

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Date and Time:- Wednesday 11 March 2026 at 10.00 a.m.

Venue:- Rotherham Town Hall, The Crofts, Moorgate Street, Rotherham. S60 2TH

Membership:- Councillors Steele (Chair), Bacon (Vice-Chair), Allen, Baggaley, Blackham, Brent, A. Carter, Keenan, McKiernan, Monk, Tinsley and Yasseen.

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

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

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

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

2. Minutes of meeting Tuesday 3 February 2026 of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (Pages 5 - 28)

To consider the minutes of the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 3 February 2026 and to approve them as a true and correct record of the proceedings and to be signed by the Chair.

3. Minutes of meeting Wednesday 4 February 2026 of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (Pages 29 - 59)

To consider the minutes of the previous meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 4 February 2026 and to approve them as a true and correct record of the proceedings and to be signed by the Chair.

4. Declarations of Interest

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

5. Questions from Members of the Public and the Press

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

6. Exclusion of the Press and Public

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

Items for Pre-Decision Scrutiny

In accordance with the outcome of the Governance Review in 2016, the following items are submitted for pre-scrutiny ahead of the Cabinet meeting on 16 March 2026. Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board are invited to comment and make recommendations on the proposals contained within the report.

7. Best Start Plan 2026-2029 (Pages 61 - 134)

Report from the Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services.

Recommendations:

That Cabinet:

1. Note the activity to date to improve early years outcomes and tackle inequalities.
2. Approve the Best Start Local Plan for implementation from April 2026.

8. Transport Capital Programme 2026/27 (Pages 135 - 152)

Report from the Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment.

Recommendations:

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the schemes and allocations of funding, as set out in paragraph 2.3, subject to approval of the Council Budget on 4 March 2026.
2. Approves the schemes and allocations of funding outlined in Section 2 of this report, including the reallocation of savings made on capital projects delivered within budget as described in paragraph 1.6.
3. Delegates authority to the Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, to determine the schemes to be delivered in 2026-27 through to 2029-30 with the Minor Works allocation, subject to approval of the Council Budget in March 2026.
4. Delegates authority to the Executive Director of Regeneration and

Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, to determine the schemes to be delivered in 2026-27 with the School Crossing Patrol Improvements allocation referred to in paragraph 2.2.6.

5. Delegates authority to the Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, to determine the use of any underspends across the Transport Capital Programme to fund the delivery of other approved transport programmes, or the progression of designs for potential future projects.

For Information/Monitoring:

9. Work Programme (Pages 153 - 155)

To consider the Board's Work Programme.

10. Work in Progress - Select Commissions (Pages 157 - 161)

To receive updates from the Chairs of the Select Commission on work undertaken and planned for the future:

- Health Select Commission
- Improving Lives Select Commission
- Improving Places Select Commission

11. Forward Plan of Key Decisions

To review and identify items for pre-decision scrutiny from the Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

Link to: [Browse plans - Forward Plan of Key Decisions, 2025 - Rotherham Council](#)

12. South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee

As part of their role the Chair and Vice Chair of OSMB are appointed to the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chair of OSMB is the Vice Chair on this committee.

This committee holds the MCA to account and ensure that all aspects of the decision-making process are transparent, inclusive and fair. The Committee are responsible for checking that the MCA is delivering its objectives and that the decisions made in policies, strategies and plans have been made in the best interests of the residents and workers of South Yorkshire.

The published agenda packs and minutes can be accessed via: [South Yorkshire MCA](#).

Members who have comments and queries regarding any item on any agenda should refer this to the Chair of OSMB and the Governance Manager at the earliest opportunity to ensure they're reflected in debate during the relevant public meeting.

13. Call-in Issues

To consider any issues referred for call-in from recent Cabinet meetings.

14. Urgent Business

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

The next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board will be held on Wednesday 8 April 2026 commencing at 10.00 a.m. in Rotherham Town Hall.



John Edwards,
Chief Executive.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Tuesday 3 February 2026

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Allen, Baggaley, Blackham, Brent, Keenan, McKiernan, Tinsley, Thorp (Substitute) and Harper (Substitute).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bacon (Vice Chair), A. Carter and Councillor Monk.

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

94. MINUTES OF MEETING TUESDAY 13 JANUARY 2026 OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 13 January 2026 be approved as a true record.

95. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

96. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

No questions were received.

97. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no reasons to exclude the press or public.

98. ROTHERHAM BABY PACKS: OUTCOMES AND FUTURE COMMISSIONING

At the Chair's invitation, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor Cusworth, introduced the item on the Baby Packs Initiative, noting that she and Councillor Baker-Rogers, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, had worked closely on the programme due to the overlap in their portfolios. She explained that the initiative aimed to support new parents and aligned with the Council's commitment to giving every child in Rotherham the best start in life.

She stated that the scrutiny session provided an opportunity to review the programme's impact, its value to families and areas where delivery could be strengthened. The report outlined how effectively Baby Packs were reaching families, levels of take-up, early outcomes, alignment with wider early years and prevention priorities, and any risks or opportunities for improvement ahead of future commissioning.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reported that early indicators showed stronger engagement with services among families receiving the packs. Midwives and health visitors had noted increased attendance at follow-up appointments and greater involvement in family health conversations. Parents also reported increased confidence in the early days at home, particularly around safe sleep practices. Evaluation measures included practitioner feedback, behaviour-change indicators and engagement data, with plans to strengthen the framework as the programme matured.

The report also highlighted positive feedback from families on the value of the packs. Councillor Cusworth confirmed that Cabinet would be asked to note the high levels of satisfaction and to approve an open procurement exercise to ensure continuity in registering and delivering Baby Packs to Rotherham families.

The Service Director of Strategic Commissioning, Scott Matthewman, noted that Councillor Cusworth had already outlined the recommendations due to go to Cabinet the following week. He stated that the scheme had been highly successful over its first two years, both in terms of its universal approach and the positive impact reported by expectant mothers and newborn families in the borough.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health stated that she was extremely proud of the town for establishing the Baby Packs scheme, noting its success to date. Over 2,000 families had registered, and all had received their packs, with feedback consistently positive. She thanked Councillor Cusworth for her work on the initiative and said she looked forward to the item progressing to Cabinet the following week.

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

Councillor Blackham expressed concern that the scheme was not targeted, stating his view that this risked wasting money, as people would naturally take up a free offer regardless of need. He believed the initiative should be more focused on those who would benefit most. He queried the financial figures in the report, noting references to £410,000 per year and an additional £50,000 in the budget, and asked whether the total cost was £410,000 or £460,000 annually. He questioned whether the level of spend, approximately £1.5 million over four years, represented good value and stated that the universal approach may limit its effectiveness.

In response, Councillor Cusworth stated that the scheme was not a waste of money and reaffirmed the Council's commitment to giving every child in Rotherham the best start in life, rather than targeting only some families. She highlighted the success of the Family Hub model and noted that new DfE guidance on Best Start Family Hubs emphasised early years support, perinatal care and improving children's development from birth to age five. The Baby Packs formed part of this wider early-years strategy.

She confirmed that the annual cost was £410,000, which included the additional £50,000 uplift. The uplift was intended to maintain the quality and quantity of items in the packs rather than see them diminished over time, with the budget increasing in line with CPI each year.

In his supplementary point, Councillor Blackham reiterated that, in his view, the scheme's success related more to service engagement than to the universal distribution of Baby Packs. He acknowledged that the packs would help some families but maintained that a non-targeted approach did not necessarily benefit everyone and risked unnecessary expenditure. He emphasised that he was not suggesting reducing the quality of the packs but rather targeting them towards families most in need. He concluded that, while the intentions behind the initiative were laudable, he believed the universal model resulted in a degree of waste.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reiterated the Council's commitment to giving every child the best start in life. She emphasised that the scheme was not solely about financial need but also about supporting parents' preparedness for the significant life change of having a baby. She noted that the contents of the Baby Packs, together with the information provided, encouraged engagement with Family Hubs and other early-years services.

She highlighted the importance of universal messaging around safe sleep practices, stressing that ensuring every new family received this information was valuable in itself, particularly given the risks associated with unsafe sleep. She stated that, in her view, none of the investment in the scheme was wasted.

Councillor Baker-Rogers responded that 99% of parents who had received the Baby Pack reported it to be overwhelmingly positive and useful. She noted that targeting the scheme would be difficult in practice. Drawing on her own experience as a new parent, she highlighted that the packs provided essential items and guidance that many first-time parents would otherwise struggle to identify. She emphasised that offering the packs universally was inclusive practice and ensured that every child in the borough had the best possible start in life.

Alex Hawley, Public Health Consultant added that there were important practical considerations behind the universal approach. The scheme was administered by midwives at the 25-week check, which made universal distribution straightforward and efficient. A targeted model would have been significantly more complex to operate and would not have ensured that every child received support. Alex noted that, with high uptake, the scheme guaranteed a consistent minimum provision for all families, while those on lower incomes benefited proportionally more.

Councillor McKiernan commented that he had recently spoken to an NHS physiotherapist whose colleague in Barnsley had received a Baby Pack,

which highlighted how positively the scheme was viewed and how it reflected well on Rotherham, given that Barnsley did not offer a similar initiative.

He then asked whether more detailed data were available on the distribution of Baby Packs per household, for example, whether twins received two packs, and whether the information captured distinguished between first-time parents and those with subsequent births, noting that several comments in the report referred specifically to first-time mothers.

Councillor Cusworth added that Councillor McKiernan had raised a useful point and welcomed the positive feedback circulating about the scheme. She noted that, as the programme moved into its third year, more data might emerge on households receiving a Baby Pack for a second child, although this would depend on the timing of births. She explained that the Baby Packs were delivered directly to families by the provider rather than through the Council but confirmed that discussions could take place about what additional data the provider might be able to share while maintaining GDPR requirements. She anticipated that more mature datasets would become available as the scheme progressed.

Councillor Allen referred to paragraph 2.6 of the report, which highlighted that while most families gained new knowledge from the Baby Pack, parents with previous children reported less benefit, suggesting a need for more tailored content. It was also noted that leaflet impact had been rated at 75% positive. She asked whether there were plans to review the contents of the pack and consider tailoring materials for families having their second, third or subsequent children.

The Public Health Consultant confirmed that the contents of the Baby Pack would be reviewed as part of the recommissioning process. Explaining that tailoring packs for different groups, for example, for families with second or subsequent children, or for parents of extremely preterm babies, had been considered, but would significantly increase logistical complexity and costs. For this reason, the intention was to retain a universal, consistent pack, while ensuring the overall content was reviewed and updated during recommissioning.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Allen suggested that, for families who already had children, some items in the Baby Pack might be unnecessary and could therefore be viewed as waste. She asked how the Council might address or mitigate this in future.

In response, the Public Health Consultant noted that this issue would be considered during the contract review. He emphasised the need to maintain value for money and keep costs manageable but confirmed that the point would be taken forward for discussion as part of the recommissioning process.

Councillor Baker-Rogers added that, as a twin herself, she believed it was

important that each twin received their own Baby Pack. She noted that twins were two individual babies with separate needs and should not be expected to share items that were intended for individual use. Providing separate packs also supported the recognition of their individual identities.

Regarding second and subsequent children, she commented that items from earlier packs might have worn out, broken or been fully used, meaning families could still benefit from receiving a new pack. While acknowledging the discussion about tailoring, she emphasised the importance of focusing on the overall success of the scheme and the consistently positive feedback received from residents.

Councillor Cusworth acknowledged the points raised. She explained that, due to the way the packs were procured and delivered directly from the provider to households, it was difficult to add or remove items from individual boxes. She noted that any change, such as tailoring packs for subsequent children, would need to be weighed against the additional logistical costs, especially as most feedback related only to the usefulness of the leaflet.

She added that previous discussions had shown how even small additions, such as including a leaflet linked to the Children's Capital of Culture, would significantly increase logistical complexity, as materials would need to be produced, transported to the provider and included in the packing process. She confirmed that officers would reflect further on the issue, but highlighted the practical constraints involved.

Councillor Baggaley emphasised the importance of parents receiving Baby Packs as early as possible, noting from personal experience that babies do not always arrive on schedule and that having essentials ready in advance could be vital for families. He supported efforts to address this issue going forward.

He then asked two questions:

1. Whether data were available on the geographical spread of take-up and whether any areas showed lower uptake.
2. Whether the pack included content relating to parental support, particularly around fathers' mental health.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People acknowledged the importance of ensuring Baby Packs were delivered to families as early as possible, noting that some had arrived very close to, or even after, the birth. She confirmed that this issue would be taken away for further consideration.

She agreed that analysing the geographical spread of take-up would be useful and invited Alex Hawley to provide further detail, noting that such data might also highlight whether uptake was higher in more deprived areas.

In response to the question on parental support, she explained that the information within the packs encouraged families to register with their

local Family Hub. She noted that parental mental health, including support for fathers, was a core and prescriptive element of the Family Hubs model, with support beginning from the 25-week midwife appointment onwards.

Alex Hawley reported that the consistently high take-up rate, well into the high 90% range, indicated that the scheme was achieving a broad, universal reach, with very few families missing out. He noted that it remained difficult to break down uptake by area without breaching data-protection requirements, but the overall level of registrations suggested strong coverage across the borough.

In relation to parental support content, it was explained that the information leaflet included in every Baby Pack had been co-designed with parents. The leaflet was updated regularly and contained guidance relevant to all caregivers, including material specifically for fathers. It was designed to fit within the child's Red Book and to be durable and reusable, ensuring that families could refer to it repeatedly rather than it being discarded.

Councillor Tinsley BEM commented from a scrutiny perspective that the report could have included more information to support wider consideration of options. He noted that the recommendations presented only two choices, either to continue the scheme or discontinue it, and that no "midway" or alternative models were outlined. He suggested that scrutiny would have benefited from analysis of the potential impact of a targeted approach, benchmarking against other local authorities, and consideration of partnership opportunities with voluntary organisations that might already be delivering similar support. He felt that including this information would have strengthened the review process.

In response, the Chair explained that reports brought to Cabinet were prepared specifically for Cabinet decision-making, which was why the recommendations were framed as they were. He noted that scrutiny's role was to consider the proposals and make comments or recommendations, rather than redesign the policy at this stage. He added that a broader review exploring alternative models would need to be commissioned separately and at an earlier point in the process.

Councillor Thorp queried the accuracy of the take-up figures presented in the report. He noted that the data showed 1,587 registrations and 1,587 deliveries within the same nine-month period and expressed concern that this appeared unlikely, for example, a parent registering on the final day of September could not reasonably have received a pack within the same reporting window. He questioned whether the figures could realistically match so precisely and suggested that this indicated a potential inaccuracy in the data.

The Public Health Consultant responded that while he could not confirm whether the reported number of deliveries exactly matched the number of

registrations for that specific period, the service was confident that every parent who registered for a Baby Pack had received one. He noted that, for that reason, it was not unexpected that the totals appeared as 100% in the report.

Councillor Thorp reiterated concerns about the accuracy of the take-up figures. He noted that the quarterly numbers appeared inconsistent, for example, 320 registrations but only 82 deliveries between January and March, yet identical registration and delivery figures appeared in later months. He suggested that the data looked artificially aligned rather than accurately reported and stated that he would prefer to see precise, verifiable figures.

In response, Councillor Cusworth reaffirmed that all parents who registered for a Baby Pack and subsequently had a healthy live birth had received one. She noted that discrepancies in the reported figures were likely due to data-lag issues rather than inaccuracies and confirmed her confidence in the reliability of the data overall. She added that the only circumstance in which a pack would not be delivered after registration was where a pregnancy sadly did not result in a healthy birth.

In relation to the scrutiny process, she stated that the Council was committed to delivering Baby Packs and that parents had given very positive feedback. The service continued to monitor and review the contents of the packs to ensure they met families' needs. She highlighted that the "Best Start in Life" booklet included in each pack had been co-designed with the Parent Carer Panel, made up of pregnant women and parents of children aged 0–2, as part of the Family Hubs model. She suggested providing copies of the booklet to members for reference.

She concluded that the role of scrutiny was to consider the effectiveness of the scheme and offer any further recommendations for Cabinet and advised members not to focus too heavily on the reporting cut-off points given the assurance that every eligible family had received a pack.

The Chair noted that the Cabinet Member had stated her confidence in the accuracy of the data within the report. The Public Health Consultant added that a new print run of the *Best Start in Life* leaflet was due, and they would arrange a small overprint so that copies could be placed in members' pigeonholes.

The Public Health Consultant also provided clarification from the report's author regarding the figures. The registration data covered all sign-ups between January and the end of September, and the delivery numbers corresponded directly to those same registrations. For that reason, the totals matched: every person who registered for a Baby Pack within that period had received one.

Councillor Keenan asked a question regarding areas for improvement, specifically around communication. She noted that enhanced information

was included in registration emails and queried what alternative communication methods were available for families who did not use email, asking how harder-to-reach families were being informed about the Baby Pack.

The Public Health Consultant explained that registration for the Baby Pack was completed by the midwife at the 25-week appointment, meaning parents were not required to initiate the process themselves. Midwives informed expectant parents about the availability of the packs and completed the registration on their behalf, ensuring the process was universal and accessible.

It was noted that while a small number of families received midwifery care outside Rotherham, a pathway was in place to ensure these families were also captured, and this was being used effectively. Given the uptake rate remained very close to the overall birth rate, there was confidence that families without email access or those harder to reach were not being missed.

Councillor Harper sought clarification on the data included in the report. He understood that the demographic information, such as maternal age and deprivation, was captured at the point of booking, around 25 weeks, and related to the 1,587 registrations referenced earlier. However, only 28% (279 responses) had completed the follow-up survey. He asked whether the characteristics of respondents mirrored the wider registration cohort, particularly in terms of deprivation and age, and whether survey responses might be skewed towards better-off families who were more likely to complete online surveys. He also queried the delivery process for packs sent to Family Hubs, asking whether each pack was delivered individually and addressed to the specific parent, rather than stored in bulk at hubs.

In response it was confirmed that the scheme primarily operated via home delivery, which aligned with parents' preferences and worked well operationally. It was added that a pilot was being developed to hold some packs in the hospital for very premature babies who might arrive before the 25-week appointment.

Regarding survey responses, it was noted that analysis used a 95% confidence approach to infer findings from the respondent group to the wider parent population. The Public Health Consultant did not have, at the meeting, a breakdown of respondents by socioeconomic status and age, and would check whether this could be provided, noting that the survey was anonymous.

Councillor Blackham noted that, as packs were delivered to home addresses, postcode data should allow anonymised analysis of geographical distribution across the borough. He suggested that either the Council or the provider could produce this breakdown to address earlier questions on uptake by area.

Councillor Cusworth explained that data-protection arrangements between the provider and the Council had limited access to detailed delivery information, as GDPR required a clear purpose for holding personal data. She noted that if the Council were packing and delivering the boxes directly, it would be easier to collect demographic and cohort data. Given that take-up closely matched the borough's birth rate, she was not concerned about coverage; she added that limited access to granular data would be more problematic if uptake were low.

The Chair acknowledged Councillor Blackham's point and noted that anonymised, area-based delivery data (e.g., by ward and deprivation profile) should be explored to improve monitoring. He agreed that ward-level reporting would be useful and indicated he would consider a recommendation to include this in future monitoring arrangements.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health stated that she was extremely proud of the Baby Packs scheme, noting that it supported all parents regardless of income or where they lived. She thanked members for the thoughtful questions raised and confirmed that these would be taken into account going forward. She reiterated her pride in the initiative and its value in giving every baby in the borough the best possible start in life.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People thanked the Chair and the committee for the thoughtful and constructive questions raised, noting that several points would be taken away for further consideration. She agreed that ward-level analysis would provide a sufficient level of anonymity and confirmed this would be explored, adding that a scrutiny recommendation on this would be helpful.

She restated the recommendations that would be presented to Cabinet the following week, which were:

- to note the high level of satisfaction with the Baby Packs, particularly the quality and usefulness of the items provided (with reference to comments about leaflet usefulness for non-first-time mothers); and
- to approve an open procurement exercise to ensure continuity of registration and delivery for Rotherham families.

Councillor Cusworth emphasised the importance of maintaining the quality of the Baby Packs over time. She noted that parents frequently compared experiences across areas and that diminishing the contents could undermine the scheme's credibility. She stressed that, although the scheme represented a significant investment, evidence showed it was money well spent. Supporting babies and families in the early years prevented more costly problems later in life. She concluded by expressing her appreciation that the scheme had been brought to scrutiny.

The Chair moved to a vote for those in favour of supporting the

recommendations within the report, this was carried by a majority.

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

1. Note the high level of satisfaction with the baby packs, particularly in relation to the quality and usefulness of the items provided.
2. Approve an open procurement exercise to ensure continuity of registering and delivery of baby packs to Rotherham families.

Further actions that arose from discussions were that:

- OSMB receive an update in twelve months, via a method of delivery to be determined, detailing the number of Baby Packs issued, broken down by ward, to enable effective monitoring of geographical take-up and to support efforts to improve engagement in areas of higher deprivation across the borough.

99. INCLUSION STRATEGY AND ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair invited The Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety, Councillor Alam OBE, to introduce the report. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety explained that the new statutory plan replaced the Council's 2022–2025 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy. Although the title had been simplified, the strategy still covered a wide range of equality, diversity, inclusion and Public Sector Equality Duty responsibilities.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety reported that the plan set out how the Council would continue to listen to local people, understand their priorities, ensure services were accessible, and address disadvantage. The plan aligned with the Council's vision of valuing decency and dignity, creating opportunity for all, and ensuring no one was left behind. It also linked strongly to the Council's inclusive economy work, including supporting people into employment and maximising the positive impact of local spending.

Consultation had been carried out online and through 12 focus groups with external organisations representing a range of protected groups, as well as internal staff networks. Feedback indicated that while people sometimes felt listened to, they wanted more engagement and were positive about co-production. Concerns about feeling unsafe were frequently raised, consistent with feedback from the 2024 Council Plan consultation. Experiences of accessing services were inconsistent, and many participants preferred face-to-face interaction rather than digital engagement. A full consultation report was provided in Appendix 4.

It was noted that the themes emerging from the consultation reflected those identified during Doncaster Council's informal peer review, such as the need to further embed equality, diversity and inclusion across all service areas. Consultation findings had shaped the strategy's themes: Working Together, Responsive Services, Welcoming Places and

Employer of Choice.

