

## IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION

- Date and Time :-** Tuesday 9 May 2023 at 1.30 p.m.
- Venue:-** Town Hall, Moorgate Street, Rotherham.
- Membership:-** Councillors Wyatt (Chair), Tinsley (Vice-Chair), Aveyard, Bennett-Sylvester, Browne, C Carter, Castledine-Dack, T Collingham, Cowen, Ellis, Havard, Jones, Khan, McNeely, Monk, Reynolds, Taylor.
- Co-opted Members:-** Mrs. K. Bacon, Mrs. M. Jacques.

This meeting will be webcast live and will be available to view [via the Council's website](#). The items which will be discussed are described on the agenda below and there are reports attached which give more details.

Rotherham Council advocates openness and transparency as part of its democratic processes. Anyone wishing to record (film or audio) the public parts of the meeting should inform the Chair or Governance Advisor of their intentions prior to the meeting.

### AGENDA

**1. Apologies for Absence**

To receive the apologies of any Member who is unable to attend the meeting.

**2. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 March 2023 (Pages 3 - 10)**

To consider and approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 March 2023 as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

**3. Declarations of Interest**

To receive declarations of interest from Members in respect of items listed on the agenda.

**4. Questions from members of the public and the press**

To receive questions relating to items of business on the agenda from members of the public or press who are present at the meeting.

**5. Exclusion of the Press and Public**

To consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any part of the agenda.

**6. Tree Programme Update (Pages 11 - 24)**

To consider an update report in respect of the delivery of the Tree Management Protocol, the maintenance programme and tree planting programme.

**7. Scrutiny Review Recommendations - Impact of Selective Licensing (Pages 25 - 38)**

To consider and endorse the findings and recommendations of a scrutiny review into the impact of the current selective licencing scheme in Rotherham at its halfway point.

**8. Urgent Business**

To consider any item which the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.

**9. Date and time of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 6 June 2023 commencing at 1.30 pm in Rotherham Town Hall.

**IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION**  
**Tuesday 21 March 2023**

Present:- Councillor Wyatt (in the Chair); Councillors Browne, C Carter, Castledine-Dack, T. Collingham, Cowen, Ellis, Havard, Jones, McNeely, Monk, Taylor and Tinsley. Also present were co-opted members Ms. K. Bacon and Ms. M Jacques.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bacon and Bennett-Sylvester.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-  
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

**57. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 7 FEBRUARY 2023**

**Resolved:-**

- 1) That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 February 2023 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

**58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

As a tenant of the Council, Cllr McNeely declared a personal interest in respect of agenda items 6 and 7.

**59. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

The Chair advised that there were no members of the public or representatives of media organisations present at the meeting and there were no questions in respect of matters on the agenda.

**60. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Chair advised that there was no reason to exclude members of the press or public from observing any items on the agenda.

**61. TENANTS SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL - IMPROVING COMMUNICATION WITH TENANTS**

Consideration was given to a report providing a summary of the findings of the review of communications with tenants and the associated action plan. The findings and recommendations were summarised by the Chief Executive Officer of Rotherham Federation of Communities. The review had been conducted by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel, a key component of the Council's Tenant Engagement Framework. The Tenant Scrutiny Panel tenants to scrutinise landlord services and standards with the aim of improving performance, value for money and tenant satisfaction. The Panel is facilitated by Rotherham Federation of Communities (Rotherfed) on behalf of the Council and consists of tenant and resident representatives from across the Borough. The Panel had completed the

review of how the Council communicates with tenants, with reference to the requirements within the Social Housing White Paper. Following completion of the Tenant Scrutiny Review, the report and recommendations had been discussed with the Housing Service and other relevant council services, and an action plan had been agreed to support delivery of the recommendations. The Assistant Director of Housing expressed gratitude to the Panel for their work.

In discussion, the Chair thanked the Panel and noted the importance of communications and the impact on residents if communications are not done well. The Chair noted the recommendations contained within the report apply more widely throughout the Council's communications. The CEO of Rotherfed affirmed the importance of the plain language and the barriers that are created by use of jargon and acronyms. The CEO of Rotherfed also noted the strength of feeling in support of staff training. Timescales for progress in the implementation of the action plan would also be relevant, because it was not possible to implement every change at once. Sensitivity around bereavement, for example, was noted by the CEO of Rotherfed as one of the primary takeaways.

Members expressed gratitude for the high quality of the review content and the recommendations. Members acknowledged that the six-minute target represents an industry average, but it was felt that this was not good enough. The response from the Assistant Director of Housing described current work on customer experience to get call times down. There was consideration of coordinating generalist versus specialist expertise in answering calls to help reduce call times.

Members emphasised social media as a further area for development, and ensuring information was provided in a way that was easy for people to access. The response from the Assistant Director of Housing noted discussions around production of the Home Matters newsletter in a variety of formats. As part of the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) the Service also had a goal to collect survey data from tenants using standardised national questions. This data would provide insights regarding preferences of tenants. It was confirmed that there was a corporate RMBC social media page, although there was no specific page for Housing. Many organisations make more use of social media. The Service could explore how this could be expanded. Ward Housing Hubs Capital Investment schemes within the wards were also noted as a channel for getting messages out to tenants which would be reviewed. The Housing Operations Manager described the prioritisation process by which tenant communications letters are reviewed. The Assistant Director of Housing noted that the Service does work with "Tell us Once." This does work; however, the information can become lost within the multiple areas of the Service. It was noted that there were only a few cases where this occurs, but it was acknowledged that these few have a high impact.

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Members requested more information around communications associated with District Heating and rents. The response from the Assistant Director of Housing noted the conversations with ward members who have District Heating in their wards. It was acknowledged that communications could be improved. The circumstances around the District Heating communications were summarised, including a decision taken late relative to other years, which resulted in the letters being sent later. The short timescales meant there was not the chance to put supportive language around the communication. The Service had scheduled drop-in sessions and there would be additional communications for those on prepayment meters.

More information was requested around the feasibility of reinstating a dedicated call centre for Housing. The response from officers noted that the Council did previously Housing call centre. The current system allowed for general as well as technical inquiries and it was felt that the best of both worlds was being achieved. Assurances were given that triage for safety was being done, and there were technical officers available.

Members requested more information around how tenant responsibilities and rights have evolved over recent years, and whether changes of this kind could be made clear. The response from the Housing Operations Manager noted the last update was several years ago, and acknowledged that this is something that tenants should have clear communications around. This point would be taken on board for implementation when there are future changes.

Members noted that the Housing officer may not be known to many tenants; therefore, Members sought information around how this might be more widely publicised. The response from the Housing Operations Manager noted some wards where there are many properties, there may be three officers. It was acknowledged that this would be something that would be relevant to communicate to tenants and would be considered. One way to do this would be through the newsletters. The Chair noted the need to look at the readership of the newsletter, and ensuring there are multiple formats with a view to promoting readership.

Members requested further details around feedback on Key Choices. The response from the Assistant Director of Housing noted that the number of calls had gone up hugely over the last years. More people were struggling; meanwhile, the service was still recovering from a difficult period during COVID-19. The Service had a number of staff having left, and the Service found it harder to recruit. The average was still 10-15 minutes which was too high but was being addressed. It was hoped to see positive change following the new staff coming in.

