

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**  
**Tuesday 13 January 2026**

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Allen, Baggaley, Blackham, Brent, A. Carter, Keenan, McKiernan, Monk, Tinsley and Yasseen.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Bacon.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

**80. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 10 DECEMBER 2025**

**Resolved:** - That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 10 December 2025 be approved as a true record.

**81. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

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

No questions were received.

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

There were no reasons to exclude the press or public.

**84. COUNCIL PLAN AND YEAR AHEAD DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Read, the Leader of the Council (Leader) introduced the report, explaining that it was the six-monthly update on progress on the Council Plan and Year Ahead Delivery Plan.

The Leader set out the following headline points from the report:

- Of the 89 Action Points set out in the Year Ahead Delivery Plan, a quarter of those (21) had been completed, with 27% being delayed.
- A reduced number of performance measures had been set out (27), and 20 of these were on target.

**Council Plan Themes**

**Places are thriving, safe and clean**

- The Street Safe Team had been launched, and the second part of recruitment had been commenced, with 9 out of 10 posts filled. Regular patrols of Wath, Dinnington, Swinton and Maltby had

started taking place.

- The Roadside Cleaning Team had been in place since October.
- Construction on the Riverside Garden/Corporation Street public realm works had been underway since May 2025.
- There had been delays to a private sector town centre housing development due to a complicated procurement process. That process had now concluded and tenders were being scored.
- Work on the flood alleviation scheme at Whiston Brook was on target and due to be commenced within the next few weeks but there had been delays in progressing schemes at Eel Mires Dike in Laughton Common and Kilnhurst. The Eel Mires Dike scheme had experienced challenges with access to land and additional funding would be required. The Kilnhurst scheme would also require additional funding, but the Leader confirmed that the Council remains committed to see these projects through to delivery.

#### **An economy that works for everyone**

- The economic inactivity trailblazer/Pathways to Work scheme was up and running and the Social Value Action Plan had been completed.
- The Templeborough Business Zone Scheme, which was a government funded scheme, had been a longer process than expected to due to complications regarding land owned by Magna. The Leader was hopeful that sign-off stage on this scheme would be reached shortly.

#### **Children and young people achieve**

- The refurbished water splash park at Clifton Park had been reopened over the summer.
- Building work at the new SEND Hub at the Eric Mann's building was almost complete. The Rotherham Parents and Carers Forum had started to move in and offer activities from this building.
- Progress on implementing Independent Travel Training for children was off target due to staffing issues at the end of 2025, but the Leader confirmed that those posts were now filled.
- The commitment to the provisions of more Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) had experienced challenges due to the Football Federation delaying their funding round. Alternative sources of funding were being explored.

#### **Residents live well**

- The specialised support service for people who had attempted suicide had been delivered.
- Groundworks on new council homes at West Melton and Maltby

were underway.

- There were delays to the Rothercare analogue to digital switchover.
- The roll-out of Strengths Based Working training had been partly delayed by the vacancy in the former post of Assistant Chief Executive. Work was underway with HR to improve recruitment processes, and an advert had gone out to recruit for a permanent Head of Organisational Development (OD).

John Edwards, the Chief Executive, offered his support to the Leader's summary and acknowledged the significant work that had been conducted by colleagues across the Council in delivering the Council Plan and in recognising those areas which required continued focus.

The Leader and the Chair invited members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) to raise questions and queries on the points raised.

Councillor Blackham asked for an update on the Dinnington Market Scheme. The Leader explained that the compulsory purchase order that had been necessary to acquire the burnt-out buildings was complete and the Council was moving towards demolition within the next few weeks. Andrew Bramidge, Executive Director of Regeneration & Environment, confirmed that the Council was in the final stages of a tender process for a contractor to conduct the works. An open day had been held for local residents just before Christmas, to provide information.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Blackham asked if there was an estimated completion date for the project? The Executive Director of Regeneration & Environment stated that the project was expected to be a two-year programme, with completion anticipated in early 2028.

Councillor Monk enquired why the Family Hub sign up rate had dropped quite significantly during Q2 and whether information was available as to which wards were particularly struggling to meet these figures. Councillor Monk also asked for more information on what work had been done by midwives and health teams and how capacity within those teams had been managed.

In response, the Leader commented that there was an annual pattern where sign up to Family Hubs increased at certain times of the year and then dropped. There was no obvious reason for this, but the Leader provided reassurance that the sign-up level of 80% was good compared to other local authorities. The Leader pointed out that there would also be a number of families who were accessing services but were not necessarily registered with Family Hubs. Discussions were ongoing as to whether registration to Family Hubs should be mandatory, or whether this could potentially put people off.

Nicola Curley, the Executive Director of Children & Young People's Services, acknowledged that Family Hub sign up was an ongoing issue and that there was a demographic difference in sign up which was being actively investigated. Service did have some in-roads into those communities within the borough that were less likely to take up the Family Hub offer and would continue to work with these. It was suggested that the problem areas may be those that were further away from the physical Hub buildings but there were outreach services in place for residents that found it more difficult to get to a centre.

The Executive Director of Children & Young People's Services also pointed out the Council was very successful in take-up of places at Nursery and Early Years settings and sometimes, parents would choose one over the other. The Family Hub Programme had received an additional year's funding, which was coming to an end in March 2026. There would be an end of programme report to Cabinet in March and then there would be ongoing permanent funding for a new programme going forward. Within this new programme, service would try and notice registration issues. The target was set at a very high level, and the Council was doing well, but would like to do better.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Monk asked if any detail could be provided on what work with midwifery services looked like. The Executive Director of Children & Young People's Services commented that they would obtain this information from colleagues in Public Health and would provide it to OSMB outside of the meeting.

Councillor McKiernan asked for more information on the reported quality assurance issues with regard to the Housing Stock Condition Surveys. Would the surveys that had already been completed have to be redone and what knock-on effect would this have to the whole process?