The introduction highlighted that extensive good work was already taking place across the Council to support people at risk of exclusion. The plan also described what excellent practice would look like, based on the Local Government Equality Framework. Examples were given of current activity, including strong Ofsted feedback on work with young people, engagement with older residents and with communities from Black and minority ethnic and faith backgrounds. A key area for improvement was demonstrating how services were reshaped in response to resident feedback, including closing the feedback loop.

Under the *Welcoming Places* theme, the Council aimed to ensure communities felt safe and supported. Under *Employer of Choice*, the focus was on ensuring the workforce reflected the borough's diverse communities and that employment opportunities were accessible to people with disabilities and those less likely to access Council roles.

An action plan was included to support delivery through the Council's governance arrangements. The annual report was also provided for information.

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

Councillor McKiernan asked about the section on page 99 relating to consultations. He noted that the report suggested there was fragmentation across Council services in how public consultations were carried out. He queried whether there were plans to establish a central consultation resource or system that all services could use to ensure a more consistent and effective approach.

The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence, Fiona Boden explained that work was already underway to develop a new consultation system. Actions within the Council Plan supported this, and a new online platform, *Citizen Space*, had been procured following an appropriate selection process. This platform was chosen because it could meet the varying needs of services across the Council and support more consistent digital engagement with residents.

It was noted that, while consultation should not rely solely on digital methods, online engagement was increasingly important for creating effective feedback loops. The new system would strengthen the Council's ability to report back to residents on the "you said, we did" outcomes of consultations. The platform was scheduled to go live in April 2026.

Councillor Allen referred to page 101, specifically the section on *Welcoming Places* and the bullet point describing "a sophisticated approach to fostering good relations." It was asked what this "sophisticated approach" was intended to involve, and what measurable

improvements the Council expected to achieve. It was also queried how the Council planned to measure something as intangible as relationships between diverse communities.

The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence explained that the bullet point referenced came directly from the Local Government Association's *Equality Framework for Local Government*, which set out the national standards for what "excellent" looked like in delivering equality, diversity and inclusion.

The challenge raised was acknowledged, agreeing that measuring relationships between communities was difficult and inherently intangible. It was noted that, at an individual project level, the Council already used qualitative methods, for example, through the Community Recovery Fund, supported by MHCLG funding received around 18 months earlier. As part of that programme, participants were asked qualitative questions before and after taking part to understand how they felt at the beginning and end of the activity. However, such measures were based on personal perceptions rather than specific quantifiable indicators.

Further to this, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety noted that fostering good relations was already a statutory duty under the Public Sector Equality Duty. He provided examples of how this work took place in practice, such as interfaith activity involving churches, mosques and synagogues working together. Recent events included Holocaust Memorial Day, where different faith communities participated jointly, as well as collaborative initiatives such as mutual visits between churches and mosques and community litter-picks.

Councillor Alam OBE explained that these practical, community-based activities helped build trust and confidence between different groups over the long term. Work was also underway to strengthen dialogue between different areas of the borough, recognising that diversity and challenges varied across communities. This included exploring how local communities and elected members could work more closely with parish and town councils.

It was acknowledged that while there were clear examples of relationship-building in action, measuring progress in this area was inherently long-term and difficult to quantify. Interfaith work remained a particularly strong example of positive partnership across different faith communities.

Councillor Allen stated that, while she appreciated the examples provided, she would be interested in revisiting this aspect of the strategy in a year's time. It was requested that, when the strategy returned for review, further examples of work to foster good relations be included.

Councillor Thorp referred to page 91 and the reference to British Sign Language (BSL) being recognised as a language across England,

Scotland and Wales. He asked whether, if a resident who used BSL attended the Council's front-facing reception, the Council had someone available on site who could communicate with them, or whether staff would need to locate support elsewhere. He stressed that, to be inclusive, appropriate support should be immediately accessible.

The Chief Executive stated that he did not know the definitive answer regarding whether a BSL-capable staff member was always available at the Council's front-facing reception. He agreed that it was reasonable for residents to have a range of ways to access information about Council services and confirmed that the Council was committed to providing appropriate access routes for all residents. He noted that while the Council would always seek to provide support, he could not confirm whether this could be arranged at very short notice. He undertook to follow up the query and provide clarification.

The Chair asked whether the strategy directly drove specific Council Plan outcomes and KPIs. The Service Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development, Lynsey Linton explained that the Inclusion Strategy aimed to ensure that everyone, particularly those facing barriers and disadvantage, was able to influence, access and benefit from Council services. The strategy sat at the heart of the Council Plan's vision and would drive its cross-cutting focus on expanding opportunities for all. It also aligned directly with the *One Council* theme.

The Service Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development noted that, within this theme, the Council was committed to providing a better customer experience, delivering high-quality and accessible services informed by customer feedback, and working in partnership with local communities. This included co-designing services, taking a strengths-based approach, making consultation and engagement processes more inclusive, and ensuring the workforce became more representative of the borough's communities.

Success measures included having a workforce more reflective of the borough's population and increasing the proportion of residents who felt the Council acted on their concerns.

The Chair raised a further question about how the Council would remain flexible to respond to emerging issues, engage effectively with communities, and address pressures such as the cost-of-living crisis and poverty. In response, Councillor Alam OBE explained that the strategy was an evolving document and that the Council would remain flexible in order to respond to emerging issues within communities. He emphasised the importance of horizon scanning and working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, as well as embedding equalities considerations across the whole Council.

He stated that all service areas needed to identify vulnerable or excluded groups and ensure they were included in planning and co-production. As

an example, he referred to previous issues in Manvers which had led to community disorder; the Council had since worked with voluntary and community organisations to strengthen engagement and improve relationships. He confirmed that the Council would continue to adapt its approach to address emerging challenges as they arose.

The Chair asked how the Council worked with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in delivering the strategy and how reliant was the Council on the sector to achieve its aims. The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence stated that the VCS was a crucial partner for the Council in delivering core services and supporting communities across the borough. She noted that while the Council relied on the VCS for significant elements of service delivery, services were also working to ensure that residents' voices were captured directly through appropriate engagement forums. Examples included the *Rascals* group in Adult Services, which provided lived-experience input from service users, and the *Four Cornerstones* co-production model used in Children and Young People's Services. These mechanisms ensured that partnership working involved both voluntary sector organisations and residents themselves.

The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence emphasised that, although the VCS was central to the Council's partnership work, the aim was to bring a wide range of people together in the right forums to gather diverse views and help shape services effectively. Further to this, Councillor Alam OBE stated that the voluntary sector already played a highly productive role in working alongside the Council. He noted that the Council had a strong relationship with community organisations, and that in some cases, where the Council could not deliver certain activities, voluntary groups were able to step in due to their close links with local communities and networks.

He highlighted that Rotherham had over 6,000 voluntary and community organisations, representing a significant local asset, with many volunteers being residents of the borough. He emphasised that the Council had always maintained good relationships with the sector, particularly around community cohesion and equalities work. Voluntary organisations also sat on the Community Reference Group, ensuring ongoing engagement and a complementary partnership between the Council and the sector.

Councillor Baggaley referred to Appendix 2, the action plan, and noted that a large number of actions were scheduled for completion in Q4 2025/26. He asked how assurance would be provided that the action plan was being monitored and maintained. He also queried whether there had been an action plan for the previous 12 months and suggested that, when the strategy returned in a year's time, a comparable update should be provided showing progress against each action, including a rating or assessment of delivery.

The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence confirmed that the suggestion was reasonable and that a revised approach could be

considered for future reporting. It was explained that an annual report was already produced, but it presented progress in a more narrative format. She agreed to look at the format for next year so that more direct feedback could be provided against each action in the plan, including clearer reporting on progress over the previous 12 months and how this would inform the action plan for the following year.

Councillor Allen referred to the creation of two posts within CYPS aimed at supporting people from under-represented communities, noting that these roles had a clear career pathway. She also referenced the national leadership development initiative for staff of colour and asked whether participation in that programme similarly included a defined career pathway or progression route. She acknowledged that there could be no guarantees around appointments but sought clarification on whether the initiative was intended to support staff toward future career advancement.

The Service Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that the Council was aware that the demographic profile of its leadership workforce did not fully reflect the borough's population. As a result, the Council was committed to encouraging applications from leaders of colour, particularly within Children's Services, where national evidence showed progression barriers for Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff.

It was noted that the national leadership programme was designed specifically to support staff of colour, and Rotherham CYPS had been able to enable staff to participate. Alongside this, the Council was refreshing its workforce plan to ensure strong alignment with the Inclusion Strategy and the Council Plan, with a clear focus on workforce development.

It was highlighted that Adults and Children's Services had local workforce boards and that employee development was a key pillar of the wider workforce plan. The aim was to create clear movement and progression opportunities within the workforce, aligning inclusion ambitions with workforce priorities.

She added that the Inclusion Strategy's 12-month delivery plan allowed the Council to regularly review progress against the workforce plan, including the development and progression of staff into leadership roles across the organisation.

During his conclusion the Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety thanked the committee for its comments and confirmed that these would be taken back for consideration. He agreed that the point raised by Councillor Baggaley regarding action plan delivery was important, noting that the plan included clear details and lead officers, providing an accountability mechanism and clarity on who was responsible for each action. Quarterly meetings were in place to monitor progress and ensure delivery.

He emphasised that, despite financial challenges, equality remained a key priority for the Council. Reflecting on his ten years as a Cabinet Member, he noted that the Council had made a positive start but that the work was ongoing. The Council would continue to focus on being inclusive, providing accessible services, and maintaining meaningful engagement with residents. He added that where the Council was unable to deliver something, it was important to return to residents to explain the reasons. He concluded that the action plan was critical and represented a positive way forward.

Before the Chair proposed the recommendations, Councillor Thorp referred back to the earlier discussion regarding British Sign Language (BSL) support at Council reception points. He suggested that a recommendation be made for the Council to have a clear procedure in place to ensure BSL support was immediately available when needed, noting that senior officers had been unsure of the current arrangements. In response, the Chief Executive apologised for not being able to provide the information during the meeting but confirmed that he had since checked. He reported that the Council used a language support app at its service centres and front-facing reception points, including Riverside House. The app provided video-based BSL interpretation at the point of contact, enabling staff to support residents who used BSL without delay. He thanked his colleague for confirming this information during the meeting and reassured members that BSL was included within the Council's language support package.

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

1. Approve the Inclusion Strategy 2026-30.
2. Approve the action plan for February 2026 to March 2027.
3. Note the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2024-2025.

Further actions that arose from discussions were that:

- That OSMB receive a follow-up report in twelve months, via a method of delivery to be determined, which clearly demonstrates how the strategy and its associated actions have been embedded and provides direct reporting against each individual action.

100. ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTION REVIEW REPORT

At the Chair's invitation the Chair of the Health Select Commission, Councillor Keenan, reported that her first role in health had been in sexual health and that she had long championed good sexual health. She presented the Health Select Commission's Scrutiny Review report on Access To Contraception.

The review had been prioritised due to concerns about inconsistent availability of long-acting reversible contraception in GP practices,

alongside wider issues around access to contraceptive advice and sexual health services.

Throughout 2025, a cross-party working group gathered evidence from GP surgeries, Public Health, Adult Strategic Commissioning, Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust, the Integrated Care Board, HealthWatch, MESMAC and others. The group carried out a site visit, undertook online research, analysed local data and reviewed practice in neighbouring areas and elsewhere in the UK.

The Chair thanked officers, particularly Kerry Grinsill-Clinton, and members for their active contribution. The review recognised that improving access to contraception required more than service availability; it was fundamental to informed choice, improved sexual health outcomes, reduced unplanned pregnancies and equitable, stigma-free access for residents of all ages.

Findings indicated that, although provision was generally strong, significant barriers remained, including variation in GP cover, limited male contraception options, stigma, difficulties accessing the hospital-based clinic, a fragmented digital offer and the impact of online misinformation. These issues affected residents' ability to make informed choices and reflected wider trends such as rising termination rates and inequalities in sexual health outcomes.

The Commission proposed targeted recommendations, including exploring mobile outreach clinics, integrating contraception within the town centre health hub, improving digital information, strengthening public health messaging and enhancing support for young people through clearer confidentiality guidance and more consistent education. Longer-term ambitions included stronger collaboration across primary care networks, appointing sexual health champions in every GP practice, expanding free condom access in community settings and improving data use for commissioning and prevention.

The Health Select Commission endorsed the report on 22 January 2026 and invited OSMB to support its submission to Cabinet for consideration and response. The Chair thanked all contributors and noted that the officer, Kerry Grinsill-Clinton, was available to answer questions.

The Governance Advisor, Kerry Grinsill-Clinton, seconded Councillor Keenan's remarks and to offered sincere thanks for the significant engagement and participation from internal and external partners in supporting the review.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, Councillor Baker-Rogers, thanked Councillor Keenan for the work undertaken and confirmed her support for the report's progression to Cabinet for consideration. She added that she looked forward to supporting the work further once the outcome was known.

Councillor Cuworth, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, placed on record her thanks to Councillor Keenan, the Commission and the working group for what she described as an excellent piece of scrutiny. She noted the importance of the work and expressed her appreciation for the effort that had gone into the review.

The Chair, Councillor Steele, noted that the report had reached this stage as part of the normal scrutiny review process. It would now be forwarded to Cabinet, which would have eight weeks to provide a response. Members approved the report by a show of hands.

The Chair thanked Councillor Keenan and the Working Group for their work on behalf of the Authority, noting the number of recommendations and acknowledging the substantial effort behind the review.

Resolved:

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) note the report.
2. That the recommendations listed below and the wider ambitions as listed in Paragraph 5 of the report, as approved by Health Select Commission, be submitted to Cabinet for consideration and response:
 - a. Commissioning and Service Delivery
 - i. That the relevant Council Services consider and review the feasibility of mobile outreach clinics or rotating sexual health outreach services where contraception, including LARC can be accessed in rural and underserved areas.
 - ii. That the relevant Council Services and relevant partners consider Including sexual health services, specifically including contraceptive advice guidance and provision, in the new town centre health hub, ensuring flexible, reliable and discreet 'drop-in' access and reduced stigma.
 - b. Education, Public Awareness and Messaging
 - i. That the relevant Council Services work in collaboration with appropriate partners to strengthen and extend the reach of a borough-wide, sex-positive public health campaign promoting safe, consensual, and informed sexual activity that makes effective use of the contraceptive and sexual health services available in Rotherham. The Commission particularly

advocates the use of modern messaging strategies that harness the power of local 'influencers' via social media platforms (e.g. TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram) wherever possible to reach younger demographics with engaging, accurate contraception and sexual health messaging that reaches them directly in places they naturally frequent and counteracts disinformation.

- ii. That the relevant Council Services encourage schools to deliver consistent, comprehensive PSHE, including ongoing practical contraceptive education and awareness of confidentiality rights and works with them to improve parental engagement and understanding of the benefits of making informed contraceptive and sexual health choices.

c. Digital Access and Information

- i. That the relevant Council Services work to improve Council public health websites to deliver youth-friendly information on contraception and sexual health services and providing/signposting to relevant sources of information, advice and guidance aimed at assisting that demographic to make informed choices.
- ii. That the relevant Council Services work to develop a centralised digital resource or landing page consolidating sexual health information, service locations, and confidentiality guidance, with links to age group/demographic specific issues and information.

d. Youth Access and Confidentiality

- i. That the relevant Council Services consider how, ideally in collaboration with relevant partners such as schools and NHS services, to raise awareness of Fraser guidelines and NHS app privacy settings to reassure young people about confidentiality when accessing contraception.
- ii. That the relevant Council Services work with MESMAC and other relevant youth services to expand outreach and ensure visibility and borough wide accessibility of services, particularly for LGBTQ+ and vulnerable groups.

e. Data, Monitoring and Strategic Alignment

- i. That the relevant Council Services include the location of sexual health clinics, drop-in centres, and pharmacies providing emergency contraception on the Rotherham mapping system (where grit salt bin locations, planning applications etc. can be found), or create a standalone map resource to allow Rotherham residents to easily identify all locations in the borough where they can access contraception.
 - ii. That relevant Council Services review local data on terminations and teenage pregnancies to assess emerging trends, identify the root causes and facilitate the formulation and implementation targeted interventions that address their drivers.
 - iii. That relevant Council Services ensure that the recommendations, observations and broad ambitions from this review are considered in the next commissioning cycle in 2027, and in the development/revision of the borough's sexual health strategy and action plan.
3. Following submission to Cabinet, that those recommendations within the control and influence of external bodies, are shared with relevant health partners and commissioners for consideration and response.

101. WORK PROGRAMME

The Governance Manager provided a brief update in addition to the information contained in the report pack. Members were informed that the OSMB Bye-laws and Life-Saving Equipment Review Group meeting had been scheduled for 24 February at 2.00 pm, and details had been circulated to all members of the review group. She explained that the session would allow for further discussion on the information and comments raised to date.

Resolved: That the Work Programme be approved.

102. WORK IN PROGRESS - SELECT COMMISSIONS

Update from Health Select Commission:

This update was noted as presented within the agenda pack.

Update from Improving Lives Select Commission:

Councillor Harper reported on activity since the previous meeting. The Commission met on 2 December and considered the *Fostering*

Transformation Programme, including work within Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) and the *Prevention of Future Deaths* processes. This included discussion of the tragic death of Marcia Grant and the Council's response.

Members had also received the *Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Assurance Report 2024–25*, which outlined key partnership activity during the year.

Regarding the 2025–26 work programme, updates included:

- An item on the *Threshold of Need*, forming part of the *Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy*.
- A workshop and visit to the Rotherham Parent Carers Forum at the Eric Manns Building had been scheduled for 29 January. Councillor Harper was unable to attend due to commitments at a Police and Crime Panel meeting.
- The *PAUSE Project* session, focusing on support for women who have experienced multiple child removals, was scheduled for 2 March.
- A *Children's Capital of Culture* workshop was scheduled for 21 April, considering legacy impacts.
- On the *Trauma and Children Missing Education* scrutiny review, a questionnaire had been issued to all secondary schools to gather feedback on the impact of trauma on children missing education.

Items scheduled for future meetings included:

- Ofsted inspection outcomes,
- Educational attainment update,
- Corporate Parenting Partnership Board updates,
- Community cohesion projects,
- *Together for Tomorrow* project updates,
- Children not in education,
- The SACRE annual report,
- Safeguarding children from radicalisation,
- Keeping children safe in education, and
- A child exploitation strategy update.

No questions were raised for Cllr Harper.

Update from Improving Places Select Commission:

Councillor McKiernan provided an update on recent meetings reporting that the Commission had considered the Annual Bereavement Services Report, noting subsequent news of significant price increases which had caused concern among members, although this was outside the Council's control.

At the most recent meeting, members received a Flood Alleviation Update, which outlined proposed interventions in areas at risk. Some schemes remained unfunded, which was disappointing. The Commission

also considered updates on Thriving Neighbourhoods, and members hoped to contribute to the development of the refreshed strategy, including through pre-policy workshops.

The School Road Safety Review remained ongoing, with further workshops planned ahead of finalising the review.

The Anti-Social Behaviour workshop, held with Housing Services, had been productive, though attendance was lower than expected. The Commission felt the content should be shared more widely with all councillors due to its relevance.

A Markets and Libraries site visit was scheduled for the following week.

At the next meeting, the Commission would receive an overview of borough-wide events delivered over the past 12 months, including, but not limited to, Children's Capital of Culture activity.

No further questions were raised for Cllr McKiernan.

103. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Board considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions February 2026 to April 2026.

The Chair noted that two items currently appeared on the work programme schedule: the *Climate Engagement Annual Report* and the *Modern Slavery Transparency Statement* annual refresh. He questioned whether both items needed to return to scrutiny every year and invited views from the committee. He commented that, in his personal view, an annual scrutiny cycle for these items might not be necessary.

The Governance Manager outlined the forward plan items scheduled for March across service areas:

- **Adult Care, Housing and Public Health**
 - *Housing Capital Programme 2026–27 to 2029–30*
 - *Public Health Grant 2026–27*
- **Children's Services**
 - *Best Start Plan 2026–29*
 - *Family Hubs Progress Update and Extension*
 - *South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency* – seeking approval to enter a new regional agreement with Barnsley, Doncaster and Sheffield to deliver adoption services.
- **Corporate Services**
 - *Community Governance Review*
- **Policy, Strategy and Engagement**

- *Local Growth Fund 2026–27 allocation*
- *Crisis and Resilience Fund*

- **Regeneration and Environment**
 - *Transport Capital Programme 2026–27*
 - *Climate Emergency Annual Report*

She also highlighted the non-key decisions scheduled for March:

- **Children's Services**
 - *Family First Partnership Programme* (recently referred to Cabinet)
 - *Scrutiny review findings and recommendations – Access to Contraception Review*

- **Regeneration and Environment**
 - *Modern Slavery Transparency Statement Annual Refresh*

These items were presented for members' consideration as part of the forward plan.

Councillor Allen noted that the *Climate Emergency Annual Report* had been scheduled for the meeting but had been withdrawn. She asked for reassurance that it would be available for consideration in March. She also commented that she would welcome scrutiny of the *Transport Capital Programme*, as it would be a substantial item of interest for the Commission.

In response, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Climate Emergency report was almost fully drafted and required only minor adjustments; he expected it to be ready for the March meeting.

The Chair then requested further detail on the *Community Governance Review*. The Monitoring Officer explained that best practice recommended that an authority conduct such a review every 10 - 15 years. The review covered the boundaries and governance arrangements of parish and town councils across the borough. The Chair confirmed that the Community Governance Review could be added to the agenda.

He asked members whether they wished to include the *Modern Slavery Transparency Statement Refresh*. Members indicated they were willing to remove it from the work programme on the understanding it would be scrutinised upon any significant changes.

Councillor Baggaley queried whether the *Best Start Plan 2026–29* should come to this Commission for scrutiny before being approved, given its long-term scope. It was suggested that the Improving Lives Select Commission might be more appropriate to consider the item, but if that was not possible, it could be brought to this Commission instead. Governance agreed to liaise with the Improving Lives Commission to determine the best route.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:

1. Agreed that the following items would be added to the March agenda as part of OSMB's pre-decision scrutiny work:
 - Climate Emergency Annual Report – Pre-decision Scrutiny
 - Transport Capital Programme 2026/27 – Pre-decision Scrutiny
 - Community Governance Review – Pre-decision Scrutiny
 - Best Start Plan 2026- 2029 – Pre-decision Scrutiny

2. Agreed that the Modern Slavery Transparency Statement – Annual Refresh would cease to be presented on an annual basis and would instead be brought forward only when significant changes to the Statement occur.