Members requested assurances around the effectiveness of the case notes system. The response from officers noted that the Service used to have several systems across housing. Now, these systems are joined to

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allow unified approach across services. IT was working with the Service on this transition. Assurances were provided that these systems were in place and would be embedded and publicised.

Members requested further clarification around the timescales for implementation. The response from the Housing Operations Manager noted that the actions on the recommendations went up to September 2023, with customer experience board work extending through 2024. It was noted that the Service would be in a position to provide a full update on the progress with the implementation of the action plan in 12 months.

The CEO of Rotherfed noted that the kind words are passed on to the Panel who did the review. The CEO of Rotherfed expressed thanks to the officers who take part in the scrutiny. It was noted that the review received a good response from officers who take the review very seriously. Officers demonstrate this by coming back to the panel well prepared. This is very valued. It was noted that the Housing Operations Manager was scheduled to update the Panel in August 2023. The Panel would continue to receive periodic updates until the Panel were content that everything had been taken to its natural conclusion.

**Resolved:-**

- 1) That the report and action plan be noted.
- 2) That feedback of Members in regard to the improvement of communications, including the website and newsletter, be noted.
- 3) That scrutiny be invited to comment on the communications strategy at an appropriate point in 2024.

**62. HOUSING STRATEGY 2022-25 PROGRESS REPORT Q2/Q3**

Consideration was given to a report presented for information which provided an update on progress in implementation of the Housing Strategy over the period July to December 2022 (Q2/Q3). The Strategy recognises the key issues affecting housing in Rotherham and the impact these have on residents. The Strategy also sets out how the Council will work in partnership to address the issues identified. The report presented an update on each of the six key priorities comprising the Strategy:

- High quality new homes
- Affordable homes to meet local need
- Investment in existing homes
- Bringing empty homes back into use
- Supporting people to live independently
- Strengthening communities

The Assistant Director of Housing noted that the context had changed significantly since the Strategy was agreed, and challenges were

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summarised. Progress on Housing Development was emphasised, including examples of how the Council is innovating to deliver 1000 new homes by 2026.

In discussion, Members noted the number of one-bedroom bungalows built in the 1950s which do not have room for modern living, including space to have visitors, meals, hobbies, medical equipment, modern appliances and technology. If there could be a programme for extending those, this would be welcome.

Members requested further assurances that investment in existing homes would be done proactively instead of reactively. The response from officers noted that in some parts of the borough, the Service is carrying out proactive investment. In Maltby the Service is working to get 140 houses to net zero, replacing some structural elements to do that. The issue was the cost, with difficult choices for the Council to make to achieve a balance between proactive, reactive, and growth initiatives. The Service was doing a lot of work around damp and mould, looking at ways to prevent it before people experience this. There were trade-offs around choices.

Members requested further details around the empty homes being brought back into use. The response from officers noted this was something the Service had recently started up again. An empty homes event had generated leads. Often the Service could not find or engage the owner of an empty home. The Service were ambitious to do more on empty homes. A summary of the homes brought back into use and current work was provided. The rationale for the prioritisation of hardest first was also given. Those left empty for less than 6 months usually come back in to use on their own. A technical point was made on what is funded by the Housing Revenue Account and how much work can go out to local officers to assist with properties on that basis. It was emphasised that anyone who has a lead should report these to the empty homes officer.

Relating to investment in existing homes, clarification was requested around a specific case that would benefit from better insulation for mould prevention. The response from officers offered to follow up on the specific case. It was noted that the Service were doing targeted, proactive works around mould prevention at an additional 400 properties.

Clarification was requested regarding the status of the waiting list for the housing register. The response from the Assistant Director of Housing noted there were 6,600 on the waiting list. A proportion of these would not be bidding and others would be actively seeking. The rise in numbers over time would be provided outside the meeting.

Members noted that where the right-to-buy was previously sought, the properties had now been sold again and were now privately rented, and often would require investment to raise the properties up to standard. Members requested additional details on the pace of right-to-buy

properties leaving the Council's housing stock. The response noted a pace of 150 to 200 per year. The Council were now replacing more than were being sold following a long period of breaking even. This meant that the Council were catching up on the decades of selling more right-to-buy.

Members requested more information on the outlook on accessible bungalows. The response noted this was an area where specific provision had been done. These properties required comparatively more land and tended to be expensive. It was something the Service would like to do more of. The Service had an Aids and Adaptations Service which had presented reports to scrutiny previously. The Service tended to focus those budgets on less costly interventions; however, these were done where the case was strong. If the Service had funding, it would do more of this.

Clarification was requested around how the Service assess features that must be repaired or replaced prior to new tenants moving into a property. The Service noted the effort to ensure aids and adaptations in place are matched up with the individuals who require these. It was acknowledged that the process is more straightforward for aids and adaptations than for things like carpets. The Service had found that the carpet often has to be changed. Given the environmental implications, clarification of the assessment for carpets was requested to be provided outside the meeting.

Members noted that some areas could not be purposed for Housing and requested more information around the suitability of acquiring lower energy properties that currently have high turnaround tenancies. The response referenced the Sites and Policies document that was adopted in 2018 and confirmed that the Council was acquiring mainly new properties. The Service exercised caution around purchasing older properties, many of which require a lot of investment because they do not meet the Council's minimum standards.

**Resolved:-**

- 1) That the report be noted and a further update be considered in 12 months' time.
- 2) That engagement with new SME builders, developers and investors continue to be prioritised.
- 3) That consideration be given to possible interventions which could link up existing services to support people to continue their tenancies rather than joining the housing register.
- 4) That Members continue to be consulted around use of the Design Guide for new developments.



**63. WORK PROGRAMME**

Consideration was given to an updated outline schedule of scrutiny work. The Chair advised that outcomes from the review of selective licensing would be submitted to the next meeting, to coincide with completion of the Service's engagement activity with landlords and tenants.

The Chair also advised that Members had completed a scoping exercise for the review into nature recovery. The purpose of the review was to consider strategic approaches already in place and propose any additional interventions that can help the Council achieve its targets and fulfil its responsibilities under the Environment Act 2021. The review would proceed in two steps.

In the first step, Members will assess the state of biodiversity in Rotherham. With a view to protecting existing biodiversity, members will meet to establish the state of biodiversity in Rotherham. This step sought to examine pollution levels in air, soil and water and the associated impact on biodiversity. The impact of wildlife crime would also be considered. Consultees will be asked to highlight species and ecosystems currently at risk. The outcome of the first step will identify where efforts should be focussed to ameliorate effects of pollution where possible and protect existing biodiversity.

In the second step, members examine biodiversity improvement actions currently in place. With a view to enhancing biodiversity, this step will seek to establish what action is already being taken by the Council, by community organisations and by partners to achieve targets and uphold duties under the Environment Act 2021. The outcome of this second step will identify possible additional interventions to be made.

**Resolved:-**

- 1) That the report and proposed schedule of work and scope of review of nature recovery be noted.
- 2) That authority be delegated to the Governance Advisor in consultation with the Chair and Vice-chair to make changes to the schedule of work as appropriate between meetings, reporting any changes back to the next meeting for endorsement.

**64. URGENT BUSINESS**

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring consideration at the meeting.