In response, the Leader explained that the Council had stopped conducting full stock condition surveys of council housing around 10 years ago. It was now clear that the Housing Regulator expected local authority housing providers to carry out a full set of stock condition surveys so over the last year, service had increased capacity to carry these out by taking on some additional in-house staff and commissioning an external contractor to assist. There had been a period of "bedding in" with staff and contractors to ensure that the quality of the surveys conducted was sufficient in order to progress the necessary repairs and maintenance activity. That had in turn, led to some delays on delivery. Conversations were ongoing between service, and the contractor and the Council was looking at creating some more in-house capacity to get the process back on target.

In a supplementary question, Councillor McKiernan asked whether the current information that the Housing team had could be relied upon due to the quality issues. The Leader clarified that the surveys that had been completed in the last 12 months were of sufficient quality, but that the

Council did not yet have completed surveys for the remainder of its council housing stock. There was, however, was a lot of other information available, such as gas and electrical safety inspections, which would provide useful information about that stock.

Councillor Tinsley asked about the proposed Rothercare analogue to digital changeover and whether tenants who were due the changeover were being prioritised in terms of need. Ian Spicer, Executive Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health, explained that the key reason why service was behind target for Q3 on this changeover was because the national provider that the Council had contracted with went into liquidation. The Council had used some of its own staff and contracts with Medequip and other providers to make progress on catching up. It was hoped that the changeover would be completed by the end of February 2026, pending any particular access issues to properties. National switchover was due to take place in January 2027, so the Council was ahead of that deadline. All new customers on Rothercare were part of a new roll-out and anyone who urgently required new equipment would be prioritised.

The Leader further commented that there were only two national providers of digital telecare and in this period of time where the whole country needed to switch over before the national deadline, one of them had gone out of business, which had created huge challenges.

Councillor Yasseen commented on the change of structure of the Council Plan report and felt that it was overall lighter on outcomes and that the measures were different to what had been used previously.

The Leader confirmed that the measures had been changed, following feedback from OSMB earlier in the year, and the number of outcomes had been reduced. When the new Council Plan had been brought to OSMB a few months ago, there was discussion about having a tighter set of measures, with longer-term measures expanded upon within the narrative of the report. The structure of the report was the same as previously but there had been the addition of the Appendix 2 summary, which had been requested by OSMB.

In a follow up question, Councillor Yasseen commented that throughout the report, there were a number of areas where targets had not been met due to a lack of senior officers being in post and questioned whether this lack of recruitment of senior officers was a concern. Could the wider teams in place still deliver on the actions without a strategic leader in place?

In response, the Leader explained that in areas where there was a Head of Service in place (such as Neighbourhoods), that Head of Service could not be expected to lead on a strategic plan whilst there was no Executive Director in post. The Leader assured members that in such situations, the work of the wider team would continue as normal but under caretaker

management. In the absence of a strategic lead, plans would be delayed until someone was in place to take that work forward. The Leader and the Chief Executive would be interviewing candidates for an interim post for the former Assistant Chief Executive's role (now Executive Director or Policy, Strategy and Engagement) and would hope to have someone appointed shortly, pending permanent recruitment.

Councillor Steele asked why the rate of new admissions to residential care homes for older people was significantly over the Better Care Fund (BCF) official target for Q2 and whether this was likely to be an emerging upward trend or were there specific pressures at the current time that had led to this increase?

In response, the Executive Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health explained that there was an anomaly each year where decisions and pay processes take a while to get onto systems. Last year, service did not reach target but was very close to it and it was hoped that service would be closer to target in this area by the end of the year. There was an increasing demand for adult care, and residential care in particular. People were living longer but with more need, acuity and complexity so challenges would remain in providing the required levels of care and support. Service would continue to work on providing community alternatives to care to enable people to live full lives.

Councillor A Carter asked a question in relation to the delays in recruitment discussed earlier. What impact did these delays have on the cost and delivery of services day to day versus the cost savings from not having these senior leaders in post?

The Leader explained that with regard to the vacant former Assistant Chief Executive's post, the new Chief Executive had wished to take some time to assess the best way for services to be organised going forward. A Staffing Committee meeting had been held in December, and the subsequent report would be presented at Full Council. Some deliberate changes were being made but members should not confuse that with a cost saving exercise, which was not the case in this instance. The ongoing vacancy in this post had allowed a reassessment of longer-term goals in this area of the Council and whether strategic leadership was focused on the right areas. Day to day services had not been negatively impacted by this vacancy.

The Chief Executive emphasised that any negative impact on service delivery had been avoided during this period due to excellent temporary leadership by colleagues. Following discussions with the Leader, the Chief Executive felt it was appropriate to focus work in this area on policy, strategy and engagement and had therefore reworked the post to reflect that, whilst moving the OD and HR functions to sit under the new combined Corporate Services Directorate. The Chief Executive explained that a key goal of this reorganisation was to make the most of available data and information about the borough in order to focus policy approach

and strategic implementation on the areas that could have the most impact.

In a follow-on question, the Chair asked how the Chief Executive viewed engagement with the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) working as policies changed and developed? The Chief Executive commented that there was a lot of engagement with SYMCA at a number of levels across the Council. Continuing with this engagement would be significant going forward as national policies continued to develop regarding devolution to the Mayoral Combined Authorities. It was important that part of the new Executive Director of Policy, Strategy and Engagement role focused on engagement with SYMCA and with partnerships across the borough.

Councillor Yasseen returned to her earlier question regarding the change of reporting structure in respect of the Council Plan and compared this report to the position on the previous Council Plan at Q4. In the previous Council Plan, there had been 68 performance indicators with 54% on target. In this report, there were 27 indicators with 74% on target. Councillor Yasseen questioned whether the reduced number of measures withing this report provided a clear enough overview of where improvements were needed. The Leader reminded members that the LGA peer review which had taken place a couple of years previously had also challenged the Council to measure itself on outcomes rather than outputs. As a result, the Council had tried to have a smaller set of measures which are more closely related to what the Council can actually influence.