104. SOUTH YORKSHIRE MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair reported that there was no substantial update from the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The main item considered at the previous month's meeting had been the specification for the new buses as part of the franchise arrangements. This was well received by the Committee.

105. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no call-in issues.

106. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday 4 February 2026

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bacon (Vice-Chair), and Keenan.

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

107. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

108. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

A member of the public, Mr Ashraf, asked for an itemised breakdown of all financial contributions including investments, subsidies, loans, core subscriptions, specific levies for functions like transport, and any match funding, contributions etc, as well as funds that Rotherham Borough received a share of from national sources, did Rotherham Borough use to fund South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, as well as projected costs for commitments made and what financial or other returns per year for the financial years 2021 onwards had it received in return? They stated they would submit the questions by email and were content to receive a written response.

In his supplementary question Mr Ashraf noted that Doncaster Airport for example while a nice idea in theory, did not seem commercially, to be financially viable. The Sheffield tram system was nice for Sheffield, but why did Rotherham residents have to pay for it? As the politicians of Rotherham were primarily responsible to Rotherham Borough residents just as Doncaster and Sheffield politicians were responsible to their residents what give and take had there been. What quid pro quo deals had been made for the benefit of Rotherham Borough residents to justify such expenditure?

The Chair noted that no verbal response could be provided at that time and confirmed that a written response would be provided by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority once the questions were received by email.

109. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no reasons to exclude the press or public.

110. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION, MAYOR COPPARD, SOUTH YORKSHIRE COMBINED MAYORAL AUTHORITY.

The Chair welcomed Mayor Coppard of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority to the meeting. The Mayor began by thanking Members for the opportunity to attend and noted the positive activity in the town centre.

The Mayor explained that questions had been received in advance and would be responded to, and that he did not intend to make a long statement about the work of the Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA), preferring to allow more time for discussion.

In response to a question regarding the Integrated Settlement and fair funding across South Yorkshire, the Mayor outlined that the Integrated Settlement was a mechanism introduced by the previous government and continued by the current one. It enabled the MCA to bring approximately 25 out of 45 funding streams into a single integrated pot, allowing greater flexibility to shift resources between capital and revenue and between different programmes, though within agreed outcome frameworks. The Mayor noted that the model gave more freedom than before but did not allow unrestricted spending. Work was ongoing to ensure money was allocated fairly and in line with priorities, including significant investment in Rotherham.

The Mayor highlighted that more than £60m of projects were currently being delivered in Rotherham, with total funding commitments exceeding £250m. He reaffirmed that the MCA would continue to support major assets such as the Advanced Manufacturing Park and improve the transport connectivity required to sustain and grow these strengths.

On Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR), the Mayor acknowledged public scepticism given previous experiences with HS2 and other cancelled rail schemes but emphasised their intention to hold the Government to account. He welcomed that Rotherham's Main Line Station had been explicitly included and prioritised in the latest NPR plan, crediting sustained lobbying by local Members. Improved rail connectivity to Sheffield, Leeds, Manchester and London, along with electrification of the line to Leeds and future expansion of Sheffield's Supertram into Rotherham, were identified as further opportunities within the NPR proposals.

The Mayor noted that these schemes formed part of a wider Yorkshire-first approach developed jointly as part of the White Rose Rail Plan. He stressed that the NPR programme was a 15-20-year plan, requiring consistent commitment from future governments, and confirmed that he would continue pressing for delivery, particularly the Rotherham Gateway Station.

The Mayor responded to further questions on transport. He noted that

detailed information on the extension of the South Yorkshire Supertram could not yet be shared, as the MCA would be launching its new transport brand and strategy on 16 March 2026. This launch would outline plans for tram extensions, bus franchising, integrated transport, rail, and work relating to the airport. Rotherham was confirmed as central to this work, with several schemes included in the forthcoming proposals.

On ensuring public transport connectivity to key employment sites such as the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation District and the Advanced Manufacturing Park, the Mayor stressed that this remained a significant challenge. Only 1% of South Yorkshire residents could access the AMRC training centre within 30 minutes by public transport, and many young people faced long, complex journeys to reach training placements. The MCA was examining improvements via buses, rail and tram-train, with bus franchising expected to support this work. A six-week consultation on franchising was under way, and all councillors would be invited to detailed engagement sessions. The Mayor emphasised that changes would not occur immediately at the point of franchising, as stability would be prioritised before route redesign.

In response to concerns about maintaining bus service levels during the transition to franchising, the Mayor acknowledged this as a live issue. He referenced the experience in Greater Manchester, where routes lost before franchising had proved difficult to reinstate. The MCA was therefore working to maintain current service levels across South Yorkshire. The Mayor expressed frustration with operators over recent fare increases of up to 20% despite significant public subsidy, and over proposals to withdraw routes ahead of franchising while seeking additional public funding to retain them. The MCA was in ongoing discussions with operators and urged them to reconsider route reductions.

The Mayor concluded by inviting further questions through the Chair and offering to provide additional detail if required.

Councillor A Carter asked what impact the proposed Rotherham Main Line Station would have on the Mayor's transport budget, and whether prioritising the station would affect funding for other local road and transport schemes, including projects such as LNIS in Rotherham. He also asked whether investment would focus solely on the Main Line Station or continue to support wider improvements across the borough and South Yorkshire.

The Mayor explained that the funding position was more complex than would be ideal. Most transport funding was provided through the Transforming Cities Regions (TCR) programme. A significant uplift had been received, totalling around £1.5bn. Approximately £350m of this would be allocated to bus franchising, which would benefit all of South Yorkshire by enabling a more integrated and partly electrified network, as well as giving the MCA greater control over depots and services. A substantial proportion of funding would also support tram-train

infrastructure, including schemes benefiting Rotherham such as Magna, Parkgate, and town centre connectivity, along with work on potential future extensions. Officers were currently assessing how the remaining funding should be distributed.

The Mayor confirmed that the proposed Rotherham Main Line Station remained a key priority linked to the Northern Powerhouse Rail plan. Feasibility work was under way to ensure the project could progress. However, investment would not be focused solely on the station; other schemes would continue to receive funding. This included allocations for pothole repair, active travel, safer roads, neighbourhood improvements, and environmental priorities such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Funding would also support culture, business investment, and other strategic areas.

The Mayor emphasised that decisions would be shaped through the Integrated Settlement arrangements, allowing flexibility to move funding across programmes, and confirmed that Rotherham's priorities would remain central in discussions with the Leader and local partners.

Councillor Blackham asked whether the lease secured from the Peel Group for Doncaster Sheffield Airport was sufficiently flexible to avoid restricting the reopening and future operation of the airport.

The Mayor responded that reopening Doncaster Sheffield Airport (DSA) remained a major priority and had been the focus of three years of work involving the Mayor of Doncaster, local councillors, MPs and the MCA. The Mayor emphasised that the shared goal across South Yorkshire was to see the airport reopened as a hub for flights, economic opportunity and job growth, noting the wider potential of the opportunities linked to sustainable aviation. Work with industry partners, including Boeing, was referenced as evidence of future potential.

The Mayor confirmed that throughout the process the MCA had acted to protect taxpayers' money while supporting Doncaster Council's efforts to secure the airport's future. Peel Group had engaged constructively, resulting in improvements to the lease arrangements. The Mayor noted that the challenges and requirements for releasing MCA funding were fully set out in the extensive public documentation published in September and reiterated their commitment to transparency and accountability throughout the process.

Councillor Yasseen raised concerns regarding value for money and the historic use of public funds on major transport schemes. She referred to the previous capital investment in the Rotherham-Sheffield tram connection and the significant cost escalation from an original £15m estimate to a final spend of £75.1m, noting that the National Audit Office had assessed it as poor value. She highlighted worries about repeated cycles of investment, such as the redevelopment of Rotherham railway station lasting only around 20 years before major reinvestment was

required and questioned whether large infrastructure projects were effectively performance-managed.

She asked at what stage schemes should be halted if costs escalate beyond their value, why key risks were not identified earlier in the tram project, and whether such schemes risked becoming “vanity projects” that continue receiving funding despite poor performance. She sought assurance on how the MCA ensured robust oversight, early risk identification, and responsible use of public funds.

The Chair clarified that the Rotherham Tram-Train scheme had been delivered by Rotherham Council and funded directly by the Government. The overspend had been met by Government rather than by South Yorkshire funds, and the Council had signed up to the scheme on that basis.

The Mayor responded by separating the question into two parts: the historic value-for-money issues relating to the tram-train scheme, and current assurance on managing major capital projects.

On the historic position, the Mayor noted that the overspend on the tram-train project had arisen from requirements introduced by Network Rail, rather than from Rotherham Council, the MCA or the Mayoral office. The Chair had already clarified that the scheme had been Government-funded and that the overspend was met by Government. The Mayor added that an inadequate early specification by Network Rail had driven much of the additional cost. Although not in office at the time, he acknowledged the challenges this created.

The Mayor commented more broadly that the UK often failed to maintain continuity in major infrastructure delivery. Skills and expertise gained on large schemes were frequently lost due to long gaps between projects. South Yorkshire, as a pioneer of tram-train technology, had not been able to build sufficiently on that early expertise, partly due to national factors.

The Mayor emphasised that the ambition to connect Rotherham via tram, tram-train and mainline rail remained the right strategic direction. However, this required strong project management and long-term maintenance. The Mayor noted that historically the Supertram network had suffered from underinvestment in maintenance, partly due to fragmented responsibilities. This had contributed to the ageing fleet and deterioration of infrastructure. He confirmed that the MCA and South Yorkshire Leaders were now reversing this trend, committing more than £600m to renew and improve the tram network, including a new fleet of trams and tram-trains. The Mayor stressed that major capital projects must be accompanied by long-term maintenance funding, noting that infrastructure could not simply be built and left for decades without reinvestment.

The Mayor concluded that the MCA was now focused on delivering

projects effectively, maintaining assets properly, and learning from past issues to ensure value for money.

The Chair observed that Government policy was shifting rapidly in relation to local government and mayoral authorities. Noting potential future changes that could see planning and licensing functions transferred to the Mayoral Combined Authority, along with proposals for fire authority governance to move under the Mayor, while police governance might be removed. The Chair asked for the Mayor's views on the democratic implications of powers being transferred away from local authorities to the regional level, particularly in sensitive areas such as planning and licensing, and how such changes would benefit residents.

The Mayor responded that the question raised important issues about democracy and community agency. Noting that over several decades significant powers had moved away from local communities, including the loss of major industries, strong local institutions and wider council powers previously held in areas such as licensing and utilities. This long-term shift had left many residents feeling he had little control over decisions affecting their daily lives.

The Mayor stated that devolution offered an opportunity to reverse some of this trend by bringing powers and funding back to South Yorkshire. However, he emphasised that this should not result in power being centralised solely in the Mayoral office. Any new responsibilities, such as planning or licensing, should Government transfer them, would need to be exercised in partnership with local councils and local communities.

Using taxi licensing as an example, the Mayor noted that although Government may decide to place this function under mayoral remit, the MCA would still need to work collaboratively across South Yorkshire to maintain the highest possible standards, recognising the improvements and leadership already shown in areas such as Rotherham.

The Mayor stressed that democratic accountability required both partnership and transparency, and that the goal was not only improved governance but restoring a sense of agency for residents, ensuring decisions were taken with communities rather than imposed over them.

Councillor Baggaley asked how local councillors and communities could work more effectively with the MCA. He noted that in his ward a number of meetings took place between the MCA and council officers, but there was no local elected representation within those working groups. He also highlighted that business cases were being developed without the local councillors being involved, despite these projects having significant community impact. He therefore asked how local Members and local communities could be better engaged in MCA processes going forward.

The Mayor responded that he aimed to make himself as accessible as possible to residents and councillors, including regular community visits,

monthly phone-ins on local radio, use of social media, and public meetings. He acknowledged, however, that informal engagement was not a substitute for formal governance or structured opportunities for local involvement.

It was noted that the MCA remained a new organisation, still developing its systems and processes while Government continued to transfer new responsibilities. He emphasised the importance of maintaining an ongoing conversation about how local councillors and communities could best engage with the MCA and confirmed that he attended forums such as this meeting specifically to listen and learn how engagement might be improved.

He highlighted that much local input already reached the MCA through chief executives, officers and council leaders, with whom he was in regular communication, but stated he was open to exploring more direct methods for involving local councillors in MCA work where appropriate. He invited Members to approach him with suggestions on how local expertise and community structures could be better incorporated.

The Mayor reiterated his belief in devolution, stating that decisions should be taken as close as possible to the people they affect. He accepted that the MCA did not always get engagement right and welcomed further discussion on strengthening local involvement.

Councillor Thorp asked whether the investment in the proposed Rotherham Main Line Station would reduce the funding available for wider road safety improvements across the borough. He noted that road safety remained a top public concern, with strong community support for additional crossings and measures around schools, yet councillors were often told there was no available funding through the Mayoral Combined Authority. He therefore asked whether prioritising the train station would limit or worsen access to MCA funding for road safety schemes.

The Mayor confirmed that investment in the proposed Rotherham Main Line Station would not reduce funding available for road safety improvements. He stated that the number of people killed or seriously injured on South Yorkshire's roads had been too high for many years, due in part to long-term underinvestment in public and active travel infrastructure. This had contributed to increased car use, congestion and road danger.

The Mayor explained that, when he took office, South Yorkshire had recently been refused Bus Service Improvement Plan funding, despite bidding for over £550m. The region had also experienced historic underinvestment from successive governments. However, he noted that the funding situation had now changed significantly, with South Yorkshire expecting around £1.5bn in capital funding between 2027 and 2032. He stated that this investment would support improvements not only in rail, tram-train and buses, but also in road safety. The road safety team had

been brought back into the MCA, enabling renewed investment in crossings and safety schemes, particularly for children. The Mayor reiterated his commitment to making South Yorkshire one of the safest places to walk, wheel, scoot and cycle, including significant funding for side-road crossings and pedestrian improvements. He emphasised that the MCA could and would invest in both the Rotherham Station project and road safety, and that the two were not in conflict.

Councillor Yasseen raised concerns about the environmental implications of reopening DSA. She noted that both the MCA and local councils had declared a climate emergency in 2019 and had committed to achieving net zero by 2040, a target she already regarded as extremely challenging. She questioned how enabling one of the highest-emission forms of transport could be reconciled with those commitments, given that aviation emissions could outweigh reductions from all other sectors. She asked how this apparent contradiction would be addressed and how the airport's return to operation could align with achieving net zero. Councillor Yasseen also asked whether it was appropriate or sustainable for councils or combined authorities to take responsibility for running airports.

The Mayor responded that no council would be running the airport. The airport would instead be operated by Fly Doncaster, an arm's-length body established with specialist expertise built into its governance, including the board and chief executive. The Mayor reiterated his long-held view that airports should be run by professionals from the private sector and confirmed that this model would be followed.

Funding for the airport's reopening would flow through the MCA once specific conditions were met. The Mayor argued that this approach protected taxpayers' money while enabling the airport to function as a major economic driver for South Yorkshire. He highlighted its potential to create significant employment, support logistics and freight, and improve global connectivity.

Addressing the climate concerns raised, the Mayor acknowledged the climate emergency and the tension between aviation and net-zero ambitions. However, he argued that aviation would remain a necessary part of modern economic and international life, and that the solution was not to eliminate flying but to develop more sustainable aviation. He emphasised that South Yorkshire was already leading in this field, citing Boeing's lightweighting and advanced manufacturing work in the region, supported in part by MCA investment. The Mayor stated that DSA could become a centre for sustainable aviation innovation, contributing both to net-zero progress and to local economic opportunity. He concluded that the MCA's approach aimed to balance climate commitments with economic needs, enabling both sustainable aviation development and local job creation.

The Chair thanked Mayor Coppard for attending, answering questions and giving his time, and also expressed appreciation to his accompanying

officer Charlie Sweeney, for his support.

111. BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX REPORT 2026-27

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety, Councillor Alam OBE introduced the 2026/27 budget, noting that it had undergone extensive consultation with officers, the budget working group, and Cabinet Members, and was now out for wider consultation. It was stated that scrutiny's views were sought at this meeting, and that any recommendations would be reported to Cabinet. It was noted that a couple of Cabinet Members would contribute, specifically on investments.

The Service Director, Financial Services, Rob Mahon provided a technical overview of the main points from the budget report. Noting that the 2026/27 budget process had been more challenging than in recent years due to delays in the Government's Fair Funding Review. Although the final outcome was positive, the slow progress had required the Council to plan for both potential savings and potential investment scenarios.

It was reported that the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) had been updated in November and that a briefing on the budget journey had been presented to OSMB in January following the outcome of the Fair Funding Review. Key points highlighted included:

- The Fair Funding Review had been positive for the Council, simplifying funding mechanisms and providing a three-year funding position.
- The Council had received an increase of £9.2m for 2026/27, rising to £21.2m by 2028/29, alongside the 2025/26 recovery grant.
- Pensions revaluation was expected to reduce contributions by £6.6m per year from 2026/27.
- September CPI of 3.8% had uplifted certain grants and the settlement funding assessment, improving the funding position.
- Service grants, including extended producer responsibility, had been uplifted, increasing spending power.
- Council Tax and Business Rates collection remained strong overall, despite a significant issue connected to speciality steel.
- Savings for 2025/26 were on track, with route optimisation savings expected to be fully realised in 2026/27.
- The Council's reserves remained robust, with no further use proposed for 2026/27 onwards other than the Local Plan, identified as appropriate one-off expenditure.

However, continued financial pressures were noted, particularly rising demand and complexity in both adults' and children's social care. Market inflation and the loss of a major business rates payer, Speciality Steel, had created further pressures and increased the likelihood of business rates write-offs. Capital financing costs linked to the wider capital programme also continued to impact the MTFS.

The Service Director, Financial Services went on to outline the key

financial implications within the budget report. Adult Social Care demand and inflationary pressures had been addressed through an additional £8.6m allocation. CYPS was due to receive £4.8m, including £2.8m to correct historical under-inflation and £2m to meet inflationary pressures in 2026/27.

Home-to-school transport was reported to be in a more stable position following work over the previous 18-24 months; however, national demand pressures remained, and £0.5m per year had been added to the MTFs to accommodate expected growth.

Pay awards, the removal of national pay spine point 2 from 2026/27, and ongoing Real Living Wage obligations had been built into the budget. The update presented to OSMB in January had shown a £1m budget pressure for 2026/27 and 2027/28, with further challenges anticipated in 2028/29. Given the uncertainty of the next 2-3 years, officers advised that no immediate action was required at this stage.

The budget report therefore moved from the January position to the proposed decisions for 2026/27, including:

- Savings totalling £3.2m.
- A Council Tax increase of 3.95% (0.95% above the LGFS assumption).
- A 3.8% uplift in fees and charges, higher than the previously assumed 2%.
- £2.8m in proposed revenue investments.
- New capital investment proposals, with associated revenue financing built into the budget.

No further use of reserves was proposed beyond 2025/26, apart from £2.2m earmarked for the Local Plan. The Council Tax Support top-up scheme would continue, funded via the Crisis Resilience Fund, providing up to £131.44 relief for Band A households.

It was highlighted that, despite national uncertainty and increasing demand pressures, the Council continued to demonstrate strong budget management and a balanced budget was presented for the next two financial years.

The budget was based on the provisional financial settlement, with the final settlement expected shortly. Any changes would be incorporated into the inflationary budget. An adjustment to fees and charges would be required before Council due to the Government's recent decision to delay rent convergence, meaning increases would now be phased from 2027/28 and 2028/29.

The Leader, Councillor Read provided an overview of the key elements of the budget proposals, expanding on the earlier technical presentation. He noted that Rotherham had been a beneficiary of the Government's Fair Funding Review, receiving £9m more than expected compared with the previous year's position. While funding remained below the level the

Council would wish for in order to fully restore services reduced during austerity, this was nonetheless a significant improvement on recent years.

However, he highlighted that the Council faced £13.4m of additional pressures in children's and adults' social care for 2025/26 to ensure those services were properly funded. As a result, services had been asked to identify efficiencies that would not disadvantage residents. This had led to approximately £3m of savings, through better use of grant funding and sustainable changes achieved during the past year.

The Leader highlighted that approximately £900,000 of the proposed savings related to working-age adult social care. This was based on modelling which showed that Rotherham's average spend per service user was higher than comparable authorities. By reviewing support packages as new service users entered the system, the Council expected to deliver services more efficiently while maintaining individual needs assessments. He emphasised that all decisions would continue to be based on the specific needs of each person, and the saving could be achieved without reducing the quality of care.

The Leader noted that the only change likely to be noticeable to residents was a slight reduction in customer service operating hours, with Riverside House and the contact centre losing about 30 minutes each day from its operating times. He reported that usage data showed very few customers accessed the service during this time. He also reminded Members that a more substantial reduction in evening call-centre hours had been implemented 12 months earlier without any negative feedback. He stated that the Council was confident the adjustment would not disadvantage residents while contributing to the required efficiency savings.

The Leader explained that, once efficiencies had been identified, the Council considered how the available funding could be used to improve quality of life across the borough. A key theme of the investment proposals was responding directly to issues raised by residents.

He highlighted a £300,000 investment to establish a High Streets Team. While the Council already had strong inward-investment and business-start-up teams, residents continued to express frustration about the condition and vitality of high streets across the borough. The new team would provide dedicated, hands-on support to businesses, initially in principal towns and then more widely, through activities such as events, promotions, growth advice, and help accessing grant funding, including schemes similar to the successful Shop Unit Grant. The intention was to use this discretionary support to help reinvigorate high streets and strengthen local communities.

The Leader reported that, following last year's selective licensing consultation, the Council had established a small team to respond to issues consistently raised by tenants, landlords and residents. While selective licensing had successfully maintained minimum housing

standards over the past decade, consultation feedback showed that communities had not seen wider improvements to their neighbourhoods or the public realm.

With the additional funding available, the Council was now able to resource this work. Local Neighbourhood Forums, bringing together tenants, ward councillors, residents and landlords, would be supported to identify and address local concerns. The budget included £100,000 per year in capital funding for small-scale public realm improvements such as fencing, planting and similar works.