**65. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

**Resolved:-**

- 1) That the next meeting of the Improving Places Select Commission will take place on 9 May 2023, commencing at 1.30 pm in Rotherham Town Hall.

Public Report  
Improving Places Select Commission

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**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Improving Places Select Commission – 09 May 2023

**Report Title**

Tree Service Progress Report

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Paul Woodcock, Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment

**Report Author(s)**

Leanne Buchan, Head of Creative Programming and Engagement

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**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough-Wide

**Report Summary**

The report updates Improving Places Select Commission on the delivery of the Tree Management Protocol, the maintenance programme and tree planting programme.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Commission:

1. Notes the content of the report.
2. Provides feedback on progress to date.

**List of Appendices Included**

Appendix 1 Tree Planting Consultation Protocol

**Background Papers**

[Tree Service Progress Update Report to Improving Places Select Commission 19 April 2022](#)

**Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

N/A

**Council Approval Required**

No

**Exempt from the Press and Public**

No

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## **1. Background**

- 1.1 On 19<sup>th</sup> April 2022, Members of Improving Places Select Commission received a report on the Tree Management Protocol and Guidance and progress on the Council's Tree Planting programme.
- 1.2 Members noted the report and made the following recommendations:
- That the value of Member and resident consultation and feedback be reflected in the review and next iteration of the Tree Management Strategy
  - That the maintenance schedule of the Tree Service be further publicised
  - That equalities be considered in the prioritisation of tree planting in deprived areas of the borough
  - That opportunities for planting of fruit trees be prioritised for expansion

This report provides an update against each of the recommendations.

## **2. Key Issues**

### **2.1 Tree Management Protocol and member and resident feedback**

- 2.1.1 At the meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2022 Members welcomed the substantial level of tree planting that had taken place in the first year of the two-year programme and the benefits that this had brought to local residents. However, some Members raised concerns that they had not received sufficient consultation regarding tree planting locations. Members were keen to play a more active role in the engagement programmes related to planting schemes.
- 2.1.2 In response to the recommendations made at the previous IPSC meeting, the service developed a Tree Planting Consultation Protocol which now forms an Appendix to the Tree Management Protocol & Guidance. The Tree Planting Consultation Protocol can be found at Appendix 1 and offers greater transparency regarding how locations for tree planting are identified and opportunities for wider engagement in planting schemes.
- 2.1.3 The meeting in 2022 noted that there are a number of opportunities to work with third parties such as private landowners to identify additional locations for proactive planting, however this will always be at the discretion of, and the responsibility of, the landowner. Because of this, the new Tree Planting Consultation Protocol relates only to where trees are planted on Council land and the process for agreeing this.
- 2.1.4 In implementing the protocol, Ward Members have been consulted on proposals which are prepared by the Green Spaces service, taking into account the suitability and availability of land which was developed in consultation with the Cabinet Member. This process will continue to take place each season. At the point of consultation, Ward Members can decide to agree to the proposals or undertake a range of wider consultation options

with local residents. Following agreement of the locations, the Trees & Woodlands Engagement Officer makes contact with the Ward Members directly to discuss and agree opportunities for engagement in the planting programmes with local residents.

2.1.5 The new Tree Planting Consultation Protocol has supported decisions related to locations and engagement opportunities for the 2022/3 planting programme, which came to a close in March 2023 and resulted in the planting of 11,348 trees across the borough.

2.1.6 This brings the total number of trees planted across the two years of the Tree Planting Programme to 32,891.

## 2.2 **Publication of the Maintenance Schedule**

2.2.1 The Tree Service offers a blend of reactive responses to service requests, either via Member casework, MP enquiries or customer service requests, and a proactive inspection schedule as outlined in the Tree Management Protocol & Guidance, which focuses on a planned schedule of inspections.

2.2.2 At the meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2022, Members wanted greater transparency regarding the planned schedule of inspections. The service has looked at how best to achieve this recommendation in a way that is most accessible to residents. The existing work schedules for street trees are held within tree management software based on the pre-2021 ward boundaries. Whilst the information could be captured in a separate document, for a short-term solution, some work needs to take place to transfer information within the system to Rotherham's post-2021 ward boundaries.

2.2.3 In order to achieve more accurate and customer-friendly data regarding maintenance schedules the service has been exploring the adoption of a new data management system which is also being considered in other areas of the Council. The adoption of the new software for management of street scene assets, including trees, is expected by the end of the financial year and will allow maintenance schedules to be published on the Council's website.

2.2.4 In addition to procuring new software, work has also been undertaken to review the Tree Management Protocol & Guidance to ensure the prescribed maintenance schedules are appropriate and in line with national best practice.

2.2.5 An Independent Review & Benchmarking study was undertaken by specialist consultants, Treeconomics. This recommended that the Council adopts a risk-based approach to proactive maintenance schedules prioritising areas of greater Health & Safety risk such as main arterial routes, areas of greater residential density, and areas of high footfall such as destination parks.

The Tree Management Protocol & Guidance will be revised in line with the recommendations made as part of the Independent Review and

- 2.2.6 Benchmarking study and brought for further consultation with Members before adoption later this year.

### **Equalities and the prioritisation of tree planting in deprived areas of the borough**

- 2.3 At the meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2022 Members requested that areas of higher deprivation were considered for future tree planting programmes to help ensure a more equitable distribution of the benefits brought from tree planting.
- 2.3.1

The table below shows the distribution of tree planting by ward across the two-year programme:

- 2.3.2

<b>Year 1 Tree Planting Programme 2021/22</b>		
<b>Ward</b>	<b>Type of Planting</b>	<b>Number of Trees</b>
Kilnhurst & Swinton East	Woodland	3887
Rotherham West	Woodland	7429
Anston & Woodsett	Woodland	2668
Wickersley North	Woodland	2415
Sitwell	Woodland	4255
Greasborough	Urban	1100
Rotherham East	Urban	8
Maltby East	Urban	70
Boston Castle	Urban	168
Wath	Urban	23
Brinsworth	Urban	116
<b>Total Trees Planted Year 1 (2021/22)</b>		<b>22,139</b>
<b>Year 2 Tree Planting Programme 2022/23</b>		
<b>Ward</b>	<b>Type of Planting</b>	<b>Number of Trees</b>
Dinnington	Woodland	7700
Sitwell	Woodland	181
Wickersley North	Woodland	6
Dalton & Thrybergh	Woodland	6
Rotherham West	Woodland	301
Anston & Woodsett	Woodland	301
Keppel	Woodland	425
Aston & Todwick	Urban	13
Rother Vale	Urban	22
Wath	Urban	32
Dinnington	Urban	41
Rawmarsh West	Urban	98

Boston Castle	Urban	13
Greasborough	Urban	1508
Aughton & Swallownest	Urban	58
Dalton & Thrybergh	Urban	2
Keppel	Urban	3
Brinsworth	Urban	6
Anston & Woodsett	Urban	2
Hooper	Urban	17
Hellaby & Maltby West	Urban	9
Swinton & Rockingham	Urban	8
<b>Total Trees Planted Year 2 (2022/23)</b>		<b>10,752</b>
<b>TOTAL TREES PLANTED TO DATE</b>		<b>32,891</b>

The target for tree planting set by the Tree Management Protocol & Guidance is for 500 per year in urban settings.