In an additional question, Councillor Yasseen asked why the recycling performance target of 45% had not been changed. Part of the reason why the Council was performing well in recycling was because the figures included household recycling, kerbside recycling and recycling at household waste centres, which had not been included before. The Leader, supported by the Executive Director of Regeneration & Environment, confirmed that the inclusion of the recycling at household waste centres was due to a national reporting requirement as the government did not make a distinction between the different methods of recycling. Performance was measured against all items of waste that get recycled within the borough.

Councillor Allen asked, with regard to the newly implemented Street Safe Team, whether some of the “examples of tangible results” referred to at page 54 the agenda pack could provide. In response, the Leader commented that whilst it was still early days, the impact of the support could already been seen, for example, support had been provided to: South Yorkshire Police, with an arrest in the town centre; a victim of domestic violence who was taken to a place of safety; and a rough sleeper who was directed to support from Housing Services. There was already strong evidence of the practical support that the Street Safe Team were providing, and the Council would think of the best way to report on this.

In a further question, Councillor Allen referred back to the structure of the Council Plan and commented that it had been previously requested that a more easily consumable, public version of the Council Plan was produced. Councillor Allen enquired whether work was underway to make this available.

In response, the Leader confirmed that work on a simpler, leaflet-style version of the Council Plan was ongoing. The Communications team was also picking out bite-sized nuggets of information that could be shared on social media.

Councillor Steele asked a question regarding the response times to calls to the call centre and complaints. An increase in calls regarding garden waste could have been anticipated so why had no additional resource been provided to deal with this? The Leader commented that the majority of complaints were not about the choice to cancel the collection of garden waste but more about the patchy service leading up to this, which had led to the increase in calls. The Leader expressed the opinion that service could not have anticipated this and increased resource accordingly. Service priority had been on increasing staffing resource to complete collections. The performance level in responding to complaints was good given the level of the increase. There was more of a challenge currently with Housing Services responding to complaints in a timely way, but work was ongoing to ensure that the response time to Housing complaints was improved.

Councillor McKiernan asked for further information on the issues with Northern Powergrid that are referred to throughout the report. The Executive Director of Regeneration & Environment commented that delays due to issues with utilities companies were commonplace across regeneration activity. For example, the redevelopment of the café at Rother Valley Country Park had been completed but the opening had been delayed due to delays with Northern Powergrid connecting the substation. Utility companies often did not work to the same timescales as local councils and this, unfortunately, was a factor out of the Council's control.

In a supplementary question, Councillor McKiernan asked whether the Council was communicating effectively with utilities companies that these delays were causing the Council significant problems? The Executive Director of Regeneration & Environment confirmed that there was an ongoing dialogue but that utilities companies experienced pressures from across the region, not just from Rotherham MBC.

Councillor Keenan asked whether the reported contract management issues for drugs and alcohol rehabilitation had been resolved? The Executive Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health expressed disappointment that numbers in this regard were not where they were anticipated to be and confirmed that the issues were being addressed via

ongoing discussions with the contractor for the drugs and alcohol service. It was hoped that more people would come forward to be prepared to go into residential placement for rehabilitation in due course.

The Chair thanked the Leader and officers for their input and responses.

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

1. Note the overall position in relation to the Year Ahead Delivery Plan activities;
2. Note the Quarter 2 data for the Council Plan performance measures; and
3. Note that a progress report covering the remainder of the year will be presented to Cabinet in July 2026.

## 85. **QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

The Chair invited members to ask questions of the Leader relating to matters within his portfolio. The Leader explained that the kind of issues covered in the previous Council Plan item on the agenda made up a large part of their portfolio. The Leader explained that they also held responsibility for overall governance processes within the Council and would lead on communications, social value and inclusive economy activity. In addition, the Leader continued to sit as a member of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) board, which was a fast-changing environment.

In response to a question from Councillor Yasseen, the Head of Democratic Services provided members with a brief summary of other areas within the Leader's portfolio, as follows: - Customer Services; Democratic Services; community cohesion; responsibility for social value through corporate commissioning and procurement strategies and implementation, including Community Wealth Building; Household Support Fund and other local welfare assistance schemes, including the Food for People and Crisis Partnership, crisis loan schemes and development of the social supermarket; and advocacy and appeals.

Councillor Yasseen went on to ask a question of the Leader around the decision to rename to the former Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy to the Inclusion Strategy. In Councillor Yasseen's view, this marked a noticeable shift in how the Council was approaching its defined legal duties towards equality.

In response, the Leader asked Councillor Yasseen to wait and see what the new draft Inclusion Strategy looked like when it came to OSMB, as it still contained everything members would expect it to cover. The Leader

further explained that the Equalities Assessment through the Local Government Association (LGA) had changed its objectives and as the Council aimed to achieve “Gold” standard in this, some of the changes to in terminology within the draft Inclusion Strategy reflected this. The Leader also confirmed that responsibility for the Inclusion Strategy sat with Councillor Alam, who would present that report when it came to OSMB.

In a further question around community cohesion, Councillor Yasseen commended the strong key performance indicators and positive work that had been carried out to address and tackle hate-related incidents and crimes in the borough. Councillor Yasseen welcomed the range of activity and engagement with young people but asked the Leader what outcomes were anticipated as a result of this important work to try and keep communities together?

The Leader agreed that community cohesion was of great importance and was an area where the Council had statutory duties. However, the local council was not the main factor that influenced whether or not communities pulled together and currently, national and international trends demonstrated that other concerning factors were pulling communities apart. The Leader commented that as a measure of success, the Council would want to see less hate-related crimes being reported. There was an annual survey carried out where Rotherham residents were able to comment on how they felt people from other backgrounds got on with each other. The Leader was proud that this measure had improved year on year but expressed some concern that this trend may not continue in the current climate where certain far right influences were trying to create division. The Council would direct the relevant resource to intervene when it was able to and would look to drive neighbourhood activity towards promoting community cohesion. The Leader expressed a desire to drive forward a narrative about how to share and confront challenges collectively rather than being driven further apart.