Additional civil enforcement capacity would be provided to tackle issues such as fly-tipping and environmental problems in the affected areas, with officers based locally to build community knowledge. Dedicated tenant support would also be introduced to assist residents who were vulnerable or at risk of exploitation, helping them access wider services including employment support.

The Leader stated that these measures would ensure that communities which had previously not felt the benefits of selective licensing would now see practical, visible improvements.

The Leader highlighted a £350,000 investment to expand the Healthy Holidays programme. He explained that the core, Government-funded scheme provided holiday activities and a hot meal for children receiving free school meals, four days a week during school holidays. However, he noted that the strict eligibility threshold for free school meals meant many low-income families were excluded despite facing similar financial pressures.

The additional local funding would allow the Council to work with providers to create free extra places for children not eligible for free school meals. The Leader advised that further work was required to finalise the delivery model and fair allocation process. Based on current uptake patterns, around 2,500 children could benefit from approximately 10,000 additional day places. With an estimated 25,000–30,000 children in Rotherham not receiving free school meals, the challenge would be to target the support to those most in need without introducing restrictive or complicated criteria.

The Leader reported a £450,000 investment to strengthen the Educational Psychology Service. He noted that while Rotherham performed comparatively well against other authorities on assessments, the process remained difficult for families and current performance levels were not sufficient to meet growing demand. The investment aimed to increase universal support for schools to help identify and address needs earlier, reducing escalation. It would also support efforts to reduce waiting times for children with the most significant needs. The Leader acknowledged that this was a substantial financial commitment but stated that it was necessary to improve outcomes for children and families.

The Leader went on to report a £200,000 allocation to fund a trial of discounted swimming for older residents. He described this as an opportunity, made possible by the improved budget position, to enhance quality of life for people aged over 65. Current participation levels for this age group were low, and the trial, linked to the existing Moving Well programme, would test whether reduced prices encouraged greater physical activity. He explained that the scheme was intended as a temporary pilot, aimed at generating evidence on whether discounted access could sustainably increase participation. He hoped the trial would lead to more older residents taking up swimming and provide useful insight to inform future targeted investment.

The Leader also highlighted planned capital works to improve green spaces, noting investment particularly at Herringthorpe and Ulley, along with additional revenue funding for Rother Valley Country Park. These improvements were intended to enhance residents' experience of local parks and leisure spaces.

The Leader noted that the capital programme also included a range of essential infrastructure works, forming a significant portion of the planned investment. While he did not detail each scheme, he confirmed these were necessary projects that supported the borough's long-term asset management.

In closing, he confirmed that the proposals resulted in a 3.95% council tax increase, remaining below the Government's cap for the seventh consecutive year. He highlighted the cumulative benefit of this approach, with the average Rotherham household estimated to be around £100 per year better off next year and in future years compared with applying maximum increases. He described the rise as a responsible and sustainable step that protected services without placing undue pressure on residents.

The Leader also reiterated that the Council Tax Support Top-Up Scheme would continue, funded through Government grant. This would provide significant reductions, often reducing bills to zero, for approximately 14,000 working-age households, easing financial pressures on low-income residents. He concluded that the overall proposals represented a strong and balanced package and recommended them for consideration.

The Chair introduced the next stage of the budget item. He explained that each Cabinet Member would now present the key elements of their portfolio, supported by officers in attendance. He asked Members to keep questions and comments brief in order to allow as many contributions as possible and to enable scrutiny to focus on detail, noting that the role of scrutiny was to act as a "critical friend." He also reminded Members to avoid political statements during the meeting, emphasising that such remarks were more appropriate for full Council when the budget would be

formally set.

He then invited Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor Cusworth to begin with her main budget items.

Councillor Cusworth presented the main budget proposals relating to Children and Young People's Services. She noted that the directorate included two savings of £400,000 linked to grant optimisation, explaining that the Council sometimes received grant funding for activity already under way or for staffing that could be funded differently, allowing these efficiencies to be realised.

She highlighted the £4.8m investment in children's social care, made possible through the improved Government settlement. She then outlined four further areas of investment and associated capital proposals designed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families, particularly those who were vulnerable or disadvantaged.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People confirmed the £453,000 investment in Educational Psychology, which would expand the service to meet rising demand. This would reduce waiting times for assessments, increase support for children with SEND, and provide schools with improved access to expert advice on emotional wellbeing and mental health. The additional capacity would also help address issues such as rising anxiety, emotionally based school avoidance, and links to elective home education.

She reiterated the importance of the £350,000 expansion of the Healthy Holidays programme, which would provide around 10,000 additional day places. The scheme offered free activities and a school-meal-quality lunch for children, working closely with voluntary and community sector partners. She noted that many low-income families were not eligible for free school meals and therefore welcomed the opportunity to widen access. Councillor Cusworth encouraged elected Members to visit sessions within their wards, highlighting the positive impact on children's enjoyment, confidence and social inclusion.

Councillor Cusworth outlined further investment proposals within Children and Young People's Services. She noted a £26,000 allocation for school uniform support, linked to an expected 20% increase in eligibility due to free school meal entitlement changes under Universal Credit. The funding would continue to provide £70 vouchers at key transition points, starting school, moving to junior school, and moving to secondary school. She clarified that vouchers could be used at any retailer, not only specialist uniform shops.

She confirmed an additional £100,000 to expand universal youth work, enabling further sessions and wider engagement. Since the programme began in 2021, delivery had grown well beyond the initial target of 750 sessions, reaching 1,260 sessions in the past year. The investment would

strengthen both youth club provision and outreach activity, working with the voluntary and community sector to provide safe spaces, trusted adults, and positive role models for young people.

Councillor Cusworth also highlighted a £208,000 capital investment for new youth outreach vehicles to replace ageing fleet. These vehicles would support mobile youth work, particularly in neighbourhoods where young people did not access traditional youth centres. She described local examples of successful outreach, such as work in Thrybergh, where regular engagement, supported by the mobile unit, had enabled youth workers to build strong relationships with groups of young people and provide early help where risks were identified.

She concluded that the set of proposals demonstrated the Council's commitment to supporting vulnerable children and families, promoting educational achievement, and expanding opportunities for young people across the borough. She welcomed scrutiny of the proposals and confirmed she was happy to take questions.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety, Councillor Alam OBE to highlight his main budget items. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety reported two investment areas within the portfolio.

First, internal audit played an important role in governance by providing assurance on service effectiveness and adding value. The team had remained stable for several years due to the extensive experience of existing auditors, but its small size, compared with other authorities, meant future resilience was a concern. To address this, proposals were made to establish two trainee auditor posts and one principal auditor post to support succession planning and future-proof the service.

Second, the Cabinet Member highlighted increasing cyber security threats, noting recent disruptions experienced by major organisations. To strengthen the Council's protection against cyber-crime, proposals were made to create two additional posts to enhance cyber security capability.

Next the Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Green Spaces, Councillor Marshall to present her main budget highlights. The Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Green Spaces reported several proposed investments.

The events team sought additional capacity to support the borough-wide events programme, including major cultural, civic and town-centre events. Visitor numbers had continued to grow, with 95,500 attending the Rotherham Show in 2025, despite the team comprising only 3.8 FTE posts. Investment was therefore proposed to expand capacity, supporting culture-led regeneration, increased footfall, stronger community engagement and enhancement of Rotherham's cultural identity.

Increased visitor numbers at Rother Valley Country Park, driven partly by favourable weather, had placed pressure on site maintenance, health and safety requirements and the management of anti-social behaviour. With the new Waterfront Café expected to attract further visitors, proposals were made to expand the ranger team to ensure the park remained safe, well maintained and welcoming.

Phase two of the roadside cleansing team was proposed. Phase one had been established in October 2025, focusing on rural verges and fly-tipping until March 2026, before moving to scheduled maintenance of the 32 gateway sites. To maintain momentum and widen impact, it was proposed to double the available resources.

From 28 October 2026, the household waste recycling centres were scheduled to be insourced, transitioning from external contractors to RMBC management. The strategy aimed to improve service quality, resident satisfaction, accountability and sustainability, with an emphasis on reuse and improved waste management practices.

A 12-month pilot for discounted swimming for residents over 65 was proposed, aimed at increasing physical activity and improving health outcomes. The pilot would provide evidence of uptake, impact and value for money.

Capital investment was proposed to replace fleet equipment for green spaces, including Clifden Park, Rother Valley Country Park and Waleswood Caravan Park, and to purchase a trailer to support movement of machinery between sites.

The resurfacing of the Herringthorpe Athletics Track was proposed, as the 1990 track surface had reached the end of its functional life. Without intervention, the facility risked becoming unusable, impacting schools and community use.

Further investment was proposed for Ulley Country Park, including replacement of the visitor centre. The new facility would enhance revenue generation, improve the visitor experience, provide inclusive community space and support educational and social outcomes for young people with SEND through vocational opportunities. The centre supported a wide range of user groups, including Ulley Sailing Club, the Sea Cadets, Friends of Ulley Country Park, Wickersley School and Sports College, and vocational training programmes.

At the Chair's invitation the Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, Councillor Williams opened by thanking the Executive Director and Service Directors in the Regeneration and Environment Directorate for their work on the budget process, and for the personal support provided in his first year in the role.

The Cabinet Member noted that in summary, proposals were grouped under three broad themes: highways maintenance, road safety, and

support for high streets.

Under highways maintenance, the Cabinet Member highlighted significant investment in the structure's maintenance programme. Recent assessments of highway structures had identified essential works required to maintain safety and usability, and the proposed funding would enable these repairs. Additional allocations were proposed for repairs to Old Flatts Bridge, allowing restrictions to be lifted once parapet works were completed, and for Fleet Bridge to fund design and planning work for future reconstruction.

On road safety, several proposals were presented. Funding was proposed to support the production of ward-level road safety plans, enabling identification of priority locations for future interventions. Funding was also allocated to progress the pedestrian crossing programme, allowing detailed designs to be drawn up for the top five priority sites following a review of more than 50 requests. The Transportation Minor Works Programme would continue, with clearer definitions of eligible interventions. Funding was also proposed to develop plans and designs for improvements at Treeton Lane Crossroads, a longstanding area of concern.

In relation to high streets, the Cabinet Member welcomed the continued investment supporting town centres, building on previous initiatives such as street cleansing teams, Street Safe teams and business support officers. Additional small budgets would be made available in each of the five areas to support local promotional and activity-based initiatives. Councillor Williams concluded by noting that the proposals represented positive investment across communities and responded directly to local priorities.

At the Chair's invitation the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, Councillor Baker-Rogers reported on the position for Adult Social Care. It was noted that, in line with other urban areas, the borough had an ageing population with increasingly complex needs, and the Council had statutory duties to meet eligible care requirements.

Adult Social Care in Rotherham had continued to focus on enabling residents to live independently at home for as long as possible, though this approach carried significant cost pressures. Inflation and rising demand meant that the portfolio required additional budget provision to meet statutory obligations, rather than to fund new revenue or capital initiatives.

The Cabinet Member emphasised the importance of value for money and noted that the Directorate had a strong record in this area. Work would continue, including reviewing spend on working-age adults while ensuring needs continued to be met. It was also reported that construction of the new homes at Canklow, which will provide day opportunities for people with high support needs, was progressing, and the Councillor Baker-

Rogers looked forward to its opening.

At the Chair's invitation the Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Beresford provided an update on selective licensing and thanked the Leader for the overview already given. It was noted that views from tenants, landlords, ward members and the scrutiny panel had been taken into account, particularly concerns that previous schemes had not delivered a visible difference in neighbourhoods. While earlier schemes had been effective in addressing issues within properties, they were less focused on external environmental concerns.

The new approach was described as an opportunity to make a more significant and visible impact. This would be achieved through strengthened enforcement, addressing issues such as fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour, and through enhanced tenant engagement to ensure residents' priorities were clearly understood.

On the capital side, the Cabinet Member explained that the programme included £100,000 in the coming year and £500,000 over five years for small-scale environmental improvements. These would be informed by the new stakeholder board and delivered in partnership with agencies such as the police, with a focus on designing out crime and tackling environmental issues.

The Cabinet Member for Housing highlighted a request for £135,000 to support the Welfare Rights Service. This funding was intended to maintain the existing service rather than introduce new provision. The service currently supported residents with serious cancer diagnoses, with around 900 Rotherham residents benefiting from advice on benefits and support, such as transport assistance for those undergoing chemotherapy.

The service had previously been funded by Macmillan Cancer Support, but reduced donations meant Macmillan might no longer be able to sustain its contribution. While Macmillan might still provide some funding, the amount and timing were uncertain. The proposed allocation would ensure the Council could continue delivering this vital service for residents.

Councillor Beresford reported a revenue saving relating to the Housing First programme, which supported some of the most vulnerable and complex tenants to sustain their tenancies. The intention was not to reduce or cease the service but to fund it differently. As referenced by the Leader, alternative funding had been identified through the Homelessness Prevention Grant, enabling the same level of support to continue without direct Council funding. This change would deliver a saving of approximately £190,000.

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

Councillor Blackham queried the budget increase, noting that while the proposed additional projects and services totalled approximately £900,000, the overall budget had risen by £4.8 million. He asked what the remaining £3.9 million would fund that had not been provided in the current year.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded that the £4.8 million increase related specifically to social care pressures. This funding was required to continue meeting existing commitments, including rising placement costs and increasing complexity within the private market. The additional proposals referred to earlier, such as educational psychology support, school uniform support, additional places and universal youth work, were separate to this and did not form part of the £4.8 million. The £4.8 million therefore covered demand-led social care costs rather than new initiatives.

In his supplementary Councillor Blackham sought clarification that the £4.8 million increase related solely to meeting inflationary pressures, increased demand and associated costs. In response the Service Director, Financial Services confirmed that the £4.8 million increase comprised £2.8 million to address historic under-inflation, as previously outlined to OSMB, and a further £2 million for inflation in the 2026-27 financial year. It was noted that this funding was separate from the revenue investment proposals discussed by Members, which related to additional activities within the budget and Council Tax report.

Councillor Tinsley BEM asked a question regarding selective licensing. He queried the shift away from a fully self-funding model, given the proposals for increased civil enforcement and capital improvements. He also asked what support would be provided in areas no longer covered by selective licensing, such as Maltby, where similar issues continued to occur.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed that selective licensing was normally self-funding, with licence fees covering the cost of property inspections and the work carried out within homes. However, the Council had chosen to expand the approach to include external environmental improvements and enhanced enforcement activity, which required additional funding. This also reflected feedback from tenants, landlords, ward members and scrutiny, leading to the establishment of a stakeholder panel and improved routes for tenants to seek support.

Regarding areas no longer covered by selective licensing, such as Maltby, the Councillor Beresford noted that their removal from the scheme reflected improvements achieved during previous designations. It was confirmed that the Council continued to operate a private rented sector enforcement team to support both tenants and landlords in those areas, alongside wider investment initiatives such as those in Maltby town centre.

Councillor Tinsley BEM followed up by noting that existing enforcement officers were already in place and queried whether the additional resources proposed for selective licensing areas amounted to a general increase in civil enforcement capacity. He expressed concern that, while the focus on selective licensing areas was understandable, other areas no longer within the scheme, such as Maltby, also continued to face similar issues and might require additional support. He cautioned that the scope of the approach might be too narrow and suggested that broader coverage could be beneficial.

In response, the Cabinet Member acknowledged the point raised and confirmed that the focus of the selective licensing proposals was on the most deprived areas, where issues such as fly-tipping and environmental crime remained persistent and required targeted intervention. These areas experienced ongoing problems that needed a concentrated approach to change long-standing patterns of behaviour and improve local conditions.

The Cabinet Member for Housing also noted that, although the new enforcement resources were directed at selective licensing areas, there was flexibility to provide occasional support to other areas, such as Maltby, should specific hotspots or issues arise. Members were encouraged to raise such concerns so that support could be deployed where appropriate.

Councillor Tinsley BEM raised a query regarding the household waste recycling centres. He noted that when scrutiny previously considered the delivery options, the cost differences between retaining the outsourced model, adopting a hybrid approach, or bringing the service fully in-house had been marginal, with outsourcing being the cheaper option. He commented that additional resources were now being invested, increasing the cost to taxpayers. He also observed that the former contractor had managed recycling activity, including operating a reuse shop, and questioned whether the new arrangements offered good value for money given that similar tasks could potentially have been carried out under the previous model.

In response the Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment explained that the changes represented an enhancement to the existing household waste recycling centre service. Ahead of the operation being brought in-house in October, the Council had reviewed current arrangements and identified opportunities to improve the support offered to residents in recycling their materials correctly. It was also confirmed that the Council intended to establish a reuse shop at one of the Rotherham sites over the next year, building on the type of provision previously referenced. He stated that this formed an additional element of the service the Council wished to develop.

The report noted that by 2028-29 there would be a £9.279m deficit in the financial budget. Councillor Yasseen asked what specific measures were

being developed, and by when, to address the funding gap. The Leader noted that there remained significant risk in the year-three budget position. Reference was made to last year's budget report, where a similar deficit had appeared in year three and had subsequently moved into year two but was now in balance. Members were advised that figures typically changed over a three-year period and, therefore, the current projected deficit was not a primary concern at this stage. The budget would continue to be closely monitored, with costs controlled and responsible decisions taken on council tax. The Council was considered to be in a sustainable interim position, though actions would be taken if the projected deficit remained a concern in 12 months' time.

A question was raised by Councillor Yasseen regarding the investment in the track at Herringthorpe Playing Fields, highlighting concerns about the lack of community consultation. It was noted that a masterplan for the site had been repeatedly promised over several years, including by successive Cabinet Members, but had not yet been delivered. Without this masterplan, requested by both the Member and the Friends of Herringthorpe Playing Fields for a decade, it was queried how the Council could be confident that the investment represented the best use of funds or reflected local community priorities. It was asked whether it would be more prudent to await the completion of the long-promised masterplan before proceeding.

The Leader explained that investment in the Herringthorpe running track had been brought forward in response to representations from users, including the Harriers and other groups, who considered it their highest priority. The track was reported to be deteriorating to the point of becoming unsafe, and the investment was presented as necessary to ensure continued use of the facility.

In her supplementary, Councillor Yasseen expressed concerns about the lack of community consultation and the absence of the long-promised masterplan for the site. It was noted that a masterplan had been requested by ward members and the Friends of Herringthorpe Playing Fields for a decade, and that investment was being made in a piecemeal way without a clear strategic context. It was questioned how priorities between different user groups could be determined without this overarching plan, and it was suggested that the investment should have been deferred until the masterplan was completed.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment noted that user groups had made strong representations regarding the athletics track, which was described as a well-used but rapidly deteriorating facility. Advice received from Athletics England indicated that the track was unlikely to remain usable beyond another year. Members were informed that, without replacement within the current year, the track would have to close in 2027, and the proposed investment was therefore presented as an immediate response to its physical condition.

Councillor Baggaley asked question regarding the revenue savings, specifically the treasury management saving line, for which no appendix had been provided. Clarification was requested on what this treasury management saving related to. In response the Service Director, Financial Services reported that the Council had generated consistent savings through its Treasury Management strategy over recent years. Some of these recurring savings had been built into the budget for 2025-26 to 2027-28. Additional in-year savings continued to be delivered beyond those already assumed. It was noted that the same Treasury Management approach, regularly reported to the Audit Committee, was expected to continue to support the budget throughout the MTFS period without further challenges.

A question was raised by Councillor Baggaley regarding how the DSG Safety Valve arrangements fitted into the budget. Reference was made to the projected increase in the DSG deficit over the period and to the end of the statutory override in 2027–28. Clarification was sought on how the Council intended to begin reducing the deficit as the override expired, and whether the MTFS currently reflected the financial impact once the override was removed or whether a significant spike would appear when it ended.

It was reported that the Safety Valve programme had enabled the Council to return the DSG position to balance, removing the previous £20m negative reserve. Members were reminded that the Government's statutory disregard meant that any DSG deficit would not impact the General Fund until 2027–28, and that this deadline had already been extended several times. It was suggested that further national delays were likely, particularly given that wider social care reforms affecting DSGs had also been pushed back.

It was emphasised, however, that the Council could not rely on further extensions and must continue to reduce demand pressures. The service would therefore continue work aligned with the former Safety Valve programme, including maximising local placements, reducing costly out-of-borough provision, and increasing capacity within local schools.

It was noted that the MTFS did not yet factor in the end of the statutory mitigation in 2027–28. Members were advised that, should the Government adhere to that timeframe, the removal of the disregard would create a pressure on the General Fund that would need to be addressed at that point. It was confirmed that the budget and MTFS were kept under continual review in line with Government policy changes, and the Council would respond accordingly as further national direction emerged.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People noted that the DSG pressures were not unique to Rotherham, as many authorities held deficits and had also participated in Safety Valve arrangements. While the programme had provided substantial support, including capital investment to expand local provision and keep children

educated within the borough, the wider national system had not yet been fixed. As a result, DSG deficits were beginning to rise again in several Safety Valve authorities. Members were informed that councils were awaiting further national reforms, including the forthcoming 'Children's Wellbeing and Schools' Bill and accompanying white paper. It was emphasised that efforts continued to maximise in-borough provision, not only for financial reasons but because it was considered better for children to remain near peers and siblings wherever possible. It was also suggested that the statutory override was likely to continue for several more years.

A question was raised by Councillor Thorp regarding the costings, specifically the £73,971 allocated for a tennis court. Clarification was requested on what this expenditure related to. In response it was noted that the expenditure formed part of the ongoing programme of tennis court refurbishment across the borough and related to one of those schemes.

A supplementary question was raised noting that the Lawn Tennis Association had recently spent £150,000 resurfacing the courts and asking why the Council was intending to spend a further £73,971. It was noted that there may have been some confusion with the athletics track refurbishment, and officers agreed to check the position and report back to Councillor Thorpe.

A question was raised regarding the £200,000 allocated to support discounted swimming for people over 65. It was noted that, at a previous meeting on funded activity to encourage increased participation, commercial operators had been asked to offer half-price swimming for this age group. Clarification was sought by Councillor Thorp on whether the Council would be subsidising the remaining cost to those operators, and it was suggested that operators should instead have been advised that offering half-price entry could generate additional income without Council support. In response it was confirmed that no additional payments were being made to the private operator of the leisure centres. The Council would be subsidising the reduced-price offer for residents aged over 65, but the operator would not receive any extra funding beyond the standard fees paid for use of the facilities.

