

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**  
**Wednesday 13 November 2024**

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Bacon, Baggaley, Blackham, A. Carter, Knight, Marshall, McKiernan, Tinsley and Yasseen.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Keenan and Pitchley.

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

**46. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 9 OCTOBER 2024**

**Resolved:** - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 9 October 2024 be approved as a true record.

**47. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

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

There were no questions from members of the public and the press.

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

There were no items that required the exclusion of the press and public.

**50. LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) SUFFICIENCY UPDATE (INCLUDING THE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS UPDATE)**

The Chair invited Helen Sweaton, Joint Assistant Director, Commissioning & Performance to introduce the report. James Clarke the Assistant Director for Housing was also in attendance for this item.

The report was both an annual update on the residential development programme, which was keeping the Council in line with Cabinet's intention to increase the number of children's homes across the borough to be able to accommodate the children in care.

It also provided an update following a peer review into the Care Leavers service, where it was recommended that the Council review its Looked After Children's (LAC) Sufficiency Strategy to reflect the needs of care leavers more accurately across the borough.

There were two reasons why it had changed since the LAC Sufficiency

Strategy had been written. The first was there had been a significant increase in the number of care leavers and the population had increased. The second was the Ofsted published regulation to that part of the sector, for 16+ provision and consequently the market had changed significantly. The report covered both an update on where the Council was with its residential development and its plans based on the needs analysis that had been undertaken to update the Sufficiency Strategy to increase the provision for care leavers within the borough.

Councillor Blackham noted that permission had been granted to acquire up to 100 properties and sought an overview on the latest position and the plan to address this over the next two-three years. It was clarified that recommendation number 4 was to make members aware that approval had already been granted to increase the housing capacity across the borough, but this was not specifically for children in care or for care leavers. The plan was already in place and a number of care leavers received their permanent accommodation when they turned 18 through that plan to provide accommodation to any member of the Rotherham borough.

It was noted that good progress had been made since Cabinet agreed the acquisitions policy and that target. This year the Council was on track, forecasting between 50-60 acquisitions, which was a significant improvement. For each property that came to the point of being let, the Council made a decision on whether it was used as general needs social housing or if it was appropriate for use as care leaver accommodation or temporary accommodation for homelessness. Those decisions were made on a case-by-case basis based on this such as need and location.

Councillor Blackham sought clarification on the number of properties that would be needed over the next two to three years for this specific provision. The information within the report considered the trend and the Council knew how many children in care were going to turn 18 over the next couple of years. It was felt that 70 additional properties would be required. A number of care leavers may move into their own provision, they may return to live with their parents, they may move outside of the borough. Some accommodation may be provided via the housing allocations policy which was not specifically for care leavers. The Council did have a number of care leavers who were not ready to live independently, who may need additional support. The Council had a duty to support those care leavers up to age 25, if required.

The report was seeking additional authorisation to be able to work with Housing Associations, private landlords, and private providers to develop accommodation so that the Council had accommodation which could be provided to care leavers as accommodation. Then if those care leavers, then needed support either by the Council delivering it through the personal advisors already allocated or through commissioning that support, this would be a more cost-effective option that what was in place currently.

Council Marshall asked if the Council had enough staff experience to meet the needs, rather than using outside providers. Where the Council knew there was a cohort of young people who would need support for a prolonged period, it was more cost efficient to employ staff. Some care leavers did not feel confident to live independently initially but may only need support to three or four months. The Council was therefore balancing, if additional support was needed, how many personal advisors would be needed on a permanent basis. The Council would then employ them if it was more cost efficient to do so. It was noted that there was some flexibility and resilience sometime by using commissioned providers however it depended on what type of support was needed and which providers were being used. Some of the charities were affordable in terms of the additional support they provided with additional benefits because they also offered other groups that the care leaver could continue to access after the Council stopped paying for the support. It was clarified that all of that was taken into consideration when determining how support would be provided.

Councillor Yasseen noted that page three of the report mentioned the development of in-house residential provision but did not detail the criteria or protocol to use when a child should be taken into care. It was queried how the Council would be able to demonstrate improvements in wellbeing, education, achievement, and mental health, which were key issues that when a child went into care they actually fell. There was a need to understand how the in-house residential offer would pick those aspects up. It was queried if it was intentional to make it holistic, rather than just providing a roof over a child's head.

It was noted that the earlier part of the report provided the update on the children's residential homes. That was slightly different to the care leavers accommodation. Those were children's homes for children under 16 who predominantly needed that level of support. The reason the Council developed its own in-house provision was because it received significant challenge in terms of getting external market providers to be able to support the children and to provide all the things previously mentioned. So external market could provide a roof over their head, at a significant cost, however the Council was concerned that there were often children were then out of borough, that the Council's ability to provide an education, the emotional wellbeing and support and the persistence that children needed, not just children in care but all children needed someone who was committed to them. Sometimes the Council did not find that the private providers were able to do that as well as the Council could itself.