- 2.3.3 Of the 32,891 new trees planted across the two-year programme 3,285 of these were in urban settings, which increases the contribution they make to carbon capture. The target for overall net gain in urban settings is 250
- 2.3.4 trees, taking into account trees that are felled or fallen or new planting which is damaged as not all new trees survive the natural environment. The service estimates that around 10% of new planting (3,289) will not survive. This gives an estimated overall net gain of 29,602 new trees across the programme and estimated net gain of 2,957 in urban settings.

- 2.3.5 The Tree Management Protocol and Strategy also set a target to dedicate a minimum of 5 hectares of land to woodland creation, either through planting or re-wilding, up to 2030. This will see the Council's woodlands estate increase in size by at least 10%. To date, the Council has already exceeded this target, planting 20 hectares of new woodland across the two year programme, of which around 4 hectares were planted by volunteers.

### **Opportunities for the planting of fruit trees**

- 2.4 The Tree Planting programme relies heavily on securing grant funding and is therefore subject to the terms and conditions of the funder. Although
- 2.4.1 some planting of fruit trees has taken place within the programme this has been limited as funding for this variety of planting is very limited.

However, in response to requests from Members to consider a greater ratio of fruit trees within the programme, fruit tree planting including apple, pear and plum trees, has taken place at three sites:

- Six fruit trees were planted at Brecks Lane in the woodland creating a small Orchard.



- 2.4.2
- Four fruit trees were added to the fruit trees in Hope Fields at Thrybergh Country Park
  - Six fruit trees were planted in Brinsworth
  - 349 fruit trees were planted at Dinnington as part of the Queen’s Green Canopy

**3. Options considered and recommended proposal**

3.1 This report is for information only, however Members are invited to comment on its content and provide feedback.

**4. Consultation on proposals**

4.1 There are no specific proposals as the report is for information purposes. However, elements of the activities outlined in this report such as the location of future sites for tree planting will be consulted upon as they are identified utilising the Tree Planting Consultation Protocol outlined at section 2.

**5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

- 5.1 The timetable of next steps is outlined as follows:
- June 2023 – Engagement regarding revisions of the Tree Management Protocol & Guidance following recommendations from the Independent Review & Benchmarking Report
  - August 2023 – Consultation will begin for the 2023/4 Tree Planting Season will begin in line with the Tree Planting Consultation Protocol outlined at 2.1.
  - September 2023 – Adoption of updated Tree Management Protocol & Guidance
  - October 2023 – Initial trials of the new database management system to support the creation of proactive maintenance schedules.
  - October 2023 - Start of the 2023/24 Tree Planting Season
  - December 2023 – Full adoption of the new database management system
  - January 2024 – Publication of proactive maintenance schedules via the Council’s website
  - March 2024 - End of 2023/4 Tree Planting Season

**6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications**

6.1 External funding secured for tree planting to date is as follows:

<b>Source</b>	<b>21/22</b>	<b>22/23</b>	<b>23/24 to date</b>
Urban Tree Challenge Fund	£157,649	£94,214	£0
Local Authority Treescapes Fund	£77,145	£0	£0

Woodland Accelerator	£0	£53,500	£53,500
Grow Back Greener	£0	£88,024	£0
South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority	£50,000	£0	£0
<b>Total</b>	<b>£284,794</b>	<b>£235,738</b>	<b>£53,500</b>

6.2 The Council has had the above grant applications approved, both capital and revenue as indicated above.

- Capital - The different funding streams are at various stages of being claimed, and not yet included within the approved capital programme.
- Revenue - The Woodland Accelerator funding for 2022/23 has been received and will be utilised in 2022/23.

6.3 In addition, the Council has approved an annual revenue investment of £50,000 for a Trees and Woodlands Engagement Officer. This is to support the £350,000 Council capital investment in the borough-wide tree planting programme.

## 7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 There are no direct Legal implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

## 8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no direct Human Resources implications arising from the recommendations within this report.

## 9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 A recent evaluation report 'Children's Capital of Culture 2025: Starting the Conversation' found that almost a quarter of children and young people surveyed (24%) wanted to see programmes of activity that celebrate and encourage engagement with Rotherham's natural environment and Green Spaces.

9.2 The Trees & Woodland Engagement Officer has led a number of engagement programmes with children and young people over the last 12 months including:

- Redscope School has been supported to develop its mini forest project through the provision of biodegradable tree guards to protect new trees, alongside comparison experiments for class on plastic and biodegradable tree guards.
- Laughton All Saints Primary School has been very active in the Queen Elizabeth II Community Woodland (now officially part of the

Queen's Green Canopy) helping to prepare the site with litter-picking and tree planting. There were also three community planting days where members of the public including families joined in.

- The service also led engagement programme with residents from the White Bear Estate in Wath working closely with Flux Rotherham to involve local community groups. The project included working with local schools to make nature art with artist James Brunt while the trees were being planted on site.
- The community involvement at Dinnington has continued with an environmental day with the local schools planting more bulbs around the trees planted last season (21/22) and learning about bees and their importance. There is soon to be another day with the local schools in Dinnington around the Coronation to celebrate the fruit trees that have been planted to mark the occasion activities on this day will be around the trees and the King's Coronation.

## **10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implication**

- 10.1 The service is committed to ensuring equal access to its trees and woodlands. The service undertakes specific Equality Impact Assessments relating to its activities as required and hosts regular consultation sessions working with a diverse range of groups with protected characteristics. An Equalities Impact Screening undertaken for the publication of the Tree Management Protocol & Guidance found that the service offers universal benefit, however engagement programmes can be tailored to support under-represented groups.

## **11. Implications for CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions and Climate Change**

- 11.1 Trees play a vital role in supporting action against Climate Change through sequestration of carbon and harmful emissions.
- 11.2 The commitments outlined in the guidance to increase the net total of its tree stock by 250 trees per year over the next ten years and to dedicate a minimum of 5 hectares of land to new woodland creation are clear and measurable contributions to reducing the impact of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

## **12. Implications for Partners**

- 12.1 At the time of the meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2022 it was the intention of the service to develop a Tree Planting Strategy for Rotherham, which would seek to identify key landowners and local stakeholders to support and influence tree planting in areas outside of the Council's control. At the meeting suggestions were made including schools and Parish Councils and some work has taken place at an informal level to engage these groups, however due to staffing issues within the team this work has not progressed and we will be revisited later in the year when a new Tree Service Manager is appointed.

## **13. Risks and Mitigation**

- 13.1 Competition for funds: In the short term, funding for new tree planting and management of existing woodlands has been available from a number of external funding bodies and a number of successful bids has allowed the service to overachieve on its early forecasts and targets as described in section 6.1 above. However, longer term funding for tree planting and woodland creation is uncertain and could reduce the Council’s capacity to continue to increase woodland cover at the current scale in the medium and long term.
- 13.2 Damage to new planting schemes: A minority of planting schemes have seen some early resistance from individuals or have fallen foul of vandalism and have suffered damage to or complete removal of newly planted trees. The current level of damage and early loss is within the 10% expected and is sustainable within the schemes overall objectives but will remain a risk if damage or removal increases. Involving communities in the planting of new trees also helps to reduce the potential for damage from vandalism.
- 13.3 Identification of suitable land for planting: As many local authorities seek to combat the Climate Emergency through tree planting programmes, identifying suitable land for planting can be challenging as this is a finite resource. In addition to tree planting other pressures for land include new homes, green energy production and recreation. In future the service hopes to be able to work more with private landowners to provide space for trees. To this end it is starting to make these links with larger landowning bodies such as Wentworth Estates, Parish Councils and Schools. This links will be revisited on the appointment of the new Tree Service Manager.