The Leader noted that, under the existing PFI arrangements for the leisure centres, prices were set by the operator. While the model was acknowledged to be costly, it had helped protect the facilities during austerity. The Council was using a small amount of funding to subsidise access for residents over 65, as it was considered beneficial to them, and it was confirmed that lessons would be learned from the approach.

Councillor Thorp raised a further question regarding the £200,000 subsidy for over-65s swimming, asking what the Council was actually paying for. It was queried whether individuals would need to claim the subsidy themselves or whether the Council would effectively be funding the majority of the operational costs. Clarification was sought on how the

subsidy worked in practice and what the £200,000 was being used to cover.

It was explained that the subsidy would be managed through the existing PFI arrangements. The Council made monthly payments to the PFI provider, and the discount offered to over-65s would be tracked and reclaimed through that contract. The PFI agreement would be adjusted to reflect this process. Over-65s would simply pay the discounted price at the leisure centre, with the operator recording those transactions and the Council reimbursing the value of the discount.

The Service Director, Financial Services explained that the subsidy would be managed through the existing PFI arrangements. The Council made monthly payments to the PFI provider, and the discount offered to over-65s would be tracked and reclaimed through that contract. The PFI agreement would be adjusted to reflect this process. Over-65s would simply pay the discounted price at the leisure centre, with the operator recording those transactions and the Council reimbursing the value of the discount.

Councillor Monk asked about the replacement of the outreach vehicles, referring to the identified risk about the availability of skilled and well-trained drivers needed to utilise the vehicles effectively. Clarification was sought on whether this was already impacting service delivery and, if so, whether the number of vehicles being replaced was appropriate given staffing levels. If the issue was not currently affecting the service, further information was requested on how the team was being future-proofed to ensure full utilisation of the vehicles.

The Service Director, Family Help confirmed that the availability of skilled drivers was not currently affecting the outreach service. The risk related instead to ensuring sufficient trained drivers in future. Most staff were still relatively early in their driving careers, and the service had in place a programme of training and refresher courses. A timetable would be followed to maintain ongoing driver competency and safeguard future capacity.

Councillor A Carter asked about the impact and value for money of the previous capital investment in replacing the bin lorry fleet. He noted that recent council meetings had reported vehicle breakdowns and asked whether the replacement had occurred, whether it had been effective, and why there was no current budget provision, was the replacement still pending, or had it happened without delivering the expected benefits?

In response the Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Green Spaces reported that the procurement for the new bin lorry fleet had gone out to tender. Members were advised that there had been a significant number of vehicle breakdowns over the winter period, which had required the temporary hiring-in of vehicles. The service was now awaiting the outcome of the tender process.

In his supplementary Councillor A Carter noted it seemed like quite a long time to get to that point where the Council was currently out to tender and queried why hasn't that taken a year? The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment noted that the procurement process had been protracted but was now concluded. Tenders had closed in the middle of the previous month, and the contract was expected to be awarded later in the month. No new funding was included in the current year's budget, as the purchase would be delivered from previously approved investment. The order for the new vehicles was expected to be placed by the end of February.

Councillor Yasseen raised a question about the new Selective Licensing stakeholder board: who decided who sat on it, and how tenants, especially given historically low engagement, would be identified and reached out to for participation.

The Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed that the stakeholder board was still being scoped and had not yet been finalised. Members were invited to suggest participants. Councillor Beresford noted that contact details gathered through the consultation, covering residents, tenants, and landlords, would be used as a starting point, alongside ward members. It was emphasised that tenants and other stakeholders would help shape the board's design, with letters to be issued to invite engagement and ensure the structure reflected what people wanted.

It was noted that work was still being put in place and asked whether any timescales had been established. It was felt that the consultation indicated the approach extended beyond the Selective Licensing team and required cross-council involvement. Examples included homelessness services, ASB and community enforcement. Councillor Yasseen asked whether a clear framework would be developed to define responsibilities and ensure accountability across teams, given that the aims related to wider area improvement, not just property issues.

Councillor Beresford explained that no definitive timescales could be provided, as recruitment was still required for key posts such as engagement officers and enforcement officers. These roles needed to be in place before effective tenant engagement could begin. She noted that the approach was broader than before, particularly regarding ASB and environmental crime. Existing challenges had arisen because the council had relied on an already stretched Community Protection Unit serving the whole borough. The new model would introduce dedicated in-house resources forming a small team responsible for internal property enforcement and external area issues. This would reduce reliance on CPU and allow officers to respond directly, which represented a key difference from the current arrangements.

The Chair asked whether the uplift in Adult Care and Children's Services was sufficient, or whether further increases would soon be required. In

response, the Leader stated that the uplift was considered sufficient based on analysis of current cost pressures and demand within the services. It was noted that while future pressures could not be ruled out, the budget was judged to be adequate and a reasonable assessment of current needs.

The Chair went on to ask if the capital programme affordable long term? The Service Director, Financial Services confirmed that the capital programme position was fully reflected in the budget and MTFS. Each time the capital programme or borrowing requirements were increased, the associated capital financing costs were built into the revenue budget in advance of projects being delivered. It was noted that slippage could create short-term savings, but provision was made annually to ensure the future affordability of the programme. The Board was advised that current capital investment levels were lower than in previous years. As a result, the Council's future debt repayment through the Minimum Revenue Provision was now higher than its new capital investment, meaning the overall capital financing requirement was reducing year on year, which was considered a positive position.

A question was raised by Councillor Baggaley regarding capital investments, noting that funding had been allocated for design work and feasibility studies but that schemes were not always progressing to delivery at pace. Clarification was requested on how the Council intended to ensure that projects moved beyond preliminary stages into delivery, given that budgets had already been set aside for this work.

The Leader explained that progression from design work to delivery depended on the individual schemes. Some projects were expected to be funded through City Region or Mayoral Combined Authority funding, while others might require further decisions within the Council's own capital programme.

It was acknowledged that, historically, schemes had not been prepared in advance, as design work often began only once major funding had been secured. This approach had delayed delivery by several years and left the Council poorly positioned when new funding opportunities arose. The current strategy aimed to be more proactive by allocating modest capital sums upfront for preparation work, accepting that this carried some risk if external funding did not materialise or costs later proved unaffordable. However, it was felt that this approach provided clearer options and greater readiness compared with previous years, when plans had not been developed early enough to progress.

Councillor A Carter asked whether there was any national information on how other councils were funding welfare rights services, querying whether this approach was unique to the Council or part of a wider trend. In response the Executive Director of Adults, Housing & Public Health explained that the Council employed its own staff to deliver the welfare rights service, supported by financial contributions from Macmillan. While

this model was considered effective, combining council staff with specialist cancer-related benefits expertise, it was noted that arrangements varied nationally. In some areas, Macmillan was likely to run standalone services. However, officers did not have detailed information on the exact position across all local authorities.

In his second question, Councillor A Carter raised a query regarding the cost of the bridge element of the Rotherham Gateway scheme. It was noted that the bridge works appeared to be significant, and clarification was sought on why the Council was liable for the cost. He queried whether the need for bridge improvements arose from changes made under the Clean Air Zone programme, which had been funded by government, and why these works had not been anticipated or included within the original scheme.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment confirmed that the query related to the Old Flats Bridge and noted that the structure was the Council's responsibility as it formed part of the local road network. The bridge and parapet had suffered structural failure, and exploratory works undertaken over the past year had required one lane to be closed for an extended period. It was explained that the Council therefore had a duty to carry out the necessary structural repairs. Although the cost was significant, £1.9m in the programme for the following year, The Executive Director stated that the works were essential to ensure safety for road users and residents and would be progressed as quickly as possible.

It was clarified that the bridge issues were not caused by the Clean Air Zone works. Following the Parkway improvement works, routine safety checks identified problems with the bridge structure. Subsequent investigations and exploratory works then confirmed the extent of the repairs required. The Leader noted that the defects came to light after the Parkway widening, rather than being created by it.

In response to a further question Councillor A Carter regarding whether choosing not to apply the maximum council tax increase would have any impact on the Council's eligibility for the Government's Fair Funding Settlement the Service Director, Financial Services confirmed that no it did not.

A concern was raised by Councillor Thorp regarding the proposal for three new Business Support Officers within the Thriving Neighbourhoods programme, at a cost of £304,000. It was noted that each officer would have only £25,000 available to support businesses, which was felt to be a limited sum relative to the staffing costs. Members questioned whether a single officer with a larger support budget might provide greater benefit to small businesses, particularly those on high streets that may struggle to fund improvements to their premises.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment clarified that the £25,000 allocated to each area was not intended to provide direct

financial support to individual businesses. Instead, the funding was designed to support jointly agreed activity with local business communities, such as promotional campaigns, seasonal events, or initiatives like Christmas lights, to help boost footfall and trading.

It was acknowledged that £25,000 would not be sufficient for individual grants, and this was not the purpose of the scheme. Officers noted that the Council had delivered a business grant programme over the previous year, providing direct financial support, and hoped to offer similar opportunities next year through SYMCA and successor funding to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

A follow-up question asked what tangible benefits three Business Support Officers would bring to high streets, given that other funding streams were already available to support businesses directly. In response the Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy explained that the key benefit of the three Business Support Officers was to provide a clear, dedicated point of contact for each high street, enabling businesses to raise issues more easily and access council support. The roles were also intended to strengthen engagement with ward councillors and improve coordination of council services on high streets. He noted that businesses often felt they lacked the promotional support given to the town centre, and these posts would help address that by supporting day-to-day business needs and delivering small-scale promotional activities funded through the allocated area budgets.

Councillor Tinsley BEM noted that ward councillors already worked closely with local businesses through ward coordinators and that these relationships were effective. He expressed concern that investing in additional staff might not be the best use of resources compared with directing more funding toward direct business support, such as grants, rental incentives, or measures to reduce empty high-street units. It was highlighted that many businesses wanted support to improve occupancy and attract more shoppers, and there was some doubt about whether the proposed balance between staffing and financial assistance was appropriate.

In response, the Chair emphasised the need for staff capacity to support high-street businesses effectively, noting that assistance could not be provided without dedicated officers in place. He described the roles as an investment intended to strengthen support for businesses. He further stated his confidence that the responsible Cabinet Member and officers would deliver the planned financial savings and avoid an overspend, confirming that the budget would be monitored throughout the year.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety noted that, based on previous performance, the Council had consistently balanced its budgets over the years. Monthly monitoring processes were in place, with Cabinet reporting to Scrutiny, and directors and officers worked diligently to remain within budget. While future circumstances could not be

guaranteed, officers expressed confidence that the Council would continue to manage its finances responsibly.

A question was raised by Councillor Tinsley BEM about whether the previously discussed pressures relating to Speciality Steel had any impact on the decision to set a flat council tax level for the year. The Service Director, Financial Services explained this had been reflected within the MTFS projections, and business rate forecasts had been adjusted downwards to reflect the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the site.

In response it was confirmed that the issue had not affected the setting of council tax, as business rates and council tax decisions were not directly linked. It was explained that budget and MTFS decisions were taken collectively across all proposals rather than one investment decision determining changes to council tax.

The Chair referred to the length of the reports and accompanying documents submitted for consideration to this and other meetings, indicating that at times this led to bulky agenda packs. As a result of this he highlighted an additional recommendation: that the Council should review and refine its approach to producing reports to ensure they were clearer, more concise and easier to read. He noted that streamlining reports would also reduce printing, lower costs and support the Council's carbon-reduction aims. He emphasised that this applied to all reports, not only budget reports.

Upon a majority vote the recommendations including the additional one were agreed.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board supported the recommendations that Cabinet recommend to Council:

1. Approval of the Budget and Financial Strategy for 2026/27 as set out in the report and appendices, including a basic Council Tax increase of 1.95% and an Adult Social Care precept increase of 2%.
2. Approval of the extension to the Local Council Tax Support Top Up Scheme, that will provide up to £131.44 of additional support to low-income households accessing the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme. It will support those most financially vulnerable to rising household costs, through reduced Council Tax bills as described in Section 2.5.15
3. Approval of the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2028/29, as described within Section 2.6.
4. Approval of the Reserves Strategy as set out in Section 2.8 noting that the final determination of Reserves will be approved as part of reporting the financial outturn for 2025/26.
5. To delegate authority to the Service Director of Planning, Regeneration and Transport in consultation with the Service Director of Financial Services and Cabinet member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, to approve the specific detailed

allocations and use of the Local Plan Reserve.

6. To note and accept the comments and advice of the Executive Director of Corporate Services (Section 151 Officer), provided in compliance with Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, as to the robustness of the estimates included in the Budget and the adequacy of Reserves for which the Budget provides as set out in Section 2.14.
7. To note the feedback from the public and partners following the public consultation on the Council's budget for 2026/27 which took place from 28 November 2025 to 9 January 2026, attached as Appendix 5.
8. Approval of the proposed increases in Adult Social Care provider contracts and for Direct Payments as set out in Section 2.4.
9. Approval of the proposed approach and increases in Children's Social Care costs as set out in Section 2.4.23.
10. Approval of the revenue investment proposals set out in Section 2.7 and Appendix 2.
11. Approval of the proposed revenue savings set out in Section 2.7 and Appendix 4.
12. Approval of the Council Fees and Charges for 2026/27 attached as Appendix 7.
13. Application of the Business Rates Reliefs as set out in Section 2.10, in line with Government guidance.
14. Approval of the proposed Capital Strategy and Capital Programme as presented in Section 2.12 and Appendices 3A to 3F.
15. Approval of the Treasury Management matters for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 9 of this report including the Prudential Indicators, the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy, the Treasury Management Strategy and the Investment Strategy.
16. Approval that any changes resulting from the Final Local Government Finance Settlement 2026/27 be reflected in the Budget and Council Tax Report to Council on 4 March.
17. Continuation of the principles and measures adopted since April 2020 to make faster payments to suppliers on receipt of goods, works and services following a fully reconciled invoice as described in Section 2.11.
18. Approval of the procedure for Budget allocations for the Community Leadership Fund as set out in Section 2.9.
19. Approval that the Capital Programme Budget continues to be managed in line with the following key principles:
 - i. Any underspends on the existing approved Capital Programme in respect of 2025/26 be rolled forward into future years, subject to an individual review of each carry forward to be set out within the Financial Outturn 2025/26 report to Cabinet.
 - ii. In line with Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules 7.7 to 7.11 and 8.12, any successful grant applications in respect of capital projects will be added to the Council's approved Capital Programme on an ongoing basis.

- iii. Capitalisation opportunities and capital receipts flexibilities will be maximised, with capital receipts earmarked to minimise revenue costs.

An additional recommendation to Cabinet was that:

- OSMB recommends the Council review and refines its approach to producing reports, ensuring that they are clearer, more concise, and easier to read. Streamlined reporting will also help to reduce printing requirements, contributing to lower costs and supporting the Council's work to improve its carbon footprint.

112. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items.

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Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 16 March 2026

Report Title

Best Start Local Plan 2026 - 2029

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

Yes

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report

Nicola Curley, Executive Director of Children & Young People's Service

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The Department for Education (DfE) issued targets for Local Authorities (LAs) to improve Good Level of Development (GLD) as part of its "Best Start in Life" strategy, aiming for 75% of 5-year-olds nationally to reach GLD nationally by 2028, issuing new data tools and funding to guide local planning and intervention.

This report provides an overview of current activity across Rotherham to improve early years outcomes, tackle inequalities, and ensure that all children, especially those who are disadvantaged, get a strong foundation for school, contributing to the Council's wider ambition that children and young people achieve.

The report outlines the key activity undertaken in developing the new Best Start Local Plan, including a comprehensive needs analysis, engagement, and consultation.

The report seeks approval of the Best Start Local Plan and outlines the timeline for implementation to achieve the ambitions identified.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Note the activity to date to improve early years outcomes and tackle inequalities.
2. Approve the Best Start Local Plan for implementation from April 2026.

List of Appendices Included

- Appendix 1 Best Start Local Plan
- Appendix 2 Best Start Summit summary
- Appendix 3 Best Start and Beyond Framework
- Appendix 4 Equality Analysis
- Appendix 5 Part B – Equality Impact Analysis
- Appendix 6 Carbon Impact

Background Papers

[Rotherham Health and Care Place Plan](#)

[Rotherham Council plan 'Forging Ahead'](#)

[Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Strategy for 2025-2030](#)

['Fit for the Future', the NHS 10 year plan](#)

[Rotherham Early Years Education & Childcare Strategy 2024–2027](#)

['No Family Left Behind' child poverty strategy \(Rotherham\)](#)

[Early Help Strategy: Family Help in Rotherham 2024-2029](#)

[Rotherham SEND Strategy: My Life, My Rights 2024-2028](#)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Best Start Local Plan 2026 - 2029

1. Background

1.1 Purpose of the report

1.1.1 The purpose of the report is to:

- Provide an overview of current activity contributing to the achievement of the DfE issued target to improve Good Level of Development (GLD) so that at least 73.3% of 5-year-olds across Rotherham reach GLD by 2028.
- Seek approval of the Best Start Local Plan 2026 – 2029 and outline the timeline for implementation to achieve the ambitions identified.

1.2 Statutory Duty and Local Responsibility

1.2.1 Under the Childcare Act 2006, the Secretary of State has powers to set local authority (LA) targets relating to early years outcomes and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.

1.2.2 Under Section 1 of the Childcare Act 2006, Local Authorities have a mandatory duty to improve the well-being of all young children in their area and reduce inequalities between those with the poorest outcomes and their peers.

1.2.3 Under Section 6, LAs must secure sufficient childcare for working parents and ensure it is of high enough quality to support school readiness.

1.2.4 The Government's "Plan for Change," giving every child the Best Start in Life, requires LAs to secure quality early years education, use new data tools and co-ordinate Family Hubs and relevant health services.

1.2.5 All LAs must develop and publish "Best Start" local plans by 31st March 2026 in line with guidance issued. These plans must outline strategies to reach the agreed local contribution to the national 75% GLD target and address regional disparities.

1.2.6 The reinforced legal and strategic framework shifts the local focus from simply providing childcare places to achieving specific developmental outcomes. Rotherham Council is required to improve the percentage of five-year-olds reaching a Good Level of Development in their Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) assessments to 73.3% (and 56.6% of five-year-olds eligible for free school meals) by 2028.

1.3 Rotherham Context

1.3.1 Rotherham has 14,893 children aged 0-4 according to the 2023 mid-year population estimate.

- 1.3.2 In Rotherham, 27.7% of pupils are eligible for FSM, which compares to an average of 24.6% across England Authorities. 23.5% of pupils have either a statutory plan for Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND), known as an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or are receiving SEND support (previously known as school action and school action plus). This compares to an average of 19.6% across all England Authorities.
- 1.3.3 In the 2023/24 academic year, 64.3% of Rotherham 5-year-olds reached a Good Level of Development (GLD). In the 2024/25 academic year, Rotherham’s GLD rate was 65.0%. This is slightly below National (68.3%), Yorkshire & Humber (66.3%) and Statistical Neighbours (66.4%).
- 1.3.4 Despite other strengths, 35% of children are not achieving GLD — with a significant proportion needing targeted support. To meet the local target of 73.3%, Rotherham needs an increase of 8.3 percentage points within three years from the current 65.0%.
- 1.4 **Existing activity aligned to Best Start priorities**
- 1.4.1 Rotherham Council’s ambition for a family-friendly Borough, where all children and young people achieve, ensures child-focused strategies create a golden thread aligning high level goals with practical, community-based support focused on early intervention and integrated partnership working.
- 1.4.2 The Rotherham Council Plan (2025–2030) includes the establishment of Best Start Family Hubs and an associated network of community sites and services to provide single points of access to advice and support. There is also an expansion of Early Education to create capacity to meet the Government’s expanded 30-hour free childcare entitlement for working parents of children from 9 months to age five by September 2025 and activity to address inequality including the provision of cost-of-living support packages, auto-enrolment of eligible children for free school meals and school uniform assistance.
- 1.4.3 The Health and Wellbeing Strategy commitment to “Enable all children and young people up to age 25 to have the best start in life, maximise their capabilities and have influence and control over their lives” underpins a partnership response which starts before a child is conceived. This includes activity in community health to facilitate easier access to wellness services via the launch of the "Rotherhive" digital platform, delivery of the universal Baby Packs and targeted outreach support focusing on improving take-up of early education places in specific areas like Central Rotherham to close development gaps.
- 1.4.4 The Children and Young People’s transformation workstream under the Health and Care Place Plan was instrumental in the development of the Best Start and Beyond Framework (Appendix 3). Key activities include the Health and Wellbeing Board’s “Supporting a Breastfeeding Borough” declaration and the development and delivery of the associated

"Rotherham Backs Breastfeeding" campaign, community support and early identification of speech and language needs.

1.4.5 Key activities in the Early Help Strategy include the expansion of the physical and digital Family Hub Start for Life offer, to ensure that families have access to the information and tools they need to care for and interact positively with their babies and children, and to look after their own wellbeing. This includes a focus on activities and interventions to support GLD and which promote language and emotional bonding, such as the Peep Home Learning Programme, as well as access to evidenced-based parenting support and a range of targeted family help.

1.5 **Proposed next steps**

1.5.1 Approval is sought for the Best Start Local Plan 2026 – 2029. This will meet the requirement to publish a Best Start Local Plan by 31st March 2026 and ensure continued progress towards the achievement of the DfE-issued target to improve Good Level of Development (GLD) so that 73.3% of 5-year-olds across Rotherham reach GLD by 2028.

2. **Key Issues**

2.1 **Developing the Best Start Local Plan**

2.1.1 On the 1st of December 2025, a Summit led by Rotherham Council brought together multi-agency partners, aiming to foster collaborative discussion and actionable strategies for improving early years development outcomes. Presentations provided a comprehensive needs analysis with a range of quantitative and qualitative information, including feedback from children and families, delivered by Children and Young People's Services, Early Years Education and 0-19 Public Health. Participants engaged in two workshops: the first focusing on current practices and the second on generating ideas for doing things differently. The summit concluded by agreeing the appropriate next steps, informing the development of the Best Start Local Plan.

2.1.2 The Summit captured examples of current activity evidencing delivery of a comprehensive early years support system through integrated health checks, family engagement, robust multi-agency delivery including a vibrant voluntary and community sector and workforce development. Collectively, these actions aim to improve school readiness, reduce inequalities, and foster strong home learning environments. Some key examples of such activity are set out in the following paragraphs.