Consequently, the whole residential programme in-house had been built on that basis, so they had really good links with the Rotherham therapeutic team, with Rotherham's CAMHS, good links with dental and health checks to make sure the children received that holistic health support, including good links with local education providers. The Council was able to accommodate children with more complex needs in borough

with its residential provision.

External placements did cost a lot of money, therefore one of the intended benefits, was that this was more cost efficient. The Council was not just placing children within its in-house provision that were currently located out of the borough but that it was also being used to be able to prevent children with complex needs needing to be placed out of the borough. One of the properties was focused on, what's known as 'Step-Down', which was where children should be cared for in a family home rather than a children's home, so fostering or return to parents. That provision was not necessarily for children that would have been out of borough, it was for children where the Council wanted a children's home that would focus their support on returning those children into the family setting instead of staying in a residential. It was for all of those different reasons the Council wanted to create its own provision.

Councillor Tinsley queried if the Council expected any challenges to purchasing those properties. For example, residential care homes had to apply for a change of use. For the in-house under 16, children's residential homes there were a number of challenges in identifying appropriate properties within the right areas. Those homes required a change in planning permission because they required a specific regulation because it would be somebody's place of work. Regarding the care leavers accommodation, as it would be a young adult's home, there was no requirement for a change to planning permission.

The report did mention exploring some supported group living accommodation, where three or four care leavers would live together, if they required additional support, if they were not ready to maintain their own tenancy or if they didn't want to stay in Rotherham. If this was used there were no current requirement for a change of use application for those properties. However, the regulation of those properties had changed for 16+, so if the Council wanted to create one of those properties for young people under 18, it may be that the planning department would recommend seeking a change of use permission. The Council did not know what was needed in terms of how many 16+ or 18+ so it was anticipating that being a barrier or issue in the future.

Councillor Tinsley asked how the Council worked with residents, who may not be supportive of the proposed change in use to try to offer reassurances around potential changes. The Council had made positive progress in terms of the residential children's homes development and there was only one property outstanding. A lot of engagement with local communities in the areas when a property was identified. The challenge was when that engagement was carried out prior to the planning application was that the residents only wanted to speak about the planning application which made it harder to work with residents positively to help them understand what it would be like following the planning process. There was continued engagement following the planning process as the Council was aware those people would be the children's

neighbours. It was in the Council's best interests to continue to work hard to engage with those residents. The Council had some really positive success, even in areas where residents were very anxious about the change use.

Councillor Baggaley asked in terms of acquisitions going forward if the Council had a view of what would open market verses new build. It was clarified that the emphasis was on what was called 'street' properties, which meant existing properties, with a focus on right to buy properties, where then Council had a statutory right to buy back the property if the ex-tenant was selling it within ten years of purchasing under that scheme. The figures would be reported to Cabinet shortly, but the majority had come from the source and would largely be semi-detached houses in existing housing estates that were owned by an owner-occupier but were previously council homes.

The Council would also look to do opportunistic acquisitions, which included purchasing from developers where they were struggling to sell new properties or where the Council was already planning to buy some Section 106 properties and had an opportunity to buy more. The focus would always be on second-hand properties, largely because they were cheaper, but the policy allowed new builds to be purchased as well, if needed. Whilst only a small number of properties had made it to the Children and Young People's Service (CYPS), this was because the Council was being cautious about which properties met those specific needs. It had been a successful programme as the Council had acquired about 30 properties, with another 20 to 30 forecasted for this financial year, meaning the acquisitions target had been exceeded in year one.

In terms of the children's residential development programme, with 55 properties that were considered to purchase one, it was clarified that there was one remaining outstanding property that needed to be completed. All other properties had now either been acquired or were being built. It was anticipated that the roof would be added imminently to the property at Rowen. There were no plans to build anything else in terms of the children's residential programme. The properties and accommodation for the care leavers, beyond the acquisitions previously mentioned, the Council would work with housing associations, with private providers, to look at house existing properties could be utilised. There was a bulge in the Council's care leavers that would last for the next three years but would then reduce as the number of children in care who were under 16 was reducing, so the Council would not want to acquire long term properties that may not be needed beyond the next five years.

Councillor Yasseen noted that the Council did not like to carry out consultation alongside the planning application but wanted to know if the Council inputted into the planning process from the specialist perspective of supporting young people in care. For the children's homes that would be run by the Council, when it was the Council requesting permission for conversion of those homes then CYPS would engage with members of

the public, local residents and local members before the planning application is submitted. The Council would not comment if a private provider was to request planning application in that area from a CYPS perspective.

