criteria and benchmarks its performance using the CIPFA benchmarking process which compares performance against other Local Authorities. The CIPFA metrics cover a range of areas including, income, cost, condition, maintenance, building performance, management, energy performance.

In addition, the Council has performance indicators which consider other measures such as customer response times and delivery against statutory timescales.

1o “...we will develop measurable targets ...” How did Council measure success up to now? (experience suggests that beyond monetary value they did not).

See above.

1p What is the timeline for these further policy documents?

Policies will be brought forward through the decision-making process over the next 12 months.

Q3 When will details of the “...significant engagement...” on the sub-policies be available and what form will this take?

There are no details as yet. Engagement will depend on the policy and the timescale for delivery.

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