2.1.3 Health services provide key developmental reviews and performance in this area is high and compares positively to regional and national averages.

2.1.4 The Family Information Service promotes activities, SEND updates, and regular communications to strengthen family support.

2.1.5 Parenting initiatives are delivered via Family Hubs, complemented by home learning programmes that promote parental engagement.

2.1.6 Community engagement is enhanced through partnerships with the voluntary sector, for example Grimm & Co, which delivers creative literacy, cultural storytelling, and parental support, alongside links to Sheffield Hallam University for impact evaluation.

2.1.7 Professional development is embedded through the annual Early Years Conference, bespoke school visits, moderation and best practice meetings and targeted training on curriculum, assessment, and EYFS requirements led by Rotherham School Improvement Service (RoSIS).

2.2 Guiding Principles

2.2.1 The Strategy has been developed in line with the principles of the Rotherham Charter (Four Cornerstones): 1. Welcome and Care 2. Value and Include 3. Communicate 4. Work in Partnership.

2.2.2 In line with the Four Cornerstones, the Summit proposed the key principles to underpin the Best Start Local Plan should be:

- **Partner with parents and carers** as the most important people in a child's life.
- **Provide high-quality early years experiences** that spark curiosity and build strong foundations.
- **Offer timely support** for any additional needs (child or family) so no child is left behind.
- **Make moving between stages smooth and positive**, so every child and family feels supported as they grow.

2.3 Analysis of local need

2.3.1 Rotherham shows high expected levels in Physical Development (82.0%) and Personal, Social and Emotional Development (79.3%), which support GLD attainment.

2.3.2 Expected levels in Writing (67.8%) and Word Reading (72.1%) are lower than other domains, potentially holding back GLD achievement. Rotherham is not exceptional in this respect, as the writing domain is also a limiting factor nationally, affecting a significant proportion of children.

2.3.3 22.2% of children are still at the emerging level in Communication and Language, which can impact readiness for Key Stage 1 and overall GLD.

2.3.4 "Expected" and "emerging" are specific judgments used in assessing a child's development against each of the 17 early learning goals (ELGs). Where a teacher judges that a child has not met the expected level of development for a particular ELG, the child should be assessed as "emerging" for that particular ELG, and further context should be provided within the profile.

2.3.5 A Good Level of Development is achieved when a child reaches the expected level against the 3 prime areas of the EYFS (communication and language; personal, social and emotional development; physical development), and for literacy and mathematics.

2.3.6 The proportion of children with EHCPs continues to increase which means that more SEN places will be needed in mainstream schools, special schools, and post 16 provision.

2.4 **Best Start Local Plan**

2.4.1 Based on the analysis of local need, the following priorities are identified (text shown below is verbatim from the plan):

1. Strengthening early communication, language, and literacy for all children

We know that communication and language are the biggest drivers of school readiness. Improving early speech, language and literacy is central to our ambition to increase the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development.

2.4.2 **2. Increasing early education access for disadvantaged children**

While many families take up funded early education places, too many children in our most disadvantaged communities still miss out, including 12.9% of 3–4-year-olds who live in one of the most deprived 30% of areas in England, based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Closing this gap is essential to closing our GLD gap.

2.4.3 **3. Improving the quality of early years provision, including Reception, for all children**

The first years of education shape life chances. We will work with providers, childminders, schools, Stronger Practice Hubs and the Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) in the Department for Education (DE) to improve practice, strengthen transitions and raise outcomes for all children.

2.4.4 **4. Identifying needs early and supporting children with SEND and vulnerable families**

With SEND prevalence above national levels and rising EHCP demand, we must act earlier and more collaboratively to ensure children get the right help at the right time – reducing escalation and improving long-term outcomes.

2.4.5 **5. Providing joined-up family support through our Family Hubs**

Rotherham's Family Hubs network is already strong. Through these hubs we will offer integrated health, early help, childcare, and community support so families experience a seamless pathway from pregnancy to school age.

2.4.6 **6. Tackling inequalities across the 0–5 system**

We are determined to narrow the gaps linked to deprivation, SEND, health inequalities and access to opportunity. Our actions will target the communities who need us most, helping to level the playing field and improve the life chances of every child.

2.4.7 The Best Start Local Plan 2026-2029 details the outcomes under each priority with clear milestones and performance metrics. The Best Start Local Plan is included as Appendix 1.

2.5 **Governance**

2.5.1 Progress against the Best Start Local Plan will be monitored by the Best Start and Beyond Steering Group. Regular updates will be provided to the Health and Care Place Board, Children and Young People's Change Management Board and Senior Leadership Team. Overarching responsibility will sit with the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People who will report into the Health and Wellbeing Board.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 **Option 1:** Consideration has been given to not developing and publishing a Best Start Local Plan. This option of doing nothing would create a risk that the Council does not meet the statutory duty and expectations detailed in Policy guidance. Should the Council choose not to deliver the key activities described in the Best Start Local Plan it is likely that fewer children in Rotherham will achieve a Good Level of Development in 2028. This may present a reputational risk if Rotherham is unable to achieve the target set by Government.

3.2 **Option 2 (preferred option):** Approval of the Best Start Local Plan to be published by 31st March 2026 will deliver against the Council's statutory duty, meet the requirements of Policy guidance, and support coordinated multi-agency activity to support more children to achieve a Good Level of Development.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 Due to the challenging timeframe set by Government for publication of the Plan, there has been insufficient time to undertake widespread public consultation specific to the Best Start Local Plan. Relevant in-depth consultation and engagement has been completed as part of the ongoing work to support children and families; this has been used to inform the development of the Plan. This has included events with Rotherham Parent

Carer Forum, work with the Family Hub parent/carer group, quality feedback from families accessing Family Hubs and feedback from families following engagement with 0-19 public health services. Child and family voice is also captured as part of regular quality assurance activity.

4.2 The Summit included stakeholders across Education, Health, Care, Regeneration and Environment, SEND and the Voluntary Sector. There were representatives from 0-19 service, Child Development Centre, Family Hubs, Grimm and Co, Rotherham Parent Carer Forum, Children's Social Care, Education and Inclusion, Culture, Sport and Tourism, NHS South Yorkshire Rotherham Integrated Care Board, Public Health, School Improvement, Early Years, Commissioning and Performance.

4.3 Updates have been provided to the Lead Member for Children and Young People, the Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health, Children and Young People Directorate Leadership Team and the Senior Leadership Team.

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

- 5.1
- Approval of the Best Start Local Plan – March 2026
 - Publication of the Best Start Local Plan – 31st March 2026
 - Implementation of the Best Start Local Plan – from April 2026
 - Review of the Best Start Local Plan – March 2027

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

6.1 Starting in April 2026, the UK government is transitioning the current Family Hubs and Start for Life programme into a new national model called Best Start Family Hubs (BSFHs). Provisional funding allocations have been confirmed by the Government covering the 3 financial years 2026-2029. All local authorities will receive funding to:

1. Develop and implement Best Start local plans.
2. Establish and deliver BSFHs.
3. Provide evidence-based parenting and home learning environment services.

6.2 Funding is split into two streams:

Delivery grant

The delivery grant supports local authorities to establish and run Best Start Family Hubs by funding staff capacity, leadership, outreach and engagement, multi-agency workforce training and development, digital systems, and service integration. It is intended to help areas deliver their Best Start local plans, strengthen joined-up working across health and family services and improve outcomes for babies, children, and families.

Capital grant

Capital funding is a small, ring-fenced element of the delivery grant and must be used for capital works only. It supports adaptations to existing

buildings, such as improving accessibility, upgrading IT and facilities, and providing equipment and furniture to enable multi-agency working and co-location of services within Best Start Family Hubs.

- 6.3 Rotherham has received indicative funding allocations for the next three financial years, detailed below:

	2026-27 Allocation	2027-28 Allocation	2028-29 Allocation
Delivery Grant	1,633,600	1,560,300	1,592,200
Capital Grant	87,200	88,900	90,600
Total	1,720,800	1,649,200	1,682,800

- 6.4 Funding beyond the 2026-29 period will be subject to future Government spending review processes, but local authorities are required to consider long-term sustainability, including join up with statutory services, in the development of their local offer.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 Section 1 of the Children Act 2006 places a general duty on local authorities to improve the wellbeing of young children in their area. Section 1(2) defines wellbeing which includes education, training, and recreation. Section 1(3) provides for the Secretary for State to set targets for the improvement of the wellbeing of young people and a reduction of inequalities between young children.
- 7.2 The Government's Best Start in Life Strategy was published in July 2025, and as a result, local authorities are expected to develop Best Start local plans to achieve the Plan for Change milestone to get a record number of children school-ready every year by 2028. The Strategy set out that plans should detail each local authority's approach to achieving and measuring their progress towards their 2028 target. Each local authority received a target in August 2025, and these were confirmed in November 2025. Under section 1(4), a local authority must act in the manner that is best calculated to secure that any targets set by the Secretary of State are met.
- 7.3 Guidance published by the Department for Education and Department for Health and Social Care in December 2025 states that Local Plans should be published by no later than 31 March 2026. Under section 1 (1) (5) a local authority in performing their duties must have regard to any guidance from the Secretary of State.
- 7.4 The options outlined at Paragraph 3.1 and 3.2 of the report provides 2 options, the recommended option is Option 2 at paragraph 3.2 following the statutory guidance to each Local Authority to publish its plan. Option 1 (paragraph 3.1) does not comply with the statutory guidance. There are no legal implications with following option 2.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There is no direct HR implication within this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 Additional focused activity to improve early identification of barriers to learning the home learning environment and the quality of teaching and assessment within the borough will give more children and young people the opportunity to achieve a Good Level of Development.

9.2 Key considerations are referenced within the report.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 Children not achieving a Good Level of Development are more likely to be from areas of deprivation. Targeted activity to address inequalities and increase engagement in provision is included within the Plan.

10.2 An equalities impact assessment is an appendix to this report.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 Wider consideration of indirect implications or unintended consequence of work in this area has on CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change is considered across all partners as the Council are committed to long term targets to mitigate these areas of concern in the Borough. An environmental impact assessment has been completed and is an appendix to this report.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 Achieving the target for 73.3% of children to achieve a Good Level of Development in 2028 will require a coordinated partnership response. Key considerations are referenced throughout the report.

12.2 Ongoing updates will be provided to key stakeholders including Parent/carers forum, health leaders, school leaders, and other associated stakeholders.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 Processes oversight will be provided through the Best Start and Beyond Steering Group and Children and Young People's Services Change Management Board, which involves all key internal parties including legal, assets, HR, procurement, transport, finance, commissioning, and education specialists.

13.2 There is a risk that despite coordinated work to improve the home learning environment, early identification and targeted support for children who need it and effective workforce development and quality assurance Rotherham will still not achieve the target set. The DfE's target

methodology was not differentiated based on the level of need in local areas and therefore does not take into account the intersectionality of need in Rotherham specifically.

14. Accountable Officers

Helen Sweaton – Joint Service Director, Commissioning, Performance and Quality

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	John Edwards	27/02/2026
Executive Director of Corporate Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	26/02/2026
Service Director, Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	26/02/26

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

Foreword from the Portfolio Holder for Children & Young People

Every child in Rotherham deserves the very best start in life. As a council, and as a partnership, we are united in our belief that a child's background must never determine their future. This Best Start Local Plan sets out our ambition to make that belief a reality — through decisive action, strong collaboration and an unwavering focus on child development.

Rotherham is a borough with enormous strengths: committed professionals, dedicated early years settings and schools, an established Family Hub network, and families who want the very best for their children. But we also face real challenges. Too many children start school without the communication skills, language, confidence or early learning experiences that set them up to thrive. Inequalities across our neighbourhoods. — in access to early education, in health, and in early development — are persistent and must be addressed head-on.

This plan is our collective response. It is built around **six shared priorities** that reflect both our evidence and our values:

1. Strengthening early communication, language and literacy for all children

We know that communication and language are the biggest drivers of school readiness. Improving early speech, language and literacy is central to our ambition to increase the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD).

2. Increasing early education access for disadvantaged children

Despite good overall uptake, 12.9% of 3–4-year-olds living in the 30% most deprived IMD areas still do not access their funded early education places. Reducing this shortfall is key to closing our GLD gap

3. Improving the quality of early years provision, including Reception for all children

The first years of education shape life chances. We will work with providers, childminders, schools, Stronger Practice Hubs and RISE to improve practice, strengthen transitions and raise outcomes for all children.

4. Identifying needs early and supporting children with SEND and vulnerable families

With SEND prevalence above national levels and rising EHCP demand, we must act earlier and more collaboratively to ensure children get the right help at the right time – reducing escalation and improving long-term outcomes.

5. Providing joined-up family support through our Family Hubs

Rotherham's Family Hubs network is already strong. Through these hubs we will offer integrated health, early help, childcare and community support so families experience a seamless pathway from pregnancy to school age.

6. Tackling inequalities across the 0–5 system

We are determined to narrow the gaps linked to deprivation, SEND, health inequalities and access to opportunity. Our actions will target the communities who need us most, helping to level the playing field and improve the life chances of every child.

Together, these priorities represent a bold and ambitious programme for change — one that reflects our values as a borough and our belief in children's potential. By 2028, we want to see more children achieving a Good Level of Development, fewer inequalities, stronger early relationships and families who feel supported from the very beginning.

This plan belongs to all of us. I would like to thank our partners across health, education, early years, the voluntary and community sector — and especially our parents and carers — for shaping it. By working with unity, compassion and determination, we can ensure that every child in Rotherham is ready to learn, ready to grow and ready to thrive.

Cllr Cusworth

Cabinet Member for Children & Young People | RMBC

Deputy Leader | RMBC

1. Our Shared Vision

Every child in Rotherham thrives in their earliest years — safe, nurtured, curious, and ready for a lifetime of learning and wellbeing.

Together, we will:

Together, we will:

- **Work in genuine partnership with parents and carers**, recognising them as children’s first and most important teachers.
- **Create highquality early years environments** that inspire play, curiosity, and early learning.
- **Identify needs early and provide the right support at the right time** so every child has the chance to thrive.
- **Ensure smooth, positive transitions** between home, childcare, nursery, and school so families feel confident and supported.
- **Tackle inequalities from the earliest point**, ensuring every child—wherever they live—has the same chances to succeed.
- **Build connected services around families** making it easier to access help, information, and opportunities during pregnancy and the early years.

Our Shared Ambition

The six shared priorities reflect the voices of our families, the expertise of our practitioners and the realities shown by our local data. They set a clear direction for the next three years — a shared commitment to improving early development, strengthening family support and reducing inequalities.

Together, we will ensure that **every child in Rotherham begins school ready to learn, ready to grow and ready to thrive.**

In Rotherham we have developed Four Cornerstones which we believe are essential for ensuring that good practice in working with children, young people, parents and carers is achieved. These are:



By working together, we can give every child the chance to reach their full potential and thrive—now and in the future.



The national Best Start in Life strategy, published in July 2025, aims to

- enhance family services and early intervention through ‘Best Start Family Hubs’
- provide affordable and accessible childcare
- deliver high quality early education.

Rotherham’s Best Start Local Plan will play a key role in delivering the Government’s national commitment to improve early child development and reduce inequalities. This will contribute to achieving one of the key aims of Rotherham’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which is to “Enable all children and young people up to age 25 to have the best start in life, maximise their capabilities and have influence and control over their lives.”

2. Strategic Priorities and Actions

Rotherham Council's plan 'Forging Ahead' has "children and young people achieving" as one of its five key outcomes for 2025-2030.

Partners in Rotherham are passionate about children getting the best start in life and going on to achieve their potential. **The Health and Wellbeing Strategy for 2025-2030** has just four aims, with the first being to "enable all children and young people up to age 25 to have the best start in life, maximise their capabilities and have influence and control over their lives."

Fit for the Future, the NHS 10 year plan, has a vision of a neighbourhood health service, with care happening as locally as it can. Rotherham is a pioneer site for the national neighbourhood implementation plan, and has a well-developed family hub network that already forms an important part of health services delivered in community settings.

This Best Start Local Plan therefore builds from a strong strategic position locally

There is no need for this plan to start from scratch, as it also builds on other key existing strategies, plans and frameworks that address different aspects of the early lives of Rotherham children. These are all already working together to help improve the life chances of Rotherham's current and future generations of children and young people. This plan's main purpose is to bring these existing plans, initiatives and working arrangements together to best achieve the vision of the best start for life for every child, and in particular that all Rotherham children should be starting primary school ready to learn.

The Government's 'Giving every child the best start in life' strategy focuses on three areas: better support for families; better access to early years childcare and education; and improving quality in early years and Reception. Rotherham already has plans and programmes across all of these areas, providing excellent foundations for this Best Start Local Plan.

Rotherham Baby Pack

This programme is part of the Council's commitment to ensuring every child in Rotherham gets the best possible start in life. It provides every Rotherham expectant parent (with very high uptake) a box of high quality essential items for the first six months of a baby's life, and also contains the booklet 'Giving your child the best start in life', co-designed by Rotherham parents and offering information on access to services, activities, and help via local Family Hubs and online, focusing on early development and wellbeing.

Best Start Family Hubs and Health Babies Programme

Rotherham has a well established Family Hub network of sites and organisations working collaboratively across the borough, anchored by three Best Start Family Hubs, serving the north, south and central localities, and offering appointments, drop-in clinics and groups, social connection, and access to a wide range of health, family help and other support services, which include infant feeding support, perinatal mental health assistance, and strengthening parent-infant relationships

Best Start and Beyond Framework

This is owned by a partnership steering group, and it provides a tool to help achieve the Health and Wellbeing Board’s aim to give all children the best start and enable them to maximise their capabilities.

It is a toolkit, providing lenses to focus attention on different aspects of the children’s workforce, available family support services and wider determinants of health, in order to identify system improvement opportunities within four key phases of a child’s journey – the first 1001 days; the early pre-school years; primary and secondary school years; the transition to adulthood.

Rotherham Early Years Education & Childcare Strategy 2024–2027

The strategy sets out to realise the vision, in the early years education and child care strategy, that “in Rotherham there will be no barriers to children achieving the best they can and realising their full potential.”

It aims to achieve this through universal access to affordable, high-quality childcare, supporting provider sustainability and continuous improvement, with a focus on vulnerable children.

‘No Family Left Behind’ child poverty strategy

Seeks to mitigate the impact of poverty and work with organisations to reduce the barriers that children, young people, and families who live in poverty may experience, and puts families at the heart of decision making.

Early Help Strategy: Family Help in Rotherham 2024-2029

Rotherham has a vision for Family Help that has been co-produced and agreed by partners, stakeholders, children, young people, and families. The vision is for all agencies to be working together to ensure that children, young people, and families have their

needs identified early so that they can receive swift access to targeted help and support under the Families First Partnership Programme.

Rotherham SEND Strategy: My Life, My Rights 2024-2028

Rotherham aims to be just as ambitious for children and young people with SEND as for every other child. The vision places a strong emphasis on equity and inclusion, recognising that SEND is everyone's responsibility and that systems should adapt to children and families – not the other way round.

3. Best Start Local Plan Needs Assessment

Introduction

This needs assessment provides an overview of development outcomes and engagement of young children and families in Rotherham. It draws on local and national datasets to understand levels of need, identify inequalities, and inform priorities for the Best Start Local Plan.

The analysis highlights both areas of strong performance and those that require targeted intervention to improve early childhood outcomes.

Unless otherwise identified data has been used from 2023/2024. This is because the target to increase the number of children achieving a good level of development was set based on data from 2023/2024.

Indicator	Period	England	Yorkshire and Humber	Rotherham
Proportion of children who received a 2 to 2½ year review, Persons, 2–2.5 yrs	2023/24	78.4%	89.3%	90.7%
Child development: % of children achieving a good level of development at 2 to 2½ years, Persons, 2–2.5 yrs	2023/24	80.4%	85.7%	88.2%
School readiness: % of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception, Persons, 5 yrs	2023/24	67.7%	66.1%	64.3%
School readiness: % of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception, Male , 5 yrs	2023/24	60.7%	59.0%	56.4%
School readiness: % of children achieving a good level of development at the end of Reception, Female , 5 yrs	2023/24	75.0%	73.5%	72.3%
School readiness: % of children with free school meal status achieving a good level of development at end of Reception, Persons, 5 yrs	2023/24	51.5%	50.1%	47.6%
School readiness: % of children without free school meal status achieving a good level of development at end of Reception, Male , 5 yrs	2023/24	43.2%	41.4%	39.0%
School readiness: % of children without free school meal status achieving a good level of development at end of Reception, Female , 5 yrs	2023/24	60.1%	59.2%	57.4%
Free school meals: % eligible, Persons, school age	2023/24	24.6%	26.8%	27.7%

Local Context and Demographics

Rotherham has a population of 265,800 and faces significant socio-economic challenges, ranking 35th among England's upper-tier local authorities by deprivation. Levels of child poverty are notably high: 30.0% (2023/24) of children aged 0–15 live in relative low-income households, well above the national average of 22.1%. The scale of deprivation is further reflected in the educational landscape, with 27.7% of pupils eligible for free school meals in 2023/24 (and evidence that this has declined further to 29.1% in 2024/25).

The borough also supports a substantial cohort of children with statutory social care involvement. As of late 2023, there were 505 children in care and 323 care leavers, highlighting the continued demand for targeted early help, safeguarding, and family support services.

Early Development and School Readiness

Early developmental outcomes are encouraging at age 2–2½. Completion rates for the mandated health review are high at 90.7%, and 88.2% of children meet

developmental expectations at this stage—both results exceeding national benchmarks. These outcomes suggest strong early identification systems and effective early years provision during the first years of life.

However, outcomes at the end of the Reception year show a decline, with only 64.3% of children achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD), below national and regional comparators. This means 102 fewer children are achieving GLD than would be expected if Rotherham matched national performance.

The data suggest that **literacy and communication are key limiting factors** for overall GLD attainment. Expected levels in writing (67.8%) and word reading (72.1%) fall below other prime and specific areas. Additionally, 22.2% of children are still at emerging levels in Communication and Language, highlighting a need for enhanced speech, language, and communication support both pre-school and during Reception.

A **gender gap** persists, with boys significantly less likely to achieve GLD than girls (56.4% vs 72.3%). Outcomes for children eligible for free school meals (47.6%) are also lower than national averages, demonstrating entrenched socio-economic inequalities in school readiness.

Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Rotherham has a higher proportion of children with identified SEND than the national picture, with 20.4% of pupils recorded as having SEND compared to 17.1% nationally. The number of children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has grown by 44% in three years, rising to 3,192 children aged 0–25.

Despite these barriers take-up of early education among SEND children is strong. In the most recent term, 72% of eligible 2-year-olds with SEND took up a funded early education place, increasing to 93.3% among 3 and 4-year-olds. This suggests effective targeting of early education entitlements to support early intervention, though the increasing demand underscores the pressure on local SEND services and the need for continued investment in early identification and specialist support. - and 4-year-olds. This suggests effective targeting of early education entitlements to support early intervention, though the increasing demand underscores the pressure on local SEND services and the need for continued investment in early

Early Help and Family Hub Engagement

Engagement with Family Hubs and Children’s Centres is a particular strength. Registration levels are high, with 89% of all children aged 0–5 registered, rising to 92% among those living in the 30% most deprived areas. Participation in Family Hubs and Children’s Centre activities is also strong: 73% of all 0–5s and 78% of those in the most deprived neighbourhoods access services. This level of engagement provides a strong platform for early intervention and family outreach.

Early Education and Childcare Take-Up

Take-up of early education entitlements is high across all age groups, though a small but significant inequality persists. For 2-year-olds, take-up ranges from 85.7% to 96.6% across the academic year. Among 3- and 4-year-olds, universal entitlement take-up ranges from 90.6% to 97%. - - and 4-year-olds, universal entitlement take-up ranges from 90.6% to 97%.

However, children living in the most disadvantaged areas are less likely to access early education than their peers: 12.9% of disadvantaged 3- and 4-year-olds did not take up a place compared with 8.9% in more affluent areas. This disparity suggests potential barriers to access—potentially including availability, parental awareness, or practical challenges—that disproportionately affect families in deprived communities.

Reassuringly, children in care have 100% take-up of early education entitlements across both age groups, reflecting strong multi-agency processes and prioritisation.

Summary of Key Needs

Rotherham has a strong foundation in early developmental outcomes in the first years of life, high levels of engagement with Family Hubs and Children's Centres, and strong uptake of early education among most groups. However there are some important challenges to address:

- **Developmental inequalities** persist and widen between the ages of 2½ and school entry, particularly for boys, children from low-income families, and children in deprived neighbourhoods.
- **Literacy and communication** difficulties are some of the primary barriers to achieving a Good Level of Development.
- **Rising SEND demand**, including a 44% increase in EHCPs, is placing significant pressure on services.
- **Early education take-up gaps in the most disadvantaged areas**, indicating a need for targeted intervention. **-up gaps in the most disadvantaged areas,**
- **School readiness outcomes** at the end of Reception remain below national expectations despite strong early progress at age 2–2½.

Implications for the Best Start Local Plan

To address these challenges, the Best Start Local Plan will prioritise:

- Maintaining high levels of Family Hub and Children's Centre engagement while tailoring services to emerging needs.

- Enhancing early SEND identification, specialist support, and inclusive early years practice.
- Strengthening early language, literacy and communication pathways from birth to age 5.
- Targeting support to disadvantaged communities, focusing on narrowing gaps in early development and school readiness.
- Improving early education access in the most deprived areas through targeted outreach and provider capacity building.
- Strengthening the transition pathway from early years settings into school to maintain strong development trajectories.

4. Our Priorities

This section of the plan sets out our priorities and what we will do to deliver on them. Details about delivering, commissioning and funding will be included in the subsequent comprehensive action plan.

Priority 1 – Strengthening Early Communication, Language and Literacy for all children

Early communication, language and literacy lay the foundations for learning, relationships and wellbeing. In Rotherham, these areas are our most significant barriers to children reaching a Good Level of Development, with **writing (67.8%)** and **word reading (72.1%)** lower than other domains.

We will:

- Universally promote early interaction, talking, reading and play from pregnancy onwards.
- Expand targeted communication and language programmes in communities where children need the most support.
- Strengthen speech and language pathways and embed evidence-based practice across settings and schools.

Priority 2 – Increasing Access to Early Education for Disadvantaged Children

Take-up of early education is high in Rotherham overall, but too many children in our most disadvantaged neighbourhoods still miss out on the benefits of early learning. **12.9% of 3–4-year-olds** in the 30% most deprived areas did not access a funded place in Summer 2025.

We will:

- Work with settings, health visitors and Family Hubs to identify and support families not accessing early education.
- Address practical and cultural barriers to take-up.
- Promote early education as a universal opportunity to learn, play and grow.

Priority 3 – Improving the Quality of Early Years Provision, Including Reception for all children

High-quality early years provision has a powerful impact on children's outcomes and helps reduce inequalities. While many settings in Rotherham provide excellent support, GLD outcomes show that more must be done to strengthen quality and consistency across settings and into Reception.

We will:

- Partner with Stronger Practice Hubs, RISE, MATs and schools to strengthen practice.
- Embed evidence-based professional development, including communication-rich practice and early literacy approaches.
- Improve transition into Reception so all children experience continuity and stability.

Priority 4 – Identifying Needs Early and Supporting Children with SEND and Vulnerable Families

Rotherham has **higher SEND prevalence than national (20.4% vs 17.1%)**, and a **44% rise** in EHCPs over three years — one of the strongest signals that families need help earlier.

We will:

- Strengthen early identification pathways across health, early education and family support.
- Provide timely SEND support within settings and Family Hubs, reducing escalation and waiting.
- Ensure vulnerable families are identified early and connected to support through coordinated early help.

Priority 5 – Providing Joined-Up Family Support Through Rotherham’s Family Hubs

Family Hubs are central to our vision. With **89% of 0–5s registered**, and even higher engagement in our most disadvantaged communities, Rotherham already has a strong platform for truly integrated family support.

We will:

- Strengthen the offer across maternity, health visiting, early help, parenting support and early learning.
- Create seamless pathways so families do not have to repeat their story.
- Make Family Hubs the trusted, visible, accessible first point of contact for parents.

Priority 6 – Tackling Inequalities Across the 0–5 System

Rotherham experiences significant inequalities in income, health and early development. **21.9% of children live in absolute low-income families**, and GLD rates for children eligible for free school meals are **47.6%**, well below those not eligible.

We will:

- Target support and investment to the communities where the barriers are greatest.
- Work across Family Hubs, settings, health and the VCS to remove inequalities in access and outcomes.
- Ensure that all actions in this plan contribute to closing the gap by 2028.

5. Engagement with Children and Families

We place children's and families' voices at the heart of the Best Start Local Plan. Their lived experiences, ideas, and feedback shape our decisions to make services inclusive, relevant, and empowering. Engagement is not a one-off activity, but a continuous process built on trust, respect, and collaboration.

We will continue to work restoratively with families, turning every interaction into an opportunity to truly understand what life is like raising babies, children, and young people in Rotherham. Through Family Hubs, community outreach, and co-production opportunities, we will create accessible and welcoming spaces for families to share their experiences, ideas, and priorities. This includes targeted efforts to reach underrepresented groups, ensuring every family feels heard and valued.

Their voices will guide and shape everything we do, ensuring that our work reflects their hopes, challenges, and aspirations. Feedback will be acted upon transparently, with clear communication about how it influences decisions. By embedding these principles into our approach, we aim to empower families as active partners in designing and improving services, leading to better

outcomes for children and stronger communities. Rotherham has already well-established mechanisms for engaging with children and families which will be maximised for the Best Start Local Plan.



6. Partnership and Governance

Proposed Governance Structure for Best Start Local Plan



- Oversight of the Best Start Local Plan will be provided by Rotherham's existing **Best Start and Beyond Steering Group**.
- The Steering Group brings together key local partners and **reports to the Health and Wellbeing Board**, aligning with Rotherham's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

- The group supports the shared aim of **giving all children and young people (up to age 25) the best possible start in life**, helping them to thrive and reach their potential.
- Membership and terms of reference will be **reviewed and updated** to ensure the right organisations are involved and children's outcomes remain the focus.
- The plan will be delivered through a **combination of existing partnerships**, supported by **newly formed subgroups and short-term task and finish groups** where needed. **-groups and short-term task and finish groups**
- One of the group's first priorities will be to develop a **detailed action plan** following publication of this high-level Best Start Local Plan.
- Progress and delivery will be **monitored and reported regularly** through the Health and Wellbeing Board.

7. Delivering this plan

Key Outcomes

We will know we have made a difference if there is an improvement in proportion of children:

- **Aged 5 years old achieving a good level of development measured by the Early Years Foundation Stage profile**
- **Aged 5 years old and eligible for free school meals achieving a good level of development measured by the Early Years Foundation Stage profile**

Lots of factors affect child development; it can take many years for impact to be seen.

Child and Family Voice

- A parent-carer panel will support us to ensure the voice of children and families influences the development and oversight of the delivery plan.
- Feedback from children and families will help us understand the impact of the delivery plan.
- Parent-carer voice will influence decision making at the Best Start and Beyond Steering Group

Data

Data can help to monitor and measure the impact of the plan. We will collect data about activity and outcomes that will support us to improve outcomes.

- Proportion of children receiving a 2-2.5-year review
- Proportion of children registered with a family hub
- **Proportion of 2-year-olds** accessing a funded place

- **Proportion of 3–4-year-olds** accessing a funded place
- **Proportion of 2-year-olds** in the 30% most deprived areas accessing a funded place
- **Proportion of 3–4-year-olds** in the 30% most deprived areas accessing a funded place
- Children reaching a Good Level of Development, with **writing**
- Children reaching a Good Level of Development **word reading**

Delivery Plan

A detailed delivery plan will be developed for each priority. Wherever possible we will work as a system (across early years, education, health services and family help).

Glossary of Acronyms – Best Start Local Plan

E

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan

EYFS – Early Years Foundation Stage

G

GLD – Good Level of Development

I

IMD – Index of Multiple Deprivation

M

MAT – Multi-Academy Trust

N

NHS – National Health Service

R

RISE – Regional Improvement Support in Education

S

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

V

VCS / VCSE – Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise

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Appendix 2

Best Start Summit

Rockingham Development Centre, Monday 1st December 2025.

Combined Notes and Actions

Compiled from workshop flipcharts and diagrams

1) Priorities / Issues

- Lack of understanding of appropriate play (parent).
- Lack of universal service for schools.
- Targeted work for people unable to access childcare.
- Integrated review (better information sharing between services).
- Cross match Family Hub access against IMD; how to strengthen ASQ – ELIM – possibly bring in? – could be targeted.
- Universal OPS plan to EYFS model.
- EYFS training for workforce (what/what anyone delivering stay/play).
- Strengthening transition – relationships between FS/ISF – roll out consistent; information sharing – B23 transition document.
- Additional tracked check between 3+4 (possibly with support).
- Evidence-based interventions – establishing evidence.
- Sharing good practice – Early Years conference.
- Child Development Document (Early Years).
- Non-traded service for Early Years + English.
- Involvement of English Hub + Maths Hub.
- Training links to DfE webinars linked to assessment.
- Informed assessment of need for FSM.
- Targeted voluntary sector delivery for targeted groups.
- Use intelligence to decide where to target work.
- Targeting grandparents.
- SEND support for settings + schools; enhanced transition for SEND.
- Wider awareness of child development.
- Team to project manage GLD; DfE to release GLD baseline.
- How to engage parents/carers and raise awareness of GLD and EYFS in general; themes within schools to target GLDs.

2) What could we do? (Key actions)

- Secure attachment; multi-agency working; intelligence.
- Reduce wait for speech & language or train staff in settings to increase knowledge to develop.

- Unified transition documents.
- Target schools with high levels of deprivation with Early Years training.
- Better risk indicators.
- Raise awareness of toxic screening.

3) What could we do? (By age/stage)

Ages 3–5:

- Target risk model; better risk indicators; toxic trio (domestic abuse, substance misuse, mental health).
- Parental mental health; parental substance misuse; domestic abuse; poverty.
- Parental engagement; speech & language; parental capacity; parental learning difficulties; SEND; complex needs.
- Early help; family support; universal services; targeted services.
- Workforce development; training; multi-agency working; intelligence sharing.

Ages 4–5:

- Improve attendance from 1–2 years; address low attendance early on.
- Referrals.

Age 1:

- Keep up momentum; annual conference; training; workforce development; multi-agency working; intelligence sharing.

4) Universal Offer & Connected Services (diagram + details)

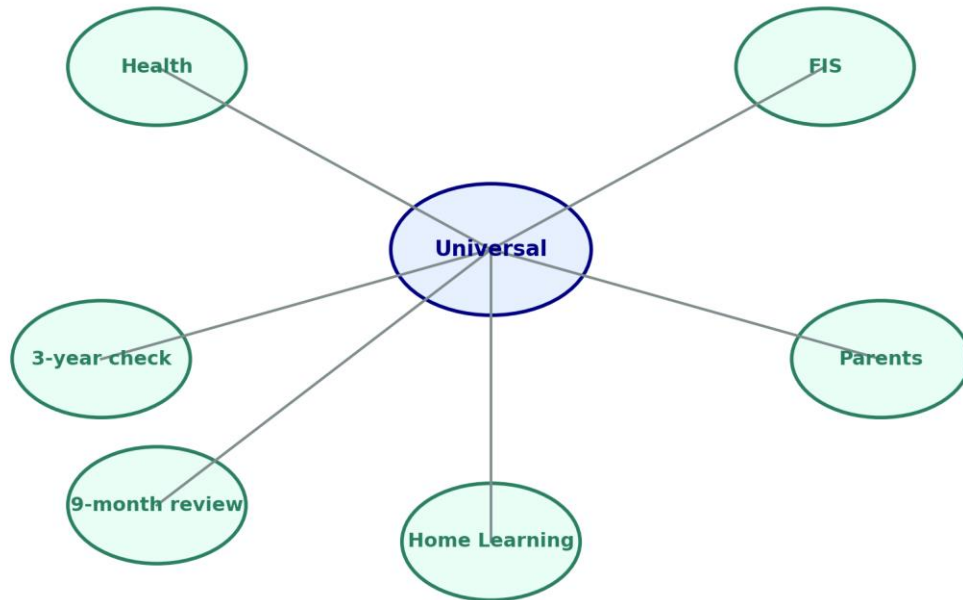


Figure: Universal offer mind map (Health, FIS, Parents, Home Learning, 3-year check, 9-month review).

Health

- 4–5
- SGH speech pathway
- 3-year check
- 9-month review – health visit

FIS (Family Information Service)

- Activities for families
- Recruitment
- Regular updates
- SEND

Parents

- Parenting offer
- CLIC
- Call into Family Hub → EYFS

- Contact details

Home Learning

- Try activities
- Parental engagement
- Home learning environment
- Workforce training
- Doorstep teaching
- Enrichment opportunities

3-year check

- Health visit

9-month review

- Health

Early Years Conference

- 1 week
- F/F
- 100+ children March 24
- outside speakers

Bespoke Visits

- into schools

Proactively seek out maintained schools

ROSIS – meetings held regularly

- EYFS information meetings x2
 - best practice yearly
 - sharing messages
- Moderation Meetings
 - Feb / June
 - focused areas (writing) provide input
- Early Reading & Writing visits
- Training
 - curriculum / assessment

- new EYFS training
- Workshops targeting parents

Writing has been targeted for over last 2 years

- Children are frightened of making mistakes

Grimm & Co.

- offer parental support, work directly with families
 - community services/groups (EID party)
 - Family hub, perinatal care led by volunteer
 - links to PCF –barriers, parent, carers, fathers
 - cultural stories / creativity
 - communication, speech & language advice
 - have impact measures & data, evaluate everything (links to Sheffield Hallam)

Hard to reach parents – Grimm doesn't look school-like

→ Going out to settings & communities to overcome barriers to access

What could we do differently?

- Measuring impact on teacher confidence
(*e.g., from ROSIS support*)
- Celebrating is part of ROSIS work
- Tailored support, based on self-generated checklist
- What will DfE guidance look like?
- GLD will return to Ofsted → will this lead to “teaching to the assessment?”
- Grimm is already targeting need
- Vol sector consortium sees the issues as they arise?
- Working directly with families and with practitioners
→ importance of attending school and EY

Post-COVID trend towards more stay-at-home relationship with children.

→ Overcome fear of settings and socialisation, with positive feedback in child social development.

It's OK to be bored (without a device as a stand-in parent).

Life skills – being “world ready” or “life ready”

→ how to make it fun.

Grimm & Co sets the template for a family-friendly place.

Social cultural literacies – get this to parents earlier – without it being like someone is watching or assessing.

Focus on parental mental health. Given its impact on children.

Summary:

Ambition/ Vision

Every child in Rotherham reaches a Good Level of Development (GLD) by end of Reception, supported by strong parental engagement, high-quality early years practice, timely support for SLCN and SEND, and seamless transitions.

Primary Outcomes (by July 2027):

Increase GLD by +6–8 percentage points in the borough, with faster improvement for IMD deciles 1–3.

Reduce the gap between disadvantaged/FSM and non-FSM by ≥ 2 percentage points.

Improve attendance patterns in Nursery and Reception (especially for those with prior low attendance at age 1–2).

Earlier identification and support for SLCN and SEND (measured by time-to-intervention and children's progress).

Parental engagement uplift: $\geq 25\%$ increase in families accessing home learning support/Family Hub activities in most deprived wards.

Workforce confidence and capability increased (EYFS practice, assessment, SLCN, SEND) — evidenced by pre/post training and moderation indicators.

Guiding Principles

Whole-system approach: Universal → Targeted → Specialist.

Evidence-informed: Adopt/strengthen interventions with data on impact; evaluate new offers.

Data-led targeting: Use IMD, EYFSP, ASQ, health checks, attendance, referrals to focus support.

Integrated pathways: Health, education, voluntary sector aligned through shared tools and common language.

Parent-first design: Accessible, non-judgemental, culturally sensitive, and playful — 'world ready' not device dependent.

Consistent transitions: Unified documents and expectations B23 → Nursery → Reception → Year 1.

Workstreams & Leads:

Universal Offer & Home Learning – Family Hubs/FIS + ROSIS

Targeted SLCN & Early Help – Health (SGH) + Early Help

Transitions & Assessment – ROSIS + Schools + Health

Workforce Development & QA – ROSIS + Hubs

Data, Intelligence & Risk Model – Performance & BI + partners

SEND & Inclusion Pathways – SEND Service + Settings/Schools + Health
Parental Engagement & Comms – Family Hubs + Grimm & Co + Voluntary
sector consortium

Strategic Workstreams & Key Actions

A) Universal Offer & Connected Services

Publish Universal OPS plan mapped to EYFS model via FIS.

Launch Home Learning Environment (HLE) campaign with Grimm & Co.

Integrate parenting offer (CLIC) into Family Hubs.

Proactive maintained schools outreach and ROSIS moderation meetings.

Cross-match Family Hub access to IMD and expand outreach.

B) Targeted SLCN & Early Help

Reduce waits for speech & language; train setting staff.

Select and evaluate evidence-based interventions.

Target grandparents and carers for engagement.

Raise awareness of toxic trio and integrate risk indicators.

C) Transitions & Assessment

Implement unified transition documents.

Add tracked check at 3–4 years.

Adopt DfE GLD baseline when released.

Strengthen information sharing and integrated review flow.

Best Start and Beyond

A framework for ensuring the best start to life for all Rotherham children and young people, from pre-conception through to becoming an adult.

Best Start and Beyond Framework Overview

Our Vision

All children and young people get the best start in life and go on to achieve their potential.

'Best Start and Beyond' is a framework which seeks to meet one of the key aims of Rotherham's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which is to improve the life chances of children and young people, by addressing inequalities, narrowing the gap in attainment and improving outcomes for all children and young people, with a strong focus on health and wellbeing in the early years to ensure all Rotherham children and young people can fulfil their potential in later life.

Why is it necessary?

The purpose of the framework

The principal reason for developing this framework is to enable an overview of work delivered by public agencies (including those in the voluntary sector) that influence the health and wellbeing of children, young people and families (CYP&F). This will be through the impact those agencies can have on the circumstances in which children, young people and families live, learn, work and play, or through provision of services that have a more direct relationship to their health and wellbeing.

The framework is designed as a tool to describe direct or indirect influences, using priority 'lenses' for how we wish important health and wellbeing outcomes to be pursued. Whilst it is not therefore a delivery plan, it does provide a way to identify opportunities across the whole system, e.g., in terms of commissioning and service delivery. In order to accelerate achieving the vision that every child gets the best start to life and is able to reach their potential, and that no child is held back in ways that are unfair.

The Best Start and Beyond Framework adopts a population-level health and wellbeing focus, based on addressing wider determinants, primary prevention and universal health services. It is intended to be complementary to the Early Help Strategy.

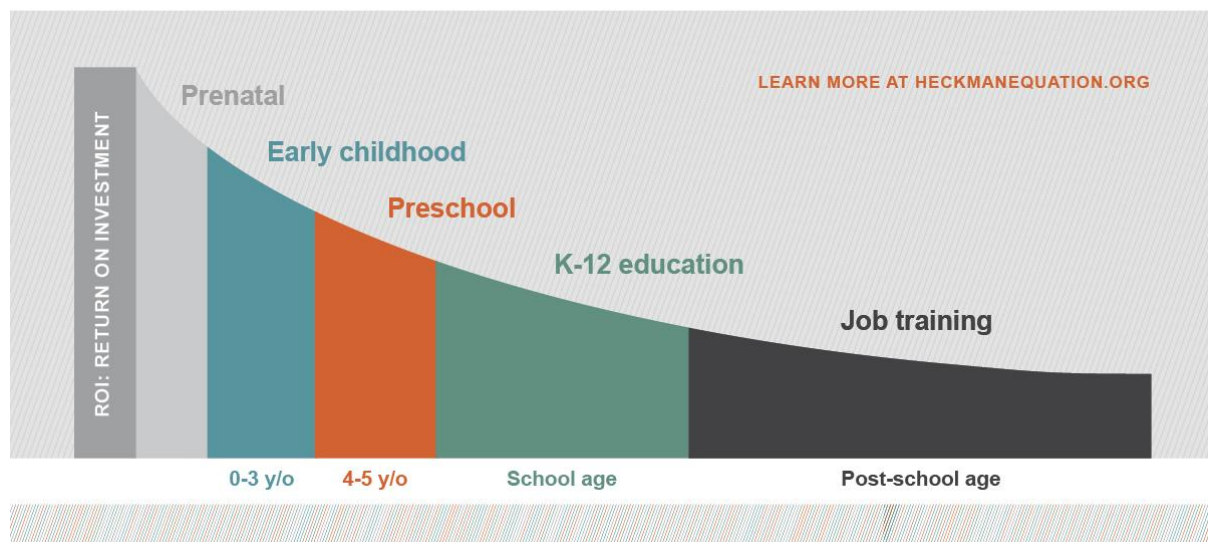
Rotherham is currently (September 2022) preparing to commit to the DHSC's Family Hub and Start for Life programme, with direct oversight provided by the Early Help Steering Group. As its delivery plan is developed and related task and finish groups are established, priorities identified through the Best Start and Beyond framework should seek to coordinate with that work. As part of the family hubs programme, publication of a 'Start for Life' offer is expected by April 2023, which should set out the services and support available to families during the critical 1001 days. This framework and its steering group will provide a key mechanism to ensure that that offer is a comprehensive, needs-based, partnership-owned offer, and one that can be continuously improved.