Councillor Blackham notes that recommendation five was to negotiate any additional accommodation required and queried if that was within the 100-property cap or open ended? The Assistant Director for Housing explained he had a delegation to acquire properties in consultation with the Cabinet Member that were added to the Council's housing revenue account stock. Some of those properties could be used to support this need but that did restrict the Council because there were some properties which the Council may want to acquire or enter into a lease which would not be appropriate to hold as council housing. This provided the Council another means to acquire or enter into a lease for properties that were not covered under the existing delegation.

The report suggested that around 70 additional properties were needed, so that would be the maximum number. There would be no benefit to acquire accommodation beyond that number.

Councillor Yasseen asked that when the properties were identified in the various locations across Rotherham that the neighbourhood teams and local councillors within those localities be included within those discussions.

Upon a vote, the following was resolved:

**Resolved:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board supported the recommendations that Cabinet:

1. Note the progress made to deliver the in-house children's residential development, the positive impact for Children in Care and financial efficiencies that will be achieved.
2. Approve the Care Leavers addendum to the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2023 – 2028.
3. Agree that the LAC and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy Delivery Plan be updated to increase the appropriateness and number of available accommodation options for Care Leavers as per the Care Leaver addendum to the LAC sufficiency strategy (see 2 above).
4. Note that on 16 October 2023 authority was delegated to the Assistant Director of Housing Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to acquire up to 100 properties in line with the Housing Acquisitions Policy, which includes scope to acquire properties to meet the accommodation needs of Children and Young Peoples Services.

5. Authorise the Councils Designated Property Officer, or relevant Strategic Director in their absence, to negotiate any additional accommodation required and complete necessary transactions, in consultation with the Council's Section 151 Officer, Strategic Director Children's and Young Peoples Services, the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services and the Assistant Director of Legal Services.
6. Give consideration to ensuring that the local neighbourhood teams and ward members were consulted when identifying properties within their localities.

## **51. TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION POLICY**

The Chair invited Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing and James Clarke, Assistant Director for Housing to introduce the report. The Cabinet Member for Housing explained the report was seeking approval for the new Temporary Accommodation Policy. It explained how the Council met its statutory obligations and provided a brief update on the demand for temporary accommodation. It mentioned the work being undertaken to improve the situation for residents and indicated a negative impact on the Council's financial position, which was welcomed.

Councillor Yasseen expressed that she was supportive of the idea of not using hotels for temporary accommodation due to the expense and didn't feel they were fit for purpose. She felt that demand had increased because the Council did not build enough houses that fit within the alternative model. She noted that around 600 houses had been built in Boston Castle but understood that very little of that stock could be used for this clientele. There were lots of factors that contributed to that. She asked if the new Housing Strategy plans ensured this need was accounted for.

A new Housing Strategy was being developed and would be presented to scrutiny and Cabinet next year. It was explained that the majority of the need could be met through straightforward general needs accommodation. Generally, rents needed to be low, which was why social housing was the preference. This was one of the reasons why there had been long standing support for an ambitious housing growth programme in the borough. Many of the Council lettings did go to households who were homeless or were previously homeless but there was a shortage of council housing which led to the temporary accommodation issue. All members were encouraged to support housing growth initiatives within their areas.

There was a small proportion of the caseload whose needs could not be met through traditional general needs council housing. An example would be single males with a history of rough sleeping where those things had been tried previously but not worked. Supported accommodation was needed for those households, and this was a challenging sector due to the

funding issues. The Council was considering that as part of the Housing Strategy what it needed to do but also where did it need to work in partnership with charities and housing associations who already did this in other areas to ensure the right provision was in the right locations.

The routine use of hotels as temporary accommodation needed to be phased out but unfortunately, there would always be a place for the use of hotels as emergency accommodation when people present on the day, because it was not feasible or pragmatic to find a permanent or even semi-permanent property in all cases.

Councillor Yasseen sought assurance that when the policy was implemented that all safeguarding issues were considered when using hotels and that when new housing was developed that the Council was not concentrating on availability in one area over another. Part B of appendix one was a practice guide for officers on risk assessing and managing the impact of hotel and bed and breakfast placements. The policy was introduced as a response to the Council using a lot more temporary accommodation than previously. The Council did not have to have this policy but felt because it was making a lot of placements in temporary accommodation that it was important to have clear, authorised by Cabinet, guidelines and policies around how placement decisions were taken effectively. As part of that process, the Council had realised it had, on occasions, become overly reliant on some hotels. The guidance in Part B provided some guidance, mechanisms, processes, and trigger points for ensuring that was done as safely as possible.

The Council had a statutory duty to accommodate and there were only so many hotels in Rotherham and many of those were in areas already built up with residential accommodation nearby.

Councillor Marshall felt it was a fully comprehensive temporary accommodation policy but queried why delegated authority had been sought to make operational amendments to the policy for a three-year period. The policy was a very operational policy and had been written to provide full transparency on an important area however it included lots of detail and flexibility was needed within that three-year period to make changes in light of pressures and demands and legislative changes. The principles of the policy would not be changed.