Cllr Allen asked the Leader what the top 3 things they wanted to lead the Council to achieve in the upcoming year were. In response, the Leader highlighted the following:

- 1) Delivering on a number of large regeneration schemes. The Leader was proud of the significant amount of funding that had been secured for regeneration projects within the borough but was acutely aware that the burden of delivery of these projects now sat with the Council as it entered the delivery phase.
- 2) Housing Services and turning the corner on long-term decline of council housing. The Leader commented that the current government had introduced positive changes that had enabled more support for local councils in maintaining direct affordable council housing; and
- 3) Moving out of austerity, how could the Council put itself back into communities in a meaningful way? The Council supported

residents, businesses and communities but the Leader commented that residents did not always see the benefit of the council services that they used. The Leader expressed a desire to correct the current disconnect between the important work done by public servants and the tangible benefits that residents felt from this work.

Councillor McKiernan raised a question around communications and a recent article that had been published in The Sun newspaper concerning a matter within his ward. A council officer had been quoted in this article, but Councillor McKiernan had not been warned about it. Councillor McKiernan requested that in future, communications were improved and ward members informed if a ward issue was due to be reported in a national newspaper.

In response, the Leader accepted that this was a fair challenge and confirmed that systems could be put in place to advise members of any press coverage in their wards before publication. The Leader commented that it was common for national newspapers to approach local councils for a brief "right to reply" on an issue and then use that out of context or within a much wider report, citing the recent instance Councillor McKiernan referred to regarding HMOs in Masbrough and an article over the summer regarding the number of Rothercard holders with asylum seeker status. The Leader commented that the Council cannot control how the national press chooses to report on information given to them. The current Communications team at the Council had been reduced and faced challenges with capacity and the Leader reflected that that the issue of future resourcing in this area might have to be considered.

The Chair thanked the Leader for their time in answering Members' questions.

## **86. NOVEMBER 2025-26 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT**

At the Chair's invitation Councillor Alam OBE, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety, introduced the report, which presented the Council's financial position at the end of November 2025 and the forecast for the remainder of the financial year, based on actual costs and income for the first eight months.

As of November 2025, the forecast overspend stood at £3.4m, comprising of an £8.7m direct overspend offset by a £5.3m underspend in central services. The overspend was largely driven by placement pressures in Children's Services, rising costs of adult social care packages, and backdated payments for Older People and Physical and Sensory Disabilities. Market price increases above inflation also contributed to budget pressures. These challenges were consistent with those faced by councils across the UK.

The Council continued to face significant pressures in funding social care and responding to rising demand. Traded services continued to perform

well. The forecast position was being closely monitored, and it was noted that, even with mitigation, reserves might be required to achieve a balanced outturn for 2025/26. The financial impact would be reflected in future monitoring reports to Cabinet.

The Service Director of Financial Services, Rob Mahon explained that this time of year could be challenging due to scrutiny presentations. It was noted that this report related specifically to financial monitoring, and that issues concerning the budget and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) would be addressed in the next presentation.

The Chair invited members of OSMB to raise questions and queries.

A question was raised by Councillor Allen regarding CYPS placements in relation to paragraphs 2.7 and 2.9.2 of the report. Paragraph 2.7 noted a reduction of 120 placements following the review, while paragraph 2.9.2 reported a £5.7m overspend on children in care placements, mainly due to increased use of external residential children's homes. Clarification was sought on whether the recent overspend formed part of the cumulative reduction identified in the review, or whether it occurred after the review. A further question asked whether this trend was likely to continue.

The Service Director of Financial Services explained that the savings delivery assessment reflected the long-standing work to review CYPS placements. The original savings were driven by reducing the number of children in care and improving the placement mix, including reducing external residential placements and increasing both in-house foster carers and kinship care options.

The review had resulted in a reduction of 120 placements over the period, as referenced in the report. However, the CYPS placement position remained fluid and subject to monthly fluctuation. A spike in looked-after children numbers occurred over the summer but had since reduced.

It was noted that ongoing challenges remained, particularly the continued reliance on external residential placements. Progress on developing in-house residential provision was expected to help reduce external placements over time. Work also continued to strengthen in-house fostering and kinship care to reduce demand for high-cost external placements.

It was confirmed that, based on the assessment, the CYPS savings set out in 2019/20 had been delivered, and this was also referenced in the MTFS presentation.

Councillor Baggaley raised a question regarding the CYPS savings position. It was noted that previous reports had shown a variance to the planned savings, and clarification was sought on whether the savings had genuinely been achieved. It was queried whether the savings arose from a real monetary reduction or simply from the fall in placement numbers

over time. It was observed that the budget line itself appeared unchanged, and therefore the reduction in placements, rather than budget adjustments, seemed to be driving the reported improvement.

It was confirmed that the question was valid and had been discussed several times in the forum. The Service Director of Financial Services explained that while year-on-year financial monitoring reports did not always clearly show the trend, the wider budget reports demonstrated a consistent reduction in the CYPS placements budget from 2019/20 to the current financial year. The associated savings had therefore been removed from the CYPS budget over time. The original aim had been to reduce placement numbers by 120, and this had been achieved. Had those 120 placements still been required, the Council would have been spending at least £10m more per year in the current and future financial years.

The Service Director of Financial Services noted the inherent volatility of CYPS placements: reductions of £2-3m could be achieved through lower looked-after-children numbers, but a single new high-cost placement could cost close to £2m and dramatically alter the position. Such events had occurred in recent years. A functional assessment of the 120 reduced placements, based on typical placement costs, indicated that the intended savings had been delivered. The Service Director of Financial Services expressed confidence that it was now the appropriate time to recognise the savings as fully achieved.