**Accountable Officer(s)**

Leanne Buchan, Head of Creative Programming and Engagement  
 Andy Lee, Green Spaces Manager

Approvals obtained on behalf of:

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Date</b>
Chief Executive		Click here to enter a date.
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Named officer	Click here to enter a date.
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Named officer	Click here to enter a date.
Assistant Director of Human Resources (if appropriate)		Click here to enter a date.
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)		Click here to enter a date.
The Strategic Director with responsibility for this report	Paul Woodcock, Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment	02/05/23
Consultation undertaken with the relevant Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Social	03/05/23

	Inclusion - Councillor Shepherd	
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*Report Author: Leanne Buchan, Head of Creative Programming and  
Engagement*

This report is published on the Council's [website](#).

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## Appendix 1 - Tree Planting Consultation Protocol

This framework acts as a guide for officers to work with Elected Members and members of the public to agree appropriate locations for tree planting across the borough and appropriate engagement programmes to undertake planting in agreed locations.

### STAGE 1: SITE IDENTIFICATION

RMBC Tree Service will identify suitable locations according to the following criteria:

- Land is in ownership of the Council or has been identified as having support of the landowner
- Planning guidance, policy and deeds allow for planting take place on this land
- The environmental conditions of the land are appropriate for planting e.g., not on contaminated land or used for other environmental gain such as biodiversity or habitat creation
- A reasonable split of planting schemes across wards where availability of land allows



### STAGE 2: CABINET MEMBER CONSULTATION

Trees & Woodlands Officer will present proposals for discussion with Head of Service and Cabinet Member for endorsement ahead of consultation with ward members



### STAGE 3: WARD MEMBER CONSULTATION

Plans will be emailed to ward members with options to:

- Approve the sites via email
- Request a meeting to discuss the proposed plans in detail
- Advise on the appropriate level of public consultation for any specific sites in their wards

Neighbourhood coordinators will be CC'd to emails.



**STAGE 4A: PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

If requested a public consultation meeting will be arranged and residents in locations agreed with Ward Members will be contacted with the support of the Neighbourhood Coordinators.

The meeting will be attended by Ward Members and Officers and minuted to record objections, endorsements and agreed resolutions.

**STAGE 4B: EMAIL AGREEMENT RECEIVED**

If plans are agreed by Ward Members via email a written record of the endorsement for the proposals will be kept by the Trees & Woodlands Officer.



**STAGE 5: RECORD OF OFFICER DECISION**

An Officer Decision Report will be submitted and added to the Forward Plan ahead of that year's Tree Planting Season outlining the agreed locations and the level of consultation undertaken.



**STAGE 6: ENGAGEMENT PROPOSALS**

Following agreement of planting locations, the Trees & Woodlands Officer will set out a proposed Planting Schedule for the season and provide recommendations for engagement programmes in each ward.

These will be agreed with the Head of Service and shared with Ward Members as opportunities for direct support or signposting to communities.

Depending on the volume of tree planting proposed in each area some of this work may need to be undertaken by contractors to ensure it is completed within the season window.



Public Report  
Improving Places Select Commission

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**Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting**

Improving Places Select Commission – 09 May 2023

**Report Title**

Scrutiny Review Recommendations – Selective Licencing

**Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?**

No

**Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report**

Jo Brown, Assistant Chief Executive

**Report Author(s)**

Katherine Harclerode, Governance Advisor  
01709 254352 or [katherine.harclerode@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:katherine.harclerode@rotherham.gov.uk)

**Ward(s) Affected**

Borough-wide

**Report Summary**

This report summarises the findings and recommendations of a scrutiny review into the impact of the selective licencing scheme in Rotherham at its halfway point. The selective licencing scheme, which runs from 2020-2025, focusses on alleviating deprivation and poor housing conditions in specific residential areas of Parkgate, Thurcroft, Maltby, Dinnington, Eastwood/Town Centre and Masbrough. The review sought to assess the impact of the scheme so far and identify further steps and risk mitigations that will help to build positively upon the accomplishments of the scheme to date.

**Recommendations**

- 1) That the response to mould and damp hazards in housing be considered for inclusion in work programme for 2023/24.
- 2) That the following recommendations be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Management Board for consideration and endorsement.
  - a) That reinspection be prioritised for landlords whose properties have required action previously.
  - b) Due to the shortage of experienced inspectors, that consideration be given to how the Council may support recruitment and development of trainee inspectors and retention of experienced inspectors.

- c) That consideration be given to incentivising responsible landlords, and, where there is a proven track record, empowering landlords to self-assess, provided that the Service can still obtain assurances that decent standards are maintained.
- d) That consideration be given to managing expectations around selective licencing as a measure focused on the health of residents rather than beautification or regeneration.
- e) That consideration be given to how uptake of the cost-of-living support offer among families in selective licencing areas may be further promoted and monitored with a view to identifying gaps and promoting financial inclusion.
- f) Given the complexity of measuring impact on deprivation and difficulty in improving relative levels of deprivation, that consideration be given to how internal metrics may better reflect the real impact of the scheme.
- g) That a joined-up approach be sought with relevant Council strategies and services, with partner and voluntary sector organisations and with resident-led initiatives prior to any future selective licencing declaration.
- h) That engagement with landlords and with tenants be considered alongside any response to the above recommendations, and that the response to the above recommendations be subject to the learning derived from continued engagement with landlords and tenants.

**List of Appendices Included**

None

**Background Papers**

*Policy Paper: A Fairer Private Rented Sector.* 2 August 2022. <<https://www.gov.uk>> Selective Licencing and Landlords. Briefing.

Selective Licencing and Landlords. Presentation. 15 November 2022.

Kulakiewics, Aaron and Wendy Wilson. Housing and health: a reading list. House of Commons Library. <[commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk)> 17 October 2022

**Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel**

None

**Council Approval Required**

No

**Exempt from the Press and Public**

No

## Scrutiny Review Recommendations – Selective Licencing

### 1. Background

1.1 This review falls under the remit of Improving Places Select Commission which supports the Council in achieving its Council Plan 2022-25 theme of Every Neighbourhood Thriving, specifically furthering the objective within in this theme to ensure people are safe, healthy and live well. Members of Improving Places Select Commission had concerns about living conditions and absentee landlords in specific areas of deprivation. These concerns led to a review of the impact of the Selective Licencing scheme in place from 2020-2025 to address deprivation and housing conditions in specific residential areas of Parkgate, Thurcroft, Maltby, Dinnington, Eastwood/Town centre and Masbrough.

1.3 All councillors whose wards have selective licencing areas were invited to participate in the review. Improving Places Select Commission subsequently undertook an in-person meeting with Service leads from the community safety and enforcement team and the Private Sector Housing Coordinator within Strategic Housing on 15 November 2022.