Councillor A Carter sought clarification that his understanding that when the Council used temporary accommodation such as crash pads, that a number of them were available and ward members and members of the community got notified in the consultation and acquisition process. He also expressed concerns that recommendation 3 to delegate authority would remove some of the wider democratic accountability. It was suggested that when operational changes had been made that they be submitted to scrutiny for discussion.

The Chair explained that councillors set policy and were responsible for



the budget, that operational issues were for the Strategic Directors, and it was expected that the Strategic Directors would liaise with the Cabinet Members on any major changes.

It was clarified that ward members were not consulted with prior to a decision being taken to aside one of the council properties for use as temporary accommodation. This was because those decisions had to be made quickly along with issues regarding safeguarding and the sharing of information which may not be appropriate. It was acknowledged that the Council had not been transparent enough in the past about where the properties were located and a table had recently been produced, which could be shared with members which set out how many properties were in each ward by bed size. The Assistant Director of Housing made a commitment to share with ward members where those properties were located in terms of how many were in each ward but not the actual addresses.

Upon the vote which included one member voting against and one member abstaining from the vote, the following was resolved:

**Resolved:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board supported the recommendations that Cabinet:

1. Note the increase in homelessness and growing demand for temporary accommodation and the work being undertaken by the Council to respond to this demand.
2. Approve the adoption of the new Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy (Appendix 1).
3. Delegate authority to the Strategic Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health for a 3-year period in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to make operational amendments to the Policy when the need is identified.
4. Note officers' intention to continue to pursue opportunities for a 3-year period to increase the portfolio of Council-owned temporary accommodation to meet service demands, subject to available budget and in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing.

Further actions that arose from discussions were that:

- The Assistant Director of Housing would share information with members regarding the number of temporary accommodation properties located in each ward, but not the actual addresses of those properties.

## **52. HOUSING REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE POLICY**

The Chair invited Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing and James Clarke, Assistant Director for Housing to introduce the report and

noted that the report had also been considered by the members of the Improving Places Select Commission (IPSC). The Cabinet Member for Housing clarified it had been discussed at IPSC where they had set out their approach to delivering the repairs and maintenance service to make sure it met the needs of tenants and leaseholders, along with ensuring that the Council was able to meet its statutory, regulatory and contractual obligations. The report also updated members on work being undertaken to consider the future of the repairs and maintenance service in light of consumer regulations.

Paragraph 2.18 of the report discussed the decorating allowance which was the subject of much discussion at IPSC. As a result of those discussions the Cabinet Member for Housing sought the Board's views on a proposed amendment to that section for Cabinet's consideration at its meeting on 18 November 2024, which would propose that the sums awarded for the decorating allowance be increased in line with the corporate Fees and Charges annually.

The Chair welcomed the proposed amendment, which would be considered during the discussions.

Councillor A Carter noted the number of repairs carried out over the years but queried what key performance indicators (KPI's) were being met with the policy. The Assistant Director for Housing indicated the KPI's could be shared outside of the meeting with members noting that many of them were corporate KPI's as part of the Council Plan. They were reported on quarterly and could be shared. The service had also taken a decision recently to start sharing, on a quarterly basis, on the website, more detailed information about performance across the landlord services. This information in the form of a link would be shared with the Governance Manager to be circulated to members of the Board and he was happy to respond to any additional questions outside of the meeting.

Councillor Yasseen queried if our current contracts supported the Council's goals and was responsive to its needs. It was clarified that this was being considered as part of the work to determine the future repairs and maintenance model. The contracts were performing well on their own terms and assurance was provided that both contractors were performing well against their measures. The questions were, were those the right measures. More of an emphasis was being placed on triaging the repairs adequately in the first instance to ensure those were being prioritised in the right way.

The authority was in a strong position on the responsive repair aspect. When repairs were logged it was good at fixing them and fixing them properly, but the data needed to be considered because if the same things kept breaking again and again, it provided an indication of where investment could be made. The repairs and maintenance service needed to move from not just being good at responding to be more preventative and more predictive.

Councillor Blackham queried on what basis had the existing contracts been extended by. The Council was currently in a position where the regulations around repairs and maintenance were changing but hadn't yet been finalised. The full impacts of Awaab's Law and how that would impact our repairs and maintenance service were not yet known. The new consumer regulation and inspection regime was introduced in April and the whole sector was assessing possible impacts of that. These were extended to allow the Council to ascertain what the requirements would be. The existing contracts were performing well and getting value for money for tenants.

Councillor McKiernan acknowledged that this had been discussed at IPSC and as Chair of that Commission he gave reassurance that a lot of similar questions had been asked during that meeting. He put forward a suggestion that fences be included as part of the household going forward. It was noted that if fences were included in the policy, it would raise the costs of the service.