A question was raised about the rising costs of placements, noting that where the Council relied on profit-making providers, it was unlikely those organisations would accept reduced profit margins. It was observed that as placement numbers reduced, the unit cost per placement tended to increase, which could limit the level of savings achievable.

Councillor Monk went on to ask whether any commissioning work was underway to prioritise not-for-profit providers, or those able to demonstrate reinvestment rather than shareholder returns, and whether any action beyond standard mitigations was being pursued to address these pressures.

It was noted that no specific work had been undertaken to target not-for-profit agencies within CYPS commissioning. The Service Director of Financial Services explained that a key challenge in residential placements was the increasingly complex needs of children, which often required the capacity, specialist skills and scale offered by larger providers, many of whom operated on a for-profit basis. The Service Director of Financial Services agreed to take the issue back to CYPS for further discussion and to explore whether procurement could consider approaches to increase the use of not-for-profit providers, though it was acknowledged that this may present practical challenges.

A question was raised by Councillor Baggaley regarding the Treasury

Management savings. While the continued delivery of savings was welcomed, clarification was sought on how much of the reported position was due to delays in capital projects, resulting in later borrowing requirements being pushed into future years, versus how much was attributable to proactive treasury activity such as interest rate management. It was indicated that this distinction would be helpful for future reporting.

The Service Director of Financial Services explained that the majority of Treasury Management savings had been achieved through the strategic approach of minimising the need to borrow by reducing cash balances and relying on short-term borrowing to secure lower interest rates. This approach generated most of the savings reported.

It was confirmed that some savings were also the result of delays in delivering the capital programme, which reduced borrowing requirements in-year. However, once those capital schemes progressed, the associated borrowing would eventually be required. To mitigate this risk, provision for borrowing costs had already been built into the revenue budget and MTFs at the point the capital investment was approved, ensuring funding was in place when borrowing occurred.

The Service Director of Financial Services acknowledged that interest rate assumptions had to be monitored closely, as delays could expose the Council to changes in rates. This risk was managed continuously, and any significant concerns would be reflected in future MTFs proposals.

Councillor Brent asked about the Wath Library project. The Year Plan had stated that demolition was due to start in December; however, the current papers reported slippage and indicated the project was on hold. Clarification was sought on how these positions were consistent and what had changed since the Year Plan was agreed.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment clarified that demolition had originally been expected to begin in December. This had slipped slightly, and the start date was now anticipated for the end of the month. The delay was due to ongoing negotiations between the contractor and the Council's parking team regarding the positioning of site boarding around the former library building. Officers confirmed that the project was not on hold.

The Chair queried the increasing overspend and questioned whether any additional measures had been introduced to reduce it rather than relying on the use of reserves. The Service Director of Financial Services reported that discussions had taken place with Executive Directors, the Chief Executive and SLT regarding the current financial position and options for managing pressures in the final quarter of the year. Although the Council had not introduced formal or strict controls such as direct service cuts or enforced spending restrictions, Executive Directors had been asked to apply strengthened decision-making around recruitment,

non-essential expenditure and the use of grants.

It was explained that several grants received during the year could be used either for new activity or to support existing work currently funded from the General Fund. Where appropriate, re-aligning these grants offered an opportunity to mitigate the forecast overspend. It was hoped that these measures would improve the position in the final quarter and reduce the potential call on reserves. It was noted that the Council's previous financial performance supported confidence in achieving this.

Councillor Yasseen reflected on the long-standing demand pressures within key services and noted that overspends had increasingly arisen in areas such as Adult Social Care and Home-to-School Transport. It was observed that the current system relied heavily on responding to rising demand, and that preventative approaches across the public sector had been difficult to deliver at scale.

It was highlighted that prevention required sustained partnership with residents and communities. Reference was made to council plan activity on independent travel, noting that Home-to-School Transport continued to show a £9.4m overspend. Councillor Yasseen queried progress on work to support greater independence for young people where appropriate and suggested that more radical approaches to reducing future demand might be required.

Concerns were also raised about wider demand trends, including the number of children identified with SEND compared to regional benchmarks, and whether support models could be developed that strengthened family and community-based solutions. Councillor Yasseen noted that some families had previously expressed willingness to explore lower-cost, more flexible transport options if supported. These comments were framed as part of a broader reflection on long-term sustainability, recognising that the matter extended beyond finance and into cross-council and partnership planning.

The Leader noted that the issues raised linked closely to national developments in SEND policy and home-to-school transport pressures. It was emphasised that the Council did not assign SEND status to children; eligibility was determined through an independent statutory process.

Significant work had taken place over several years, led by Children's Services, to address home-to-school transport pressures. Independent travel training had been expanded, supported by additional investment, and continued to benefit some young people. However, it was recognised that families often had concerns about moving away from guaranteed transport provision, particularly where children had complex needs. While family-arranged transport payments were already offered and could generate savings, the Council was open to considering further examples where this approach might work.

The Leader highlighted that demand pressures in SEND and home-to-school transport were being felt nationally. The challenge of balancing increased specialist provision, maintaining capacity in mainstream schools and managing the transport costs arising from these pressures was recognised. The Council's position was noted to be similar to that of comparable authorities, with examples referenced of other councils facing significant cost increases. It was confirmed that local work continued to push the system in a more sustainable direction despite the wider pressures.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the comments about long-term demand pressures, particularly within Adult Social Care, and noted the challenges associated with an ageing population. It was reported that the Council was participating in the national Neighbourhood Health Pilot, led by health partners and delivered across 42 areas nationally. The local focus was on long-term conditions and complex frailty, which often drove higher care costs.

The pilot aimed to improve understanding of how primary care, community support and adult social care could work more effectively together to promote independence and reduce reliance on statutory services. Learning from the pilot would feed into national evaluation and support the development of more sustainable approaches to managing demand.