1.4 Prior to this meeting, Scrutiny Councillors had background knowledge of several areas:

- The function of selective licencing in Rotherham.
- The general role of the private rented sector in Rotherham's housing market.
- Proposed social housing reforms described in the Government White Paper, *A Fairer Private Rented Sector, 2022*.
- Recent proceedings of the National Residential Landlord's Association (NRLA), which Rotherham MBC has attended and presented.
- The seven Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) whereby deprivation is measured, which include health as a primary factor and housing as a secondary factor.
- Local knowledge of Selective Licencing areas within their wards.

The review examined:

- 1.5
- The role of private sector housing in national and local contexts.
  - How selective licencing gives the Council additional powers to raise standards in areas of greatest deprivation.
  - Misconceptions around selective licencing in Rotherham.
  - The role of partners in raising standards

1.5 In examining the role of partners in raising standards, the review also considered the perspective of South Yorkshire Police (SYP) partners and made note of the consultations with landlords and tenants which are currently in progress by the Service. The results of the landlord surveys are being analysed by the Service, and the engagement with tenants will be completed in April 2023, with outcomes available after this report has been submitted; therefore, it is acknowledged that recommendations

from this review will be subject to any insights garnered from these engagement exercises. The Service may be invited to share the results of these surveys and the response of the Service as part of a future update to scrutiny.

1.6 Whilst anti-social behaviour is often mentioned as an issue of concern when discussing selective licencing areas, the topic of anti-social behaviour was determined to be outside the scope of this review. This is because Rotherham's selective licencing scheme was initiated to address deprivation and poor housing conditions. Therefore, any review of the impact of the scheme should examine the extent to which the scheme is alleviating the conditions it set out to address. Crime, however, was considered in this review insofar as it is the fifth domain within the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), which is the national framework by which deprivation is measured. Complexities inherent in assessing impact on deprivation will be discussed in the next section. IPSC has previously agreed that anti-social behaviour will be the focus of a separate piece of scrutiny work in 2023/24.

### 1.7 **Selective Licencing in Rotherham**

1.8 Private Sector Housing plays an increasingly important role in Rotherham. As housing market conditions delay home ownership for many families, and as the cost of living leads more families to join the register for council housing, private sector housing will play an increasingly important role. Private Sector Housing is all housing which is not Council-owned, including private lettings, Registered Housing Associations, and owner-occupied housing. This sector comprises approximately 94,000 properties in Rotherham. The Council, along with the Community Protection Unit are responsible for monitoring and enforcement actions where there is private sector housing.

1.9 The Private Rented Sector (PRS) is the portion of the Private Sector Housing market which is most at risk for deprivation and poor housing conditions. The PRS remains largely unregulated, which means that anyone can be a landlord. The PRS has grown by 320% in the last 20 years. In Rotherham, this sector, based on the Census 2021, now contains slightly more than 17,000 properties and makes up 15% of the total housing market. A proportion of these properties are below decent standards.

1.10 Councils have various powers to raise and enforce standards throughout their local authority areas, including areas where there is private sector housing. In addition to these powers, under Part 3 of the Housing Act 2004, Councils can add a selective licencing scheme to enable further interventions in a designated area where there are any of the following issues:

- Low housing demand (or is likely to become such an area);
- A significant and persistent problem caused by anti-social behaviour;
- Poor property conditions;

- High levels of migration;
- High level of deprivation;
- High levels of crime.

- 1.11 Based on several small geographical areas within the borough that have a high proportion of private rented sector housing, Rotherham applied for the current selective licencing scheme based on the criteria of deprivation, or a lack of basic necessities. Following and expanding on a previous scheme from 2015-2020, the current declaration was designated in 2020 and will continue until April 2025.
- 1.12 The scheme offended some landlords at first. Then improvement was seen, as penalties were only for landlords not doing things right. Since then, 1,074 landlords have applied for 2,083 licenses. 69% of landlords have responsibility for only one property. Over two thirds of applications are managed by landlords with portfolios of less than five properties. Only a handful of landlords have portfolios larger than 20 properties; these landlords are responsible for 8% of applications. 93% of applications are managed by individuals rather than letting agents. Income from licences is equivalent to £36,167 per area per year. To date, 346 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) inspections had been completed, with 129 rebates offered to be returned to landlords when their properties passed. 832 notices had been served where houses were not up to the legal standard. 66 properties had Category 1, or serious, hazards. There had been 17 successful prosecutions. A National Federation of Residential Landlords (NFRL) training package was offered alongside all civil penalties assessed.
- 1.13 Support offered to landlords under the scheme has continued to expand as the scheme was continued and extended. To provide Rotherham's landlords with a resource for clear information around licencing expectations, the Service created dedicated web pages. The Service also produces newsletters to increase added value to landlords by sharing sector specific information, intelligence and inspection trends. The Service introduced an improved inspection protocol and undertook a landlord and tenant survey.. The Service offers access to training for landlords and provides NRLA Corporate membership for those landlords who want/need to improve their knowledge of the private rented sector as well as attending and presenting at locally organised residential landlord association meetings. The Service produces tenancy advice packs, enforces Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard (MEES), and performs letting agent compliance checks. These efforts recognise the valuable contributions of responsible landlords and managing agents. The support offer will evolve further as the Service reacts to the current Government White Paper.
- 1.14 Rotherham participated in the consultation on the White Paper, which proposes several reforms to the PRS in response to an increasingly unsettled housing market. Among these reforms is a plan to abolish Section 21 'no-fault' evictions and introduce a simpler tenancy structure through a Rental Reform Bill; to apply the Decent Homes Standard to the

PRS for the first time; to enforce a strict liability offence requiring landlords to offer decent accommodation; to introduce a new Property Portal to help landlords understand their obligations; and to introduce a housing ombudsman covering all PRS landlords and providing redress for tenants.

1.15 **Measuring deprivation with the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)**

1.16 Deprivation has proven a challenging category on which to base the scheme, because so many factors contribute to deprivation, and the value of Rotherham's deprivation rating can be influenced by the activity or lack of activity of other local authorities. This is reflected in how the Government measures deprivation via seven indices. The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) are seven domains, each comprising a range of indicators. These indicators are:

1. Income;
2. Employment;
3. Education, Skills and Training;
4. Health and Disability;
5. Crime;
6. Barriers to Housing and Services;
7. Living Environment.

1.17 A selective licencing scheme focussed on alleviating deprivation may involve interventions in each of these 7 domains. With so many factors contributing to deprivation, however, impact is hard to achieve without joined up approaches to improving each of the domains. As articulated in *The English Indices of Deprivation 2019*, a technical report by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, many people assume that deprivation is synonymous with poverty, but it is important to note that income and finances make up only one domain of the IMD. Deprivation encompasses much more than low income and is characterised by "a lack of resources of all kinds," including basic necessities.<sup>1</sup> Alleviating deprivation requires improved access to multiple types of resources, including those recognised within the IMD indicator.

1.18 For the purposes of this review, the IMD are a useful and relevant framework, but should be considered a starting point for measuring the impact of selective licencing. The IMD cannot be used to measure *absolute* change in deprivation over time, because deprivation is measured as a range of small geographical areas from most deprived to least deprived. However, the IMD are useful for delving into how Rotherham residents may be experiencing the domains of deprivation, and for thinking about whether these experiences are changing faster or slower than areas of the country where people are also experiencing a lack of basic necessities. The findings of the review, outlined in the next section, identify some impacts of Rotherham's selective licencing areas that are not named in the IMD, but benefit residents nonetheless.