Councillor McKiernan acknowledged that including maintenance of fences would increase the budget requirements for the service but suggested that current fences could be maintained. It was clarified that the Council would intervene where damaged fences caused a health and safety risk but could not commit to making sure the fencing was of a good standard when a property was re-let. It was confirmed that the maintenance of fences would be considered as part of the repairs and maintenance review.

Councillor A Carter raised concerns that in some instances mould in council properties was seen as a lifestyle choice due to the way people maintained their homes. It was noted that two to three years ago damp and mould weren't reported as they were now but the Council had brought in a damp and mould policy and reassurance was provided that this was now core business for the Council.

Councillor Baggaley sought reassurance the needs of vulnerable tenants were being prioritised. It was clarified that once known, repairs were escalated accordingly. The contact centre used a script when receiving calls, which determines if a repair is urgent or less urgent. Traditionally those questions hadn't been asked and whilst an IT solution was investigated the housing team were looking to update the script to ascertain those needs in the first instance.

Upon a vote, which included the additional recommendation proposed by the Cabinet Member for Housing, the following was resolved:

**Resolved:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board supported the recommendations that Cabinet:

1. Approve the Housing Services Repairs and Maintenance Policy

(Appendix 1).

2. Approve the increase in decoration allowance from £25 to £50 per room, up to a maximum of £350 per property, as proposed in the Housing Services Repairs and Maintenance Policy (Appendix 1).
3. Note the ongoing work to scope the future repairs and maintenance delivery model for Rotherham and agrees to receive a further update on this work in 2025.
4. Approve the Housing Services Gas and Carbon Monoxide Safety Policy (Appendix 2).
5. Approve the Housing Services Electrical Safety Policy (Appendix 3).
6. Delegate authority to the Strategic Director for Adult Care, Housing and Public Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to make amendments to the following housing policies in line with operational, regulatory and legislative demands:
  - Housing Services Repairs and Maintenance Policy
  - Housing Services Gas and Carbon Monoxide Safety Policy
  - Housing Services Electrical Safety Policy
  - Housing Services Fire Safety Policy
  - Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy as it relates to housing assets.
7. That Cabinet supports the proposal that the sums awarded for the decorating allowance be increased in line with the corporate Fees and Charges annually.

Further actions that arose from discussions were that:

- The Assistant Director for Housing would provide the Governance Manager with the link to the published performance information for circulation to members.

### **53. ANNUAL COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS REPORT 2023-24**

The Chair invited Jo Brown, Assistant Chief Executive to introduce this report. She explained that an overview presentation was usually provided with this report to highlight the key trends.

The report set out the annual position on both complaints and compliments for the year ending March 2024. The report included figures on the overall council position and detail by directorate. A training briefing had been circulated to all Councillor post-election as a result of previous feedback. That briefing provided information of how the Council responded to formal complaints, and the differences between the formal complaints process and the things members may see in their surgery

enquiries. Information was also provided in December 2023, on the compensation levels in 2022-23.

New reporting had been developed around financial redress as a result of any upheld complaints, which provided additional reporting through directorates to monitor and ensure appropriate levels of financial redress were maintained.

The presentation highlighted the following:

- It showed the number of complaints received each year between 2019/20 through to 2023/24.
- The lowest number of complaints were seen during 2020-21 when across the country complaints were suppressed due to the Covid 19 pandemic.
- The highest number of complaints received was in 2022/23, 1,397 but this decreased in 2023/24 to 1,212.
- The number of compliments received had a slight decrease in 2020/21 however this increased over each year with 902 compliments being received in 2023/24.
- The comparison between 2022/23 to 2023/24 showed that 185 fewer complaints were received which was a decrease of 13%. 25% of complaints were upheld and this was a decrease on 2022/23 when 32% of complaints were upheld.
- 111 more compliments were received, which was an increase of 14% and it was noted that not all compliments were passed on to the Complaints Team by staff.
- Over the last two years Housing and Regeneration and Environment (R&E) had received the highest number of complaints.
- The largest decrease in the number of complaints received over the last two years was in R&E with a decrease of 27%.
- The second largest decrease in the number of complaints received over the past two years was in Children and Young People's Services (CYPS), with a decrease of 45%.
- Finance and Customer Services also decreased by a percentage of 13%.
- Adult Care services had a percentage increase of 16% with Housing an increase of 1%.
- The Assistant Chief Executives directorate had increased from four to five and Public Health remained unchanged at zero complaints received.
- In terms of performance, 82% of complaints taken through the formal process were responded to within relevant timescales. This was slightly below the Council Plan target of 85%.
- Finance and Customer Services resolved 91% of complaints within timescales.
- CYPS increased the number of complaints resolved in a timely manner up to 89% from 64%.
- Compliments had increased from 791 in 2022/23 to 902 in

2023/24, whilst the number had increase overall, the numbers had not increased across all the main service areas where it was noted that not all compliments may have reached the Complaints Team.