The Chief Executive emphasised that, as with SEND and independent travel training, there was no single solution. Instead, a range of interventions would be required to support residents to live independently, reduce long-term pressures and help prevent health needs from escalating into higher-cost social care later in life.

Councillor A Carter noted that the CYPS overspend position felt repetitive year-on-year and recalled that the previous financial monitoring report to OSMB had indicated a much smaller overspend, which was expected to be reduced to approximately £0.5m by year-end. The escalation to a £9m overspend was a significant variance, and concern was expressed that this suggested insufficient planning for the demand pressures that had been evident for several years.

Councillor A Carter went on to ask what measures the Council intended to take to ensure a more realistic and transparent position in the next financial year. Questions were also raised about the potential impact of the current overspend on other projects and programmes, and what may be deprioritised as a result. A further query was made regarding the impact of reduced business rates income arising from the recent steelworks closure within the borough, and how far this had contributed to the current budget pressures.

The Executive Director of Corporate Services did not agree that the CYPS position reflected a lack of planning. It was explained that the children's

budget had reduced year-on-year, and significant work had been undertaken to provide assurance that historic savings actions had been delivered. The data had been re-examined in detail to distinguish between the savings originally required and the separate, ongoing budget pressures caused by the complexity and cost of placements. It was noted that, without the actions taken since 2019/20, CYPS would have been spending around £10m more per year. The Executive Director went on to emphasise that children were placed according to need, not cost, and some placements, particularly where intensive staffing was required, remained very expensive. The development of an in-house residential provision was helping to reduce costs where possible, but the service continued to face significant challenges due to the volatility and complexity of demand.

In relation to Adult Social Care, it was stated that the overspend did not indicate poor management but reflected unavoidable demand pressures, inflation in the care market and limited provider options. Work continued between services and finance teams to set budgets as accurately as possible while maintaining oversight and challenge.

The Executive Director of Corporate Services confirmed that the forthcoming MTFs report would set out the baseline adjustments and further work undertaken to establish realistic budget levels for the next financial year. It was also noted that the scale of the budgets involved, over £100m, needed to be taken into account when considering the size of variances. The Executive Director concluded that the earlier comments regarding demand pressures and inflation also addressed the point raised about the impact of business rates reductions.

It was confirmed by the Service Director of Financial Services that the loss of business rates from Speciality Steel had not affected the 2025/26 financial position. Under the business rates system, the Council forecasted expected income for the relevant financial year, and any surplus or deficit was adjusted through the Collection Fund in future years. The Collection Fund operated similarly to a reserve, allowing the impact of changes in business rates income to be managed over time. They went on to note that, following the company entering liquidation in the summer, the liquidator had continued to pay the business rates for the remainder of the financial year while they remained in occupation. As a result, the Council continued to receive business rates income from the site.

Councillor A Carter commented that some of the financial explanations given appeared understandable from a finance perspective but did not fully reflect the operational complexities faced within frontline services. They suggested that Executive Directors and Cabinet Members responsible for significantly overspending services should be invited to a future OSMB meeting to discuss the challenges in greater detail.

The Chair advised that these matters would be addressed in the following

month's budget scrutiny session when the Executive Directors and Cabinet Members would present their proposals to the Board. Members would have the opportunity at that meeting to raise questions directly with the relevant service leads.

The Chair noted that information as to whether any work was done by CYPS to look to commission services from not-for-profit organisations (which may help in mitigating the impact of constant price increases from private sector providers) would be provided.

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

1. Note the current General Fund Revenue Budget forecast overspend of £3.4m;
2. Note the projected overspend and that whilst the Council aims to manage this pressure, should that not be possible, use of reserves will be required to balance the 2025/26 financial position;
3. Note the updated position of the Capital Programme; and
4. Approve the capital budget variations as detailed in section 2.17 of the report.

Further actions that arose from discussions were that:

- Information as to whether any work is done by CYPS to look to commission services from not-for-profit organisations (which may help in mitigating the impact of constant price increases from private sector providers) would be provided.

## 87. MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Alam, Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety and the Service Director of Financial Services introduced the item, explaining that the presentation would provide members with an update since the last report to Cabinet on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in November 2025.

The key financial pressures currently faced by the Council were as follows:

- Placement pressures in social care, due to the complexity of care, market inflation and rising demand for services.
- Numbers of SEND children were rising year on year, which added pressure to home to school transport services.

These particular financial pressures reflected the national picture and were not unique to Rotherham and when looked at in comparison to neighbouring local authorities, Rotherham was performing well in these areas.

- The waste management optimisation programme had proved challenging but was not forecast to create a pressure in the financial year 2026-27 as the savings linked to that programme

should be delivered in full.

- Pressures on income generation within Regeneration & Environment remained but were not considered a huge issue in the context of the wider £350m net council budget.
- The impact of the local government pay awards, which were not funded by central government.

In taking members through the presentation, the Service Director of Financial Services explained that locally generated taxation (business rates and council tax) funded over 60% of the Council's core activity, with much less funded by central government. Over 60% of the Council's overall spend was taken up by social care for children and adults.

The Service Director of Financial Services commented that the Council had been getting more robust in its financial decision making and had demonstrated that savings could be agreed and delivered. The Council's reserves were in a stronger position than they had been historically, with a low level of reserve usage in the budget and MTFS profile.

The key dates for the budget setting process were highlighted as follows:

- Announcement of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in September was key because that was the measure the government used to dictate the funding increases on core government grants year on year. September 2025's CPI was 3.8%, which was higher than the MTFS assumption of 2%, which was therefore positive, and would bring in more resource.
- The provisional settlement was announced in late December 2025, which included the output of the Fair Funding Review. This provided the Council with clarity on what funding would be from the various central government funding pots.
- February's cabinet meeting and the Full Council meeting in March would be where the Council's budget for 2026-27 would be formally set.