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<sup>1</sup> McLellan et al. 9.

1.19 To assess the impact of selective licencing on alleviating deprivation, the review examined how the scheme has prompted current and recent interdisciplinary work (across Council services and partner and community organisations across Rotherham) targeting one or more of the IMD. The aim of the review was to maximise the effectiveness of this work for the remainder of the 2020-25 scheme and to consider ways to expand positive impact in these areas of the Borough in the medium and longer term.

## 2.0 Findings

2.1 The review identified four key risk factors to the success of the scheme: 1) pandemic-related delays, 2) a shortage of experienced inspectors, 3) a rising cost of living and 4) complexity of measuring impact on deprivation.

### 2.2 Risk 1) – Pandemic-related delays

2.3 Restrictions during the pandemic required inspections to pause because inspectors could not enter homes. The impact of this meant that the Service had to scale back its ambition from inspecting every house twice to inspecting every house at least once during the duration of the scheme. It is the goal of the Service that all properties receive inspection by December 2024.

2.4 Over one third of properties have been found not to have any hazards at all; however, learning from past schemes locally and nationally has shown that landlords whose properties required action following an inspection are more likely to be again non-compliant later. This means that properties which have not met the minimum legal standards in the past are at greater risk of falling below the minimum standards again. *It is therefore recommended that reinspection be prioritised for landlords whose properties have required action previously.*

### 2.5 Risk 2) – Shortage of experienced inspectors

2.6 Skilled inspectors, especially those qualified to undertake the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)<sup>2</sup>, are key to the success of the programme, combining precision, speed, and tact. Experienced inspectors understand how properties are put together and how they fall apart. Having this knowledge aids inspectors in identifying areas where things are going wrong. Being able to identify early signs can help make rectifying these faster, easier and less expensive for landlords.

2.7 The review examined how selective licencing fees are collected and utilised. In 2019, the fee was lowered, and the rebate was introduced to incentivise responsible landlords. The application fee is £68 per property (this is not for houses of multiple occupancy). The maintenance fee is

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<sup>2</sup> HousingHealthSafety.qxd (publishing.service.gov.uk)

£453 for 5 years. Where applicable, a late fee of £136 is assessed by the Service. A rebate of £127 is given back to the landlord if the property passes.

- 2.8 The review found that the Selective Licencing fees currently pay for an additional inspector, one of four inspectors on staff. No funds are left over to pay for improvements or projects within the selective licencing areas. To stakeholders expecting visible improvements from the scheme, this could give the impression that the Declarations are not adding value. *For this reason, it is recommended that the Service consider how expectations among landlords and within communities may be managed around selective licencing as a measure focused on the health of residents rather than beautification or regeneration.*
- 2.9 By nature of the role, inspectors must be highly skilled and experienced to conduct the inspections and navigate the interpersonal demands of the role. Legislation governs how notices are served regarding private sector properties. Communication around this process has to be done with precision, creating a high training requirement for inspectors. Skilled inspectors are therefore key to the success of the programme, combining precision, speed, and tact. Identifying defects, experienced inspectors understand how properties are put together and how they fall apart, aiding them in identifying areas where things are going wrong. Being able to identify early signs can help make rectifying these faster, easier and less expensive for landlords.
- 2.10 The outlook for the Service suggests that highly skilled inspectors are in increasingly high demand. Proposed social reforms described in the Government White Paper, *A Fairer Private Rented Sector, 2022*, will reinforce the need for highly trained inspectors, as new legislation and long-standing laws will require enforcement by local authority officers.
- 2.11 The Service has had to scale back its inspection targets as noted in Section 1.18 above because of combined effects of pauses during COVID-19 restrictions and the shortage of skilled inspectors. A skilled inspector can independently conduct as many as four inspections per day, including paperwork. This rate drops to around two inspections per day where there are significant differences house to house. A less experienced inspector may complete one inspection per day. The Service is currently developing trainee inspectors to be able to conduct inspections independently, but development takes time. As tightening resources and shortages of skilled workers are being experienced across many sectors nationally, a mitigation undertaken by some local authorities is to empower landlords to self-assess. Many local authorities go a step further to incentivise accredited landlords, provided they maintain the accreditation throughout the duration of the scheme. Further discounts are granted for proactive landlords who have met standards for energy efficiency, for example. *Due to the shortage of experienced inspectors, it is recommended that consideration be given to what the Council can do support recruitment, development, and retention of trainee inspectors. It is also recommended that consideration*



*be given to empowering landlords to self-assess, and that consideration be given to rewarding responsible landlords.*

**2.12 Risk 3) – Rising cost of living**

2.13 For many families throughout the country, rising cost of living follows on from a financially challenging period during the pandemic. Prices have risen faster than wages. Rising cost of living is felt in areas of high deprivation where income margins were already thin. The pandemic also caused increased risk for some residents relating to IMD domains 1) income, 2) employment, and 3) health and disability. Deterioration in these domains can have follow on effects on other indices, such as cold or crowded living conditions. Homes which are inadequately heated and insulated can become damp and mouldy, with potentially serious health implications for residents.

2.14 In view of these wider challenges which have come about after the initiation of the scheme, housing inspections delivered under scheme have only limited ability to prevent deprivation from worsening. As the cost of living rises, more residents are at risk of not being able to afford basic necessities. *It is therefore recommended that the Council's response to damp and mould, as a health hazard for families affected by rising cost of living, be considered for inclusion in the scrutiny work programme for 2023/24. It is also recommended that consideration be given to how the uptake of the cost-of-living support offer among families in selective licencing areas may be further promoted and monitored, with a view to identifying gaps and promoting financial inclusion.*

**2.15 Risk 4 – Complexity of measuring impact on deprivation**

2.16 It is commendable that six declarations have been undertaken under the heading of deprivation, but as outlined above, deprivation is an extremely difficult category to influence. A joined-up approach targeting all seven indices would have maximum impact on deprivation.

2.17 It should be noted that, although the links between poor housing conditions and poor health have been well established, the IMD do not identify poor housing conditions as a primary domain. Exposure to damp, cold, mould and noise is strongly associated with poor mental and physical health, yet Living Environment Deprivation - which includes indicators for housing without central heating and housing in poor condition - is one of the lesser weighted IMD domains. This means that improvement in indoors living environment alone cannot sway these measures, even when serious hazards are being addressed that will improve healthy life expectancy for residents. As stated in section, 1.18, the IMD cannot be used to measure absolute change in deprivation over time, because it is measured as a range of small geographical areas ranked from most deprived to least deprived. The IMD is however useful for considering the ways people in selective licencing areas may be experiencing the various domains of deprivation, and in thinking about how Rotherham might leverage more of its unique assets and strengths

beyond the Council and within communities to accelerate the rate of change.