- Within in the first six months of the year 567 complaints had been received with 85% responded to in time and 464 compliments had been received which was an increase compared to the 396 received during the same period.

Councillor Yasseen welcomed the decrease which showed the benefits of investigating complaints. An area of concern was around the response timescales as the target had been missed and it was queried if there was a clear theme where the directorates were missing that target.

The target could have been missed due to the complexity of the complaint, some of which were multifaceted and coordinated across directorates or services to provide a comprehensive response. There were no discernible patterns. Assurance was provided that no manager wanted to respond to things out of time. However, when the target was missed this was sometimes down to the complexity of the complaint or sometimes it was due to issues with the individual. The Complaints Team provided support to managers were needed and had weekly dashboards, and monthly performance report, which monitored this.

Councillor Yasseen noted that sometimes residents contacted their ward members when they had not received a response to their use through other avenues and queried the timescales by which members should received a response in instances such as this.

The Chair noted that council procedures should be followed and if they were not followed then a complaint should be raised.

The Vice-Chair noted that whilst there had been a decrease in the number of complaints, there had been an increase in the number of complaints not being responded to within the correct time limits. It was queried if complaints for this particular year had been more complicated that other years. It was also asked how many staff in that area worked from home? Training had been discussed at last year's meeting and had been mentioned again at this meeting and it was queried when the training would be reviewed to ensure its effectiveness.

The Chair commented that whether the staff were working at home should not make a difference to the performance.

In response it was noted that pressures within services differed month on month so it was acknowledged that, at certain times of the year, services may struggle to pull information together particularly if it was a complex response. It was agreed that processes should be followed, and the Council should be aiming to meet people's expectations wherever possible, to provide timely and quality responses. The complaints process was there for a reason and should be utilised when all other routes had

been exhausted but look to resolve those instances as quickly as possible.

The Council had a Working Location Policy which provided flexibility to staff, but it had always focused on service delivery to residents. Training was continually provided by the Complaints Team, who pushed for high standards in complaints responses, both in quality and timeliness.

In response to a follow-up question by the Vice-Chair it was noted that when a complaint came from the Ombudsman, the Council had done all it could to try to resolve that complaint, but it was noted that even at that point, more could be done to try to engage with the customer to see if there was anything further the Council to do to resolve it. Consideration would be given to how members who put through high numbers of case work relating to customer service complaints could be involved further.

Councillor Blackham felt that it was not just the attitude of our staff that needed to be considered but also the attitude of our providers and contractors as well. The attitude they projected when visiting someone's home was important and related to the quality of service offered. Assurance was provided that regular conversations, including contract management meetings took place, going down to individual complaint level if required. The number of housing complaints raised when compared to peers was lower.

The Vice-Chair asked if in future reports that the Complaints Team would consider how members who put through high numbers of casework relating to customer service complaints could be involved further.

The Chair noted that OSMB was the forum where the complaints report was considered, and it was expected that all officers of the Council would follow policy and procedures. It was suggested that a recommendation that a Member Session be held for all members to consider the complaints report following its consideration by OSMB.

Upon a vote, the following was resolved:

**Resolved:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:

1. Noted the Annual Compliments and Complaints Report for 2023/24.
2. Agreed that a Member Session be held for all members to consider the Annual Complaints and Compliments report following its consideration by OSMB.

#### **54. THE SAFER ROTHERHAM PARTNERSHIP (SRP) ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24**

The Chair noted that Sam Barstow, Assistant Director, Community Safety and Street Scene would answer questions on the Safer Rotherham

Partnership (SRP) Annual Report 2023-24.

Councillor Tinsley asked if there had been any further discussions regarding restorative justice and if there were plans for this to be reintroduced. It was noted there were some formal aspects in terms of reparations where it related to criminal offences and often those powers were only available to the police. The Council did have a number of options available. The report mentioned community payback, which was where the SRP had invested funding to bring more offenders into the borough to deliver some of that reparation work. Another key area of that work was one the Council had chosen to fund itself as part of the budget setting process for that year. The report referred to hate crime in particular. For many years they had been engaging with victims and those impacted by hate crime and the feedback received indicated they wanted to see more restorative justice approaches in relation to hate crime. Short term funding from the partnership was provided to address this as part of a pilot. Following on from that as part of the budget setting process the Council had been able to provide the funding for that service to continue. It was highlighted that wherever those opportunities presented themselves the Council had sought to exploit those along with the partners in the SRP.

Councillor Tinsley noticed the hate crime element and noted there was a lot of migration across Rotherham along with people moving into Rotherham. It was asked if there was anything that could be done more proactively to engage that cohesion locally.