When the November MTFS update was provided, there was a £0.9 million overspend. Due to challenges within adult social care caused by backdated care placements and additional demand pressures, this overspend had increased to £3.4 million. It was hoped that this could be reduced significantly before the financial year end and the use of reserves minimised.

The Fair Funding Review represented a significant change in how local authority funding would be distributed and marked a shift towards applying funding more clearly on a need's basis. It would combine all the local authority funding from central government and council tax into a huge national pot, with Rotherham's share expected to be 0.49%. Initial calculations indicate that this could equate to over £20 million of funding

over a three-year period.

Savings of around £10 million had been achieved in CYPS as a result of a comprehensive review of demand and market management and social care pathways, with the aim of driving down the numbers of looked after children and where they were placed. The MTFS made provision for 3% inflation to CYPS for their supplier market. However, as each individual package is agreed on a placement-by-placement basis, for an emergency or complex placement, a much higher inflationary rate than 3% would have to be agreed. An external review of CYPS confirmed that the right things were being done, but did highlight a potential under-inflation on market placements, which had now been accounted for in the CYPS budget within the MTFS.

The Service Director of Financial Services explained that there had been some concern around the Household Support Fund coming to an end but that it had been confirmed that there would be a new scheme named the Crisis Resilience Fund. The Council would work through the guidance for this. There had also been a positive update from SYMCA that a new local growth fund would fund around 90% of the activity that had been previously funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Since the November MTFS update, the government had announced a 6.75% increase in the real living wage. This had a significant impact on the Council as a real living wage accredited employer and would lead to an uplift in the Council's pay grade structure to ensure that, at the bottom end of the structure, the Council continued to pay the real living wage.

The government had been looking to change business rates and the business rates process. However, in recognition of the fact that the Fair Funding Review is already a seismic shift in funding for local authorities, it had decided to delay this. However, the government had paid out in advance, the top-up grant as part of the business rates review that would be allocated to the Council in 2026-27 and 2027-28, in order to mitigate some of the financial challenges that councils would face as part of this process.

The Chair invited members of OSMB to raise questions and queries on the points raised.

Councillor A Carter asked a question relating to the pressure caused by the higher than forecast local government pay award. How confident was the Council that its assumptions for increases in pay in the medium-term, would align with government outcome and could assurance be provided that this would not have an unexpected impact on the Council's financial position in-year?

The Service Director of Financial Services responded that the level of pay award could not be predicted as it was always announced by the government after the budget had been set. Initial proposals could come

forward from the unions prior to the budget being set but central government did not approve the level of the pay award until 6-7 months into the new financial year. The Council maintained a working assumption based at 2% but recognised that the award may be higher than this assumption, due to inflation. The Council's Treasury Management savings should mitigate any in-year pressure, and any budget gap would be addressed moving forward. If the working assumption on the pay award were to be increased, this could lead to a potential reduction in posts to make savings, which would be harder to reverse than to address a gap moving forward.

Cllr Yasseen commented that the Fair Funding Review and the three-year allocation of it represented a welcome positive shift in central funding for Rotherham. Was this funding expected to be available to the Council from April 2026? The Service Director of Financial Services confirmed that there was a specific settlement allocation over the three years, and the Council was due to receive an additional £8 million of funding for the financial year 2026-27.

Additionally, Councillor Yasseen asked a question around the reported savings in CYPS placements via the use of Special Guardianship Orders. Could more be done in this area to support and encourage the wider family members of relevant children to provide support in this way? The Service Director of Financial Services agreed that this was an area that CYPS were keen to drive forward as a more appropriate and cost-effective choice of placement for certain children. Increased use of Special Guardianship Orders was also being looked at nationally in reforms to CYPS social care.

Councillor Blackham asked whether the reserves position presented included recent changes regarding the write-down in social housing values. The Service Director of Financial Services explained that the social value housing write-down, which had been recently noticed in an external audit with Grant Thornton, would impact on capital financing reserves rather than corporate reserves.

Councillor Baggaley commented that the financial year 2028-29 was looking potentially very challenging and asked how service hoped to maintain a balanced position going into that year? The Service Director of Financial Services responded that that they were confident that the Council would be able to get to a balanced position in the next two financial years but acknowledged that it would be difficult to balance the budget for the financial year 2028-29 given the current predicted position of an almost £10.5 million deficit. It was expected that this position would improve over the course of the next two financial years due to continued progress in making savings in CYPS and Adult Social Care. Completion of the Business Rates review process in summer 2026 would hopefully leads to an improved business rates position moving forward which would assist with the pressures anticipated in 2028-29. The Service Director of Financial Services also commented that it was likely that the position

regarding the Fair Funding Review would change moving forward, so in many respects, the projection for that third year remained uncertain.

Councillor Steele asked whether the Council was sure that the predicted £22 million would come to the borough under the Fair Funding Review? The Service Director of Financial Services confirmed that they were confident that this would come to the borough as it had been announced by the government in the provisional settlement. However, the figure was provisional, and the final financial settlement would be announced after the setting of the 2026-27 budget and could be subject to further minor refinements after this date. There was the small possibility of challenge from those local authorities who felt they had lost out under the Fair Funding Review.

In a supplemental question, Councillor Steele asked at what point inflation could cause problems for the budget? The Service Director of Financial Services responded that this was tricky to predict as inflation is only one part of the budget. High inflation – e.g. climbing to double figures - would cause the Council huge problems and could require the need to make massive savings. However, the Council had experienced high inflation in recent years and had been able to work through this and produce some mitigations. The crux of the matter was how inflation could interact with pay and impact on service delivery.

The Chair thanked officers for their input and responses to members' questions.