2.18 *Given the complexity of measuring impact on deprivation and difficulty in improving relative levels of deprivation, it is recommended that consideration be given to how internal metrics may better reflect the real impact of the scheme on specific indices included in the IMD, and in other indicators of quality that are not included in the IMD. Furthermore, it is recommended that a joined-up approach be sought with relevant partner and voluntary sector and resident-led organisations prior to introducing any further scheme, especially in the category of deprivation.*

2.19 **Potential areas for further interventions**

2.20 Maximising the effectiveness of the remainder of the current selective licencing scheme, and any future scheme established under the category of deprivation, may involve several areas for potential further interventions:

- supporting actions by CPU and SYP to the reduce rates of violence, burglary, theft and criminal damage, which are indicators of deprivation within the IMD;
- eliciting buy-in from stakeholders regarding focused interventions relating to IMD indices 1-3 which are Income Deprivation; Employment Deprivation; and Education, Skills and Training Deprivation;
- strengthening links with the Housing Strategy of the Council and with other Council service areas and community services, such as those which support homelessness prevention and financial inclusion.

2.21 The review found that the interventions associated with the HHSRS inspections have had a positive if limited impact on health and safety of residents within selective licencing areas. Housing inspections delivered under the scheme have directly led to actions which eliminated hazards relating to IMD Index 7, Living Environment Deprivation and Index 4, Health Deprivation and Disability.

2.22 The review also found evidence that partnership working with South Yorkshire Police in selective licencing areas had a beneficial impact relating to organised crime around illicit drug cultivation. This kind of illegal activity is not listed as an indicator of deprivation, however, and is not included in the IMD. The review found that, notwithstanding the profound results of Operation Grow which have been widely publicised, further police and community protection work is required in order to reduce 'recorded crime rates of violence, burglary, theft and criminal damage', which are indicators of deprivation. The indirect effect of Operation Grow reduces instances of other kinds of crime through increased police presence, monitoring and reporting, but there will be further work to do to improve and maintain the safety and wellbeing of residents in selective licencing areas.

- 2.23 The review found potential for the current scheme focussed on safer housing to give rise to more coordinated interventions around IMD Indices 1-3: Income Deprivation; Employment Deprivation; or Education, Skills and Training Deprivation. Interventions being delivered by the Council, its partners, or third sector organisations which target these Indices could be better integrated within the delivery of this scheme. The range, uptake, and impact of these within selective licencing areas was not identified within the review and may be an area for further work, subject to analysis of the latest census data, and forthcoming results of engagement activity with residents. Through a joined-up approach targeting all indices of deprivation, maximum impact can be achieved.
- 2.24 Furthermore, the review ascertained that more interventions relating to Index 6, Barriers to Housing and Services, may be possible within the remainder of the present scheme. For example, stronger links with the Council's Homelessness Prevention and Financial Inclusion Services would help alleviate pressure on temporary accommodation caused by preventable evictions. Early intervention can help raise the chances of avoiding crisis. This adds value for landlords and tenants alike. Proactive landlords benefit from staying informed, but it is acknowledged that working with less active landlords can be more challenging.
- 2.25 It is important to note that 88% of small geographical areas (LSOAs) that were among the most deprived in 2015 were again among the most deprived in 2020. This was an incredibly difficult category to impact prior to the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis. This does not mean that Rotherham should abandon its attempts to shift deprivation in view of the additional economic challenges and risks. Improving access to resources of all kinds for people living within selective licencing areas remains a worthy aspiration, and if a further scheme were to be undertaken in the future, this should be done with key actions in place to secure buy-in from all stakeholders and partners – and especially residents, who have a vested interest in the revitalisation of their neighbourhoods and communities.
- 2.26 The review found there may be room to infuse good practice into operations by applying lessons learned from previous schemes locally, as well as learning from other local authorities and from local stakeholders. Recognising that the IMD does not provide an absolute measurement but rather a range, it would be of interest to note where positive and negative shifts occurred within Rotherham LSOAs between 2015 and 2020 and the reasons for these shifts, if these are known. The use of Selective Licencing within these areas would be relevant. It is understood that Selective Licencing is not a quick fix.
- 2.27 Should any perpetuation of selective licencing declarations be considered for Rotherham after April 2025, it will be important for the Service to consider carefully the appropriate category for the scheme. No matter the category that is chosen, a joined-up system-wide approach should be taken prior to activation of any scheme. The optimal approach will be data-driven based on the needs and desires of residents, and will

be undertaken in partnership with residents and members of the communities where there is Selective Licencing. This includes businesses and organisations who have a stake in improving these areas. This involves going into communities and supporting or co-producing resident-led initiatives that complement the objective of the selective licencing scheme, whether that be reducing crime or extending tenancies within these areas.

- 2.28 The review noted that the Service is currently engaging with landlords and residents, for example, through newsletters, local and regional landlord forums, and surveys, which are all positive. Scrutiny will be keen to receive an update exploring how insights gathered will inform the future Service offer and future engagement. Preliminary considerations prior to any further scheme of selective licencing should include engagement activities to form a baseline from residents and landlords. With buy-in from residents and stakeholders, system-wide actions can be organised around priorities. For example, if a proposed scheme aimed to reduce rates of short-term tenancies, the Service might join up with teams across the Council and the wider borough who are best placed to alleviate the issues and barriers currently preventing people from seeking or sustaining their tenancies. Working with town or parish councils where there is interest may yield additional momentum from community members who are willing to lead grassroots efforts. For example, Dinnington Town Council has made representations regarding desire to organise around improvements. It is acknowledged that actions related to any category of declaration will come down to addressing deprivation.

### **3. Options considered and recommended proposal**

- 3.1 The review considered how best to include the perspective of residents living within the selective licencing areas. This was left to the Service as part of the engagement activity that concludes after April 2023. For this reason, the results of this piece of work and the response of the service to insights received through the engagement work will be considered as part of the response to the recommendations. All other recommendations agreed as part of the outcomes of this review are subject to the findings of the engagement work with residents.

### **4. Consultation on proposal**

- 4.1 Members consulted with Service Leads, Partners, and Landlords as part of their considerations in developing these. Members also have due regard to the expressed views of their constituents in their formulation of scrutiny priorities and lines of enquiry. Recommendations from scrutiny are produced as outcomes of consultation by Members in their role as elected representatives of Rotherham residents.

**5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision**

5.1 The accountability for implementing recommendations arising from this report will sit with Cabinet and relevant officers. The Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules require Cabinet to consider and respond to recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and the Select Commissions in no more two months from the date that Cabinet receives this report.

**6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications**

6.1 No financial implications arise directly from this report, although the response to the review will take account of any such implications.

**7. Legal Advice and Implications**

7.1 There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

**8. Human Resources Advice and Implications**

8.1 There are no HR implications directly arising from this report.

**9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults**

9.1 There are no implications for children and young people and vulnerable adults directly arising from this report.

**10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications**

10.1 Furthering equalities and human rights is a key objective in undertaking scrutiny activity; therefore, Members have due regard for equalities implications in the development of scrutiny work programmes, lines of enquiry and in their derivation of recommendations designed to improve the delivery of council services for residents.

**11. Implications for CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions and Climate Change**

11.1 There are no climate or emissions implications directly associated with this report.

**12. Implications for Partners**

12.1 There are no implications for partners directly arising from the report.

**13. Risks and Mitigation**

13.1 Members have due regard to the risks and mitigation factors associated with the services under scrutiny and have made recommendations accordingly.

**Accountable Officer(s)**

Emma Hill, Head of Democratic Services and Statutory Scrutiny Officer  
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