It was noted that cohesion was like an ecosystem, whereby a breakdown in cohesion could lead to community tensions within communities, tensions could lead to hate crimes and much more significant areas of concern. The community safety partnership took care of the later stages of that, in terms of monitoring tensions in communities. It was noted that this was a relevant point on the back of the disorder in Manvers over the summer. The Assistant Chief Executive explained she was leading on a piece of work with partners and council officers to look at some of the things that could be done together, some of the things that were already being done well but that could have the most meaningful impact, which included youth outreach, working with schools to help educate and look to upscale what was done, which involved working closely with the Children and Young People's Services. Another aspect was looking at what could be done with communities and particular groups within communities as well. Community cohesion was at the forefront of the Council to address.

Councillor Marshall queried if safeguards were put in place with outside providers to ensure they were following the same standards and not being people in and exploiting them, regarding modern slavery and human trafficking.

There was a range of actions done in relation to modern slavery. The Council, as an organisation, had an annual statement, which was



produced in relation to modern slavery. A big part of the commitments in relation to that charger and the statement produced annually was that the Council ensured any third parties it worked with, contactors, and suppliers had clear, demonstrable, commitments in terms of how they would tackle and address modern slavery.

Councillor McKiernan, under the protecting vulnerable adults and mental health section, he noted that there was a specialist but asked if more than one person was required for this task.

This section of the report was specifically about a mental health clinical lead being embedded directly with the Safe Enable Service, which was a joint team with the Council and Police, where they were dealing with the more significant, severe cases that were escalated through the normal casework reporting arrangements. That clinical lead was there specifically for cases where there was a community safety, criminal justice aspect. More staff would always be welcomed in this particular area because it would allow delivery of much more intensive provisions, but the Community Safety Partnership and the SRP Board continued to monitor the demand to ensure it could respond if that demand outstripped the level of supply. This was not passing comment in terms of the wider mental health issues.

Councillor McKiernan noted that the report mentioned that interventions by the mental and clinical health were reviewed and improved, could further detail be provided. Further detail would be provided in writing to members of OSMB outside of the meeting, but this was about the referral processes and the actual interventions that that officer delivered.

Upon a vote, the following was resolved:

**Resolved:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board noted the progress of the Safer Rotherham Partnership in tackling crime and disorder in 2023-24 against its key priorities and makes recommendations in relation to the current and future work of the partnership.

Further actions that arose from discussions were that:

- The Assistant Director, Community Safety and Street Scene would provide further information to members of OSMB regarding the section of the report that mentioned that interventions by the mental and clinical health were reviewed and improved, to provide further context.

**55. RESPONSE FROM CABINET 16 SEPTEMBER 2024 TO THE SCRUTINY REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS - REFERRAL FROM COUNCIL TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD (OSMB) - PETITION "ROTHERHAM'S COMMITMENT TO A PERMANENT CEASEFIRE AND TO PROMOTE PEACE IN PALESTINE AND IN THE REGION"**

The Chair invited Councillor Sheppard, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion & Neighbourhood Working to introduce the report. The report outlined that a subgroup of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) met with representatives of the petition prior to the local elections. His thanks to those members of OSMB who were involved in this work were noted.

The recommendations from the subgroup were approved by OSMB on 24 July 2024 and it was noted that consideration of the report was delayed due to the pre-election publicity restrictions in place at that time. Following a request from the Chair of OSMB, Cabinet agreed to amend the usual timescales and process and Cabinet's response to those recommendations was provided alongside the formal receipt at the Cabinet meeting on 16 September 2024.

The response included in the agenda pack included Appendix 1, which was a detailed letter to the Chair of OSMB. Appendix 2 detailed the 13 recommendations, of which five were in progress and eight were completed.

Chair invited questions but highlighted the report was presented for members of OSMB to note it's content.

The Vice-Chair noted that recommendation 1D and 1E along with a couple of others used officer time and resources and queried if a breakdown as to how many hours work would be undertaken to discharge those recommendations and if an estimate as to what the cost to the authority would be. It was noted the information was not available however it was clear that OSMB felt strongly that it needed to be in the recommendations and Cabinet were happy to act on OSMB's responses in that instance.

The Chair reminded members that this was Cabinet's response to the recommendations, and it was understood that a meeting was being arranged with the lead petitioner to discuss the outstanding recommendations.

The vice-Chair reiterated his query regarding how many hours and staffing hours this was going to use and asked if that information could be provided. It was explained that enquiries could be made regarding what the time and cost implications were however the Vice-Chair was referred back to the previous statement whereby it was noted that OSMB had referred the recommendations to Cabinet and Cabinet had accepted them.

The Chair reiterated that the report was presented to be noted. It had gone through the usual processes, had been submitted to Cabinet and Cabinet had provided a written response back to OSMB, it was not about the costs of carrying out those recommendations, which had already been agreed.