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

1. Noted the Medium-Term Financial Strategy Update.

## 88. STRATEGIC COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL) UPDATE

At the Chair's invitation, the Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment introduced the report which provided an update on the outcome of the 2025 bidding round for Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (Strategic CIL) funding.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment explained that Strategic CIL funding was a method to secure contributions from developers towards strategic infrastructure to support developments across the borough. CIL funding was separate to contributions from developers under section 106 agreements, which were used to counteract the impact of developments in a specific local area. The report summarised the application process which had taken place and recommended to Cabinet the allocation of £3 million to the Whiston Brook Flood Alleviation Scheme, which was the only project that fulfilled all of the criteria in this bidding round.

The Chair invited members of OSMB to raise questions and queries.

Councillor Allen complimented officers on the report, commenting that it was clear, concise and logical. Councillor Allen then asked whether the A57 Todwick roundabout project, which sat within her ward, would be carried forward to a future bidding round and enquired if there were any other avenues of funding that could be made available to that project?

Simon Moss, the Service Director of Regeneration and Environment responded that the Todwick roundabout had been considered for Strategic CIL funding in this round. However, the project had been costed at over £8 million, which took it over the £3 million threshold for Strategic CIL funding. This project would require other funding to bridge that funding gap, which would usually come from SYMCA or the Department for Transport (DfT). The Service Director explained that the current phase of SYMCA block funding for transport was coming to an end and that policy work would soon commence with SYMCA to inform a new local transport plan. This would hopefully provide a new five-year funding scheme that could be utilised for local projects. The Service Director confirmed that it could be challenging to make a strong business case for congestion schemes as they had not been a priority for the government. However, the council had previously submitted an expression of interest in respect of the Todwick roundabout to the DfT and would continue to seek any funding opportunities as they arose. In the meantime, the Todwick roundabout project would not be ruled out for other rounds of Strategic CIL funding.

Councillor Steele asked whether any additional funding could be put into the projects that were not successful in this bidding round and enquired what consultation would be undertaken with ward members regarding Strategic CIL funding?

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment confirmed that for those projects that did not meet the threshold on this occasion, the council would look at alternative funding streams, and it was anticipated that some projects would come back for future Strategic CIL bidding rounds. It would be expected that service providers would consult with ward members on projects within their areas – not all proposals had come from the council, some had been from the NHS and other external service providers. The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment informed members that a review of the Strategic CIL assessment criteria was about to take place with the Chief Executive and section 151 Officer. Any proposed changes to the criteria would be reported via Cabinet, which would allow members the opportunity to provide any input.

Councillor McKiernan asked whether the Whiston Brook Flood Alleviation Scheme would be fully funded from the Strategic CIL money if approved, or would there be any other money going into it? The Executive Director confirmed that funding from the Environment Agency for this project was already confirmed and available so if the grant of the Strategic CIL funding to this scheme was approved by Cabinet, it would be 100%

funded.

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

1. Approve the allocation of Strategic CIL funds to the Whiston Brook Flood Alleviation Scheme (£3,000,000).

## 89. WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Democratic Services noted that the current work programme was presented in the report and informed members that the proposed Q&A session with Mayor Coppard for the February meeting was still awaiting confirmation. The Budget and Council Tax Report 2026-2027 was due to come to OSMB for pre-decision scrutiny in February's meeting, alongside the Inclusion Strategy and Annual Report.

The review on by-laws and life-saving equipment was underway and information from the Service Director for Community Safety and Street Scene had been received and circulated to members, which would enable the review to progress.

The Chair informed members of two potential reviews which could come to OSMB that he was currently monitoring, following receipt of satisfactory information from Service Directors. These reviews related to problems with bin collections and the Snow Warden Schemes. Both of these issues would be put on hold until the end of April, at which point it could be properly assessed whether the issues still warranted a formal review. The Chair also referred to a working group due to be established by Councillor Williams, which would look into grit bins and their placement across the borough. Scrutiny had been asked to have some input into this working group.

**Resolved:** - That the Work Programme be approved.

## 90. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

Councillor Allen referred to the meeting of the Audit Committee which was due to take place that afternoon and commented that one risk that consistently appeared on the council's risk register was around climate change. Councillor Allen was aware that the Climate Emergency Annual Report was due to be presented to the Improving Places Select Commission but requested that it come to OSMB. The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that the Climate Emergency Annual Report was on the forward plan of key decisions for Cabinet and that OSMB could consider it as a pre-decision item. The Chair commented that an additional meeting may be required to cover the additional items of pre-decision scrutiny as the scheduled 4<sup>th</sup> February meeting was likely to already be very busy with consideration of the budget, which would take priority.

The Head of Democratic Services outlined the forward plan for February, including reports on: the Rotherham Baby Packs: Outcomes and Future Commissioning; the Local Authority Better Care Fund 2025-26 Discharge Grant Commitments; SEND Sufficiency Strategy; Business Rates Discretionary Relief Renewals 2026-27; Climate Emergency Annual Report; Rotherham Markets & Library Update; and Rotherham Gateway – Progress to Full Business Case.

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

1. Agreed that the following items would be added to the work programme for February 2026 as part of OSMB's pre-decision scrutiny work:
  - Climate Emergency Annual Report;
  - Rotherham Baby Packs: Outcomes and Future Commissioning;
  - Rotherham Markets & Library Update; and
  - Inclusion Strategy & Annual Report.
  
2. Agreed that OSMB should add an additional meeting to the work programme in the first week of February to consider the above pre-decision items. This would ensure that the scheduled Wednesday 4 February 2026 meeting could be dedicated to the planned Q&A Session with Mayor Coppard and pre-decision scrutiny of the Budget and Council Tax Report 2026-27.
  
3. Agreed that the Head of Democratic Services would liaise with officers and Members to agree a suitable date for the additional February OSMB meeting.

**91. SOUTH YORKSHIRE MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Chair reported that there was nothing to update from the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, as no formal meeting had taken place since the last OSMB meeting. The Chair commented that the minutes to the last meeting of the SYMCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November were available to members to review.

**92. CALL-IN ISSUES**

There were no call-in issues.

**93. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no urgent items.