Councillor Marshall noted that the target completion date for some actions was 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and sought an update. It was noted that there were some elements of the recommendations that were still in progress, one such element was the meeting with the lead petitioner that was being arranged and would take place within the next few weeks.

Councillor McKiernan noted Action four agreed that the Cabinet spokesperson continued to hold dialogue with petitioners to continue to seek peace in Palestine and the region and sought an update as it did not appear there could be a completion date for that and expand on how that task would be completed. It was explained that this was to ensure there was a continued dialogue with communities in Rotherham and whilst it was not suggested that the Council would be able to have any direct impact, in terms of a resolution of the horrific situation over there, it was important that the Council met with members of it's community, especially those most affected by the current problems over there to ensure the Council was responding wherever it could.

Councillor McKiernan sought clarification if a meeting had been held and what was discussed. It was reiterated that a meeting would be arranged in the next few weeks. As per the recommendations an updated would be provided within six months.

Councillor A Carter felt that the recommendations were not specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) recommendations. Disappointment was expressed that the discussion with the lead petitioners had not taken place to determine how to display the Palestinian flag on 29 November 2024. This was an issue that many residents felt strongly about.

The Chair noted that the Leader had responded to this at Council and Cabinet were speaking with the lead petitioners regarding the flag. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion & Neighbourhood Working noted that there had been lots of ongoing discussions which the Leader had highlighted during the Council meeting. Regarding the point about the recommendations being SMART, it was highlighted that recommendations were received from the subgroup and Cabinet were happy to support them.

Councillor Tinsley noted the recommendation to fly the Palestinian flag and understood from discussions at the Council meeting that there may be an event at the same time. Were those discussions taking place with the lead petitioner to ensure everything was in place. It was clarified that discussions were still taking place with the group to understand their requests and the decision had been taken to fly the flag.

Upon a vote the following was resolved:

**Resolved:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:

- 1) Noted the Cabinet response to the petition as outlined in Appendix 1.
- 2) Noted the progress made in discharging those recommendations requiring action, as outlined in Appendix 2.
- 3) Agreed that progress on discharging any outstanding actions arising from its recommendations be reported to OSMB in six months.

## 56. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair of OSMB and the Governance Manager met with the Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, the Chair of the Planning Board and planning officers, to discuss the process of planning enforcement. The Chair advised that was assured that the correct planning enforcement process was followed. The service provided statistics to the Planning Board on a six-monthly basis, it was agreed that the statistics would be provided to all elected members, to ensure an awareness and understanding of the planning enforcement process.

Concerning the potential spotlight review on 'Grass Cuttings and Grounds Maintenance', the Governance Manager was in discussions with relevant officers, to arrange the spotlight review.

**Resolved:** - That the Work Programme for 2024/2025 be approved.

## 57. WORK IN PROGRESS - SELECT COMMISSIONS

The Chair of the Improving Places Select Commission, (IPSC), noted that the Repairs and Maintenance Policy had been discussed at the previous IPSC meeting. The Chair welcomed in inclusion of a couple of members of the IPSC to join the proposed review on Grass Cutting / Grounds Maintenance.

The Vice-Chair of IPSC would be chairing a review into the School Road Safety motion. The other two workshops were on housing matters and the Chair would be contacting members to seek additional participants for those. The Chair welcomed suggestions for topics for future scrutiny.

The Vice-Chair of the Improving Lives Select Commission advised that the Commission had participated in an additional session led by the Head of Service for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), to capture feedback as part of the consultation process for the development of the new SEND Strategy. The session was well attended, and members provided detailed feedback on the proposed strategy. A further update on the proposed strategy, including a summary of the consultation phase and proposed amendments would be presented to the Commission in December.

The Vice-Chair noted that the Commission met on the 29 October and

were presented with the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report and the Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report. South Yorkshire Police, the Integrated Care Board and the Rotherham Hospital Foundation Trust were all in attendance and provided a partnership approach to questions raised by members.

The Vice-Chair informed OSMB that the next meeting of the Improving Lives Select Commission would consider an update from Childrens and Young People's Services on all types of absences from education including elective home education, Children missing education, education other than at School, persistent and severe absence and exclusions. Absences from education had been a focus of the Commission previously and the upcoming meeting could identify areas for potential review work.

**58. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS - 1 NOVEMBER 2024 - 31 JANUARY 2025**

The Board considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions 1 November 2024 – 31 January 2025.

The Vice-Chair of the Improving Places Select Commission (IPSC) sought a briefing to provide further information regarding the Our Places Fund.

The Chair suggested that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the IPSC could take this forward for consideration on their work programme.

**Resolved:** - That the Forward Plan be noted.

**59. CALL-IN ISSUES**

There were no call-in issues.

**60. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no urgent items.