Optimising the benefits of early investment

The Heckman Curve famously describes the theoretical economic case for investments early in the life course, which are expected to provide significantly higher rates of return compared to investments targeted at adults.

With respect to health outcomes, the body of evidence is growing to support theories of foetal and early childhood origins of adult disease. In acknowledgement of this, a recent government-commissioned report has made recommendations for optimising the impact of support to the critically important first 1001 days of each human life (the period between conception and age two), and recent additional funding announcements by The Chancellor of the Exchequer appear to be responding directly to some of these recommendations.

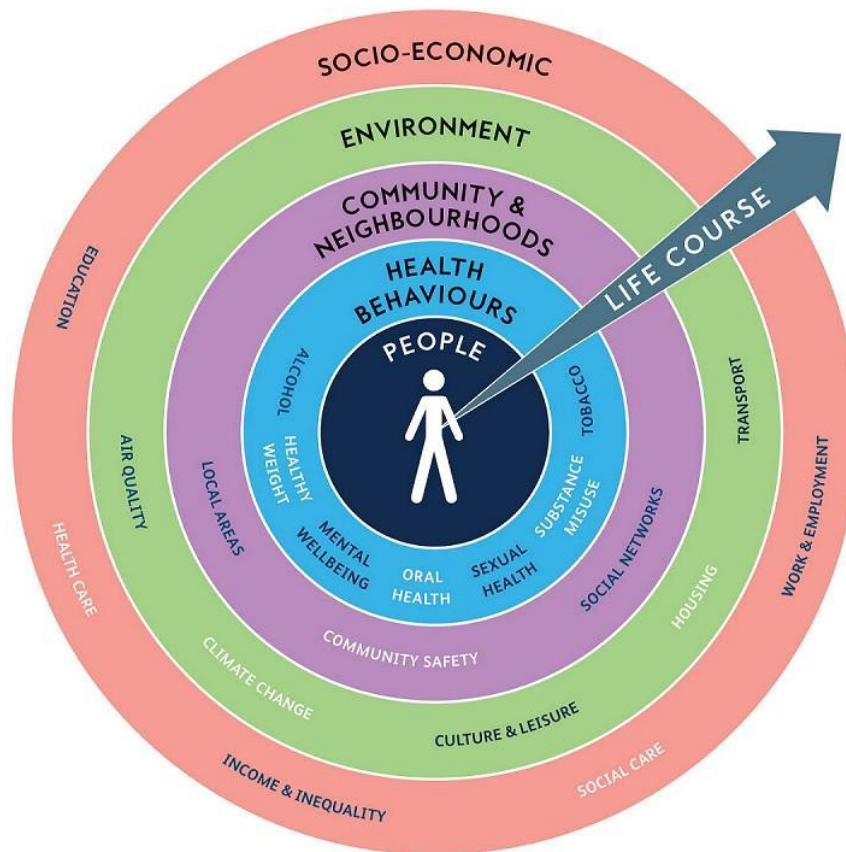

 Return on Investment
Economic impact of investing in early childhood learning.



Addressing the wider determinants

Public health takes the viewpoint that health is a product of where we live, learn, work and play and that the more we are able to address these wider determinants of individuals' and communities' health and well-being, the greater the net benefit, when compared with addressing problems at the individual level.

The wider determinants include socio-economic factors, housing, social networks and education as well as the commercial determinants of health – a phrase designed to encapsulate a conflict of interest in some parts of private sector activity where profit maximisation may be dependent on promoting products and behaviours that are detrimental to health. Within this discourse, poverty is quite often overlooked but should be considered a key social determinant of child health, and an important context for understanding and responding to families' needs and experiences.



Wider determinants of health through the life course. Source: Rotherham JSNA

During the course of a child's life from conception through to transition to adulthood, the importance of the range wider socio-economic and environmental determinants and exposures on the child's health and wellbeing will change.

From before conception and through pregnancy, social disadvantage experienced by women is likely to increase the risk of poorer maternal outcomes. The individual risk factors that such disadvantage might lead to include existing health problems (mental and physical), misuse of substances prior to or during pregnancy, a low level of education, being poorly nourished or in poor quality housing, and having unsupportive or even abusive partners.

Socio-economic determinants can have an important influence on the early phase of a child's life in the way that it affects parental income, parenting styles, housing quality, the extent to which the home and family environment is a nurturing one, the quantity and quality of stimulation and interaction within the home learning environment, exposures to environmental toxins both indoors and outdoors, and the quality of nutrition.

As a child ages, so other determinants beyond the home environment increase in importance, such as social and community networks, influences of peers, education, culture and leisure influences, the quality of the local built and natural environment.

Health and care services and other public sector services can exert some influence over these determinants but have limited power in respect of socio-economic determinants. Ironically, the sphere of influence of public/voluntary sector services

tends to increase as a child ages, whereas a greater potential benefit might result from improving the conditions that affect a child earlier in life.

The best way for the health and care system to respond is to draw on the concept of 'proportionate universalism' - making services universally available but delivering them at a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the degree of need.

There is growing evidence that wide-reaching strategies to provide support at a population level result in fewer children and families in need of more intensive services. Such an approach has the additional benefit of avoiding stigmatisation of people in receipt of those services.

Prevention and early help/early intervention

In public health the word prevention is often categorised into three types of prevention: primary, secondary and tertiary. Within a strategy to give children the best start in life, prevention offers the greatest return in the long term, and primary prevention is the ideal. Secondary prevention is more targeted prevention, and effectively refers to identifying and responding to risks or emergent problems at the earliest possible opportunity.

'Early help' and 'early intervention' are terms that are often used interchangeably to describe a range of services, programmes or interventions to help children and families resolve problems before they become more difficult to reverse or require more interventionist support. In this respect early help can be seen as a form of secondary prevention.

Sometimes the default understanding of early help or early intervention is as a risk-based individual-level form of protection. However, it is the wider conditions of people's lives (those wider determinants that include their homes, their financial resources, education and employment, access to services, etc.) that have the biggest impact on their health and wellbeing.

Our early help and wider system of support provided through public policies, investment and service provision needs to adopt an holistic approach, informed by evidence on preventative public health.

The diagram below depicts the Early Help system in its widest possible sense, showing 3 types of support service around the family – community support, universal services, and acute and targeted support. Those described as universal are effectively universally available, but some will require agency on the part of the family to receive the service.



Early Help System. Source: Early Help System Guide, DfE and DLUHC

Life course

Physical and cognitive growth occur rapidly during the early stages of life, and there are key stages in utero, in infancy, and in later childhood/adolescence when such changes accelerate.

In addition, there are particular transitional moments in the life of a child relating to growing independence from their parents, and greater participation in wider society that mean that the context for the influence of wider determinants of health and for the provision of services go through step changes.

In the light of this, it makes sense to organise this Best Start and Beyond framework, and in particular the priority issues of concern, the outcomes that are sought, and the consideration of access to services and the interplay between them into key life-course stages.

The framework will adopt four key phases:

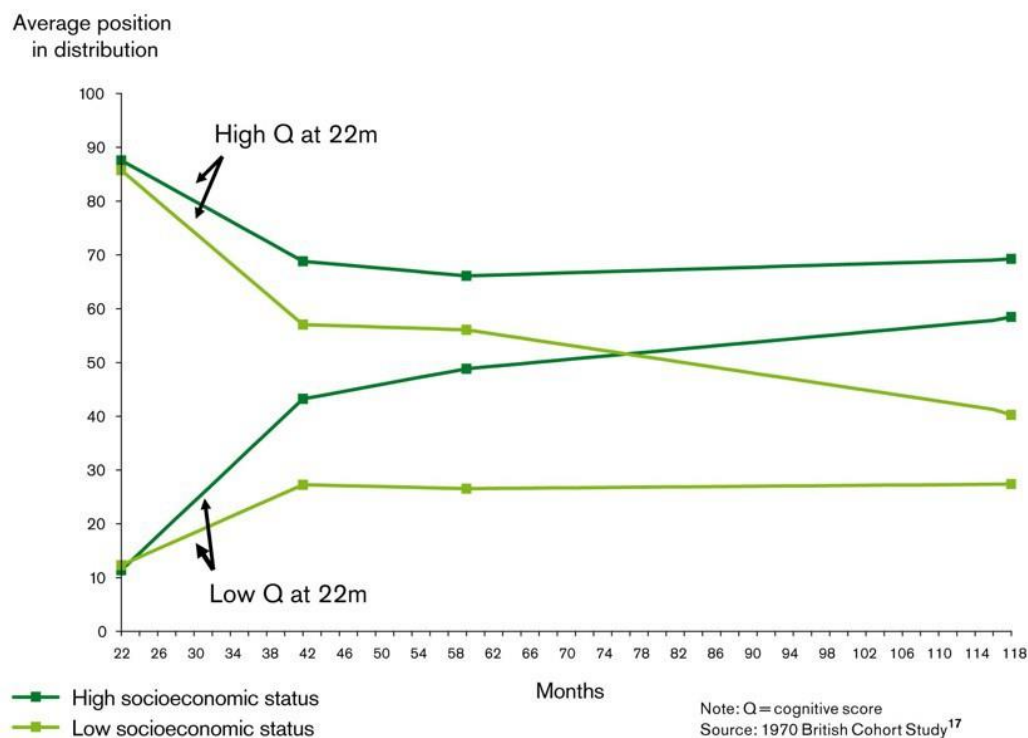
1. The first 1001 Days (from conception to 2 years, but also including consideration of pre-conception phase)
2. The early pre-school years of life
3. The school years – primary and secondary
4. The transition to adulthood

Inequality

The wider determinants of health matter because they drive unequal outcomes. In particular, inequalities in the way income and wealth are distributed through the

population tend to be reflected in inequalities in exposures to all the wider determinants, and this in turn leads to most health outcomes following a social gradient.

The extent to which these unequal effects are also unfair is well illustrated by the graph below, which shows how a child's low socioeconomic status drags down early high cognitive scores, whereas high socioeconomic status can pull up low early scores.



Childhood inequality and cognitive development at 22 months and 10 years

Source: Marmot Review (2010). [Fair Society, healthy lives. Review of health inequalities in England post-2010](#)

Very often we measure outcomes by looking at averages across a whole population. This inevitably risks overlooking the way the outcome is distributed within the population, and the gradient of the slope.

Reducing inequality in health and related outcomes should be seen as a key aim of this framework, and one that is more important than simply improving the average.

Co-production

A key principle is that families and communities are likely to have the best knowledge and assets to respond to local challenges, and that such knowledge should be brought to bear on the design of services and support networks that are better distributed and avoid stigmatising interventions. Families and relationships within them are hugely important to the health and wellbeing of a child, and we will

seek to work with the whole family and to understand those relationships in seeking the best outcomes for the child/young person.

The Rotherham Charter

Also referred to as The Four Cornerstones, the [Rotherham Charter](#) is a set of principles and a way of working that was developed to enable better parental involvement in ensuring better outcomes for Rotherham children and young people with special educational needs.

It is now recognised that these principles should be equally reflected in relationships with all the children and young people of Rotherham, and their parents and carers, as a way to underpin co-productive processes.



How we will effect change

Principles

A set of principles is set out that are designed to ensure that actions are guided and coordinated in ways that fit with a public health approach, encapsulating the key ideas of prevention, equality, co-production and working from evidence. These principles also largely coincide with principles agreed within the Prevention and Health Inequalities Strategy, and so ensure some consistency of approach across the system. They are set out below.

- Embedding proportionate universalism by delivering interventions at a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the degree of need.
- Adopting a whole pathway approach, considering opportunities for primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

- Drawing from research, data and intelligence to develop evidence-based interventions.
- Working with local people and involving them in decisions about their health and care.
- Taking a compassionate approach to health promotion.
- Making every contact count to maximise opportunities for prevention.
- Advocating for prevention within the wider system, including work to tackle the 'causes of the causes.'
- Challenging clinical variation to raise the bar of the management of risk factors and chronic conditions across all communities.
- Acting at the earliest possible stage to prevent and reduce the burden of ill-health.
- Raising the average performance for a health and wellbeing outcome is seen as of secondary importance to reducing the slope of its social gradient.

Priority Lenses

Five themes have been identified that provide a focus for how actions under this framework will achieve outcomes in the best possible way that take account of current key priorities. These can be thought of as 'lenses' through which to view existing or proposed actions, rather than as outcomes to be pursued per se. Ideally all planned related activity should be considered under these priority lenses to ensure that change is effected in an optimal way

The five lenses are:

- 1) **Poverty** – poverty is a key determinant of health, and particularly at a time when the cost of living is rising rapidly, actions that build resilience, individual strengths and skills, and community assets are essential to enable health benefits to be equally accessible to all, especially those whose family income is below the poverty line.
- 2) **A compassionate approach** – obesity is increasingly spoken of as having the attributes of an epidemic, but at the same time the predominant policy response remains to seek change purely through individual choice. The compassionate approach adopts the view that the paradigm now needs to change, and seeks to acknowledge that obesity is largely a product of wider (especially commercial determinants), and that individuals should not be stigmatised for their weight (and that this only produces worse outcomes). Whilst its starting point is in relation to weight, in reality it applies to most health outcomes that are socially determined.
- 3) **Parental health** – it is well established that the health of the child is strongly influenced by parental health. In particular, when seeking that every child get the best possible start to life, a focus on the health of the parents when planning a family and during pregnancy and immediately after birth has the potential to deliver lifelong benefits.
- 4) **Transitions** – the life-course experience of a child, from conception through to adulthood does not follow a smooth path with respect to physical, mental and emotional development, and there are some key moments of transition.

These present moments both of opportunity and jeopardy for every child and should be a key focus of services and support efforts.

- 5) **Mental health** – it is now well understood that mental health is generally underrepresented within the organised efforts of society to promote health and wellbeing. Within this context, parental mental health, especially in the perinatal phase, as well as the mental health of the child should be understood to be inextricably linked to all other health and wellbeing outcomes, and that this can be a two-way relationship – poor outcomes or adverse events can drive poor mental health and vice versa.

The life-course stages

An overall high level outcome and key contributing impacts are set out for each of four stages of the child's journey from pre-conception to transition to adulthood. 1001 Days remains the stage that has the greatest capacity for long-term benefit, if everything is done to ensure that every child gets the best possible start and is not disadvantaged by the circumstances and conditions into which they are born.

Against each life stage a broad overall outcome is described that clearly contributes to the vision that every child has the best start to life and is able to fulfil their potential. Enabling outcomes are also set out. They are not deliverables of the framework itself, but are expected to be being delivered within the system, as key contributors to the vision. Where opportunities are identified within the system to improve the way these outcomes are realised, the steering group may take a view that some specific improvement work (e.g. through a task and finish group) would be beneficial.

1001 Days (Conception to 2nd Birthday)

Overall outcome: Every child has the best start to life

Key enabling outcomes:

- Pregnancies are planned and well prepared for
- A compassionate approach to weight is used to support parents during and between pregnancies
- Harms of smoking, alcohol and other substances during and after pregnancy are reduced
- Perinatal mental health is robust (and partners are considered)
- Infant feeding is an informed and supported choice
- Breastfeeding initiation is supported and length of exclusive breastfeeding is supported to reach recommended levels
- Continuity of care from midwifery to health visiting is optimised

Early years

Overall outcome: All children are ready to start school at age 5

Key enabling outcomes:

- A compassionate approach to weight is adopted that influences the home environment and within EY settings
- We take shared responsibility for building a culture where early years education is valued across all communities.
- All eligible children are enabled to take up their early education entitlement.
- Parents are seen as educators
- Children achieve a good level of development at age 5

School age (including children not attending school)

Overall outcome: All children and young people are able to reach their potential.

Key enabling outcomes:

- Education settings adopt a whole school approach to child health
- The health of children not attending school has parity of esteem
- Good sleep habits are promoted
- Good child emotional and mental wellbeing is promoted and supported
- All children and young people have access to and good attendance at the most appropriate educational setting
- Resilience and agency is built by ensuring young people can benefit from having places to go and things to do

Transition to Adulthood

Overall outcome: Every child ready to live as independently as is within their capacity

Key contributing outcomes/impacts:

- All young people have agency and resilience for a successful transition to adulthood, and support is available when needed.
- Young people benefit from a person-centred understanding of need and choice of support/opportunity

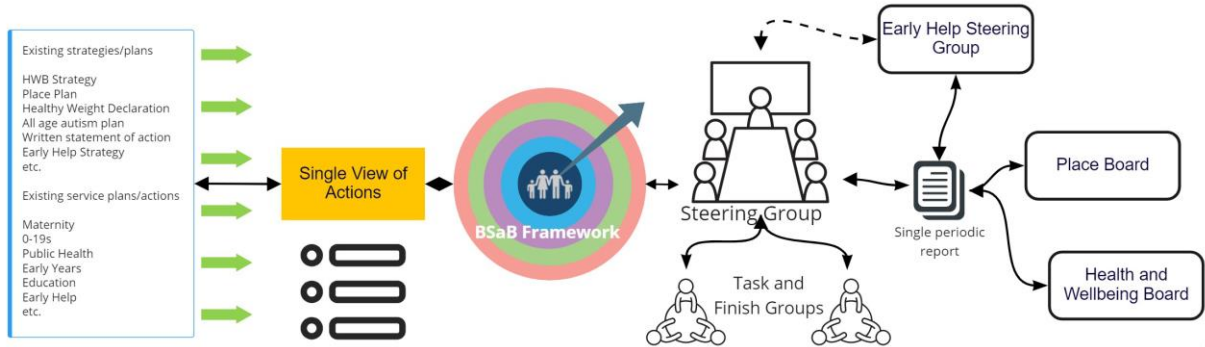
An aggregated action plan

The framework does not contain an action plan per se, but sets up a means of assessing current actions across different parts of the system, in order to achieve an overview of how likely the system is to enable every child to have the best start in life and to go on to achieve their potential. In this respect, the wider determinants and the priority lenses provide the means of such a mapping exercise. It is envisaged that a steering group will consider the outcome of such an exercise, and identify gaps in our efforts and/or opportunities to add value to existing efforts, e.g. by making links between different agencies to work in a more joined up way.

The appended diagram describes how the process is envisaged to take place.

Appendix.

Best Start and Beyond Framework – operation within expected governance, action planning and progress reporting arrangements



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PART A - Initial Equality Screening Assessment

1. Title	
Title: Best Start Plan 2026 - 2029	
Directorate: Children and Young People's Services	Service area: Commissioning, Quality and Performance
Lead person: Helen Sweaton	Contact number: 07554436546
Is this a:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strategy / Policy	<input type="checkbox"/> Service / Function
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other
If other, please specify	

2. Please provide a brief description of what you are screening
<p>The DfE issued targets for Local Authorities (LAs) to improve Good Level of Development (GLD) as part of its "Best Start in Life" strategy, aiming for 75% of 5-year-olds nationally to reach GLD by 2028 issuing new data tools and funding to guide local planning and intervention.</p> <p>This report provides an overview of current activity across Rotherham to improve early years outcomes, tackling inequalities, and ensure all children, especially disadvantaged ones, get a strong foundation for school, contributing to the Council's wider ambition that children and young people achieve.</p> <p>The report outlines the key activity undertaken in developing the new Best Start Plan, including a comprehensive needs analysis, engagement and consultation.</p> <p>The report seeks approval of the Best Start Plan and outlines the timeline for implementation to achieve the ambitions identified.</p>

3. Relevance to equality and diversity
<p>The Best Start plan will support children in Rotherham and their families to improve early years outcomes. Tackling inequalities, to ensure all children, especially disadvantaged ones, get a strong foundation for school, contributing to the Council's wider ambition that children and young people achieve.</p> <p>The target for the general population across Rotherham is to improve Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028 for at least 73.3% of 5-year-olds, however this must include at least 56.6% of 5-year-olds eligible for Free School Meals (FSM).</p> <p>Research highlights that certain groups are disproportionately vulnerable due to underlying inequalities. These inequalities increase the likelihood of not achieving outcomes..</p> <p>This plan reflects Rotherham's commitment to unite efforts across the Borough to enhance early years experiences and create a more equitable future for all.</p>

Priorities		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening early communication, language and literacy for all children • Increasing early education access for disadvantaged children • Improving the quality of early years provision, including Reception for all children • Identifying needs early and supporting children with SEND and vulnerable families • Providing joined-up family support through our Family Hubs • Tackling inequalities across the 0–5 system 		
Questions	Yes	No
Could the proposal have implications regarding the accessibility of services to the whole or wider community?	x	
Could the proposal affect service users?	x	
Has there been or is there likely to be an impact on an individual or group with protected characteristics?	x	
Have there been or likely to be any public concerns regarding the proposal?		x
Could the proposal affect how the Council's services, commissioning or procurement activities are organised, provided, located and by whom?	x	
Could the proposal affect the Council's workforce or employment practices?		x
If you have answered no to all the questions above, please explain the reason		

If you have answered **no** to **all** the questions above, please complete **sections 5 and 6**.

If you have answered **yes** to any of the above, please complete **section 4**.

4. Considering the impact on equality and diversity
Equality and human rights are considered within the strategy. Part A Equalities Screening is attached as appendix 2.
<p>How have you considered equality and diversity?</p> <p>Rotherham has 14, 893 children aged 0-4 according to the 2023 mid-year population estimate.</p> <p>In Rotherham 29.1% of pupils are eligible for FSM, this compares to an average of 24.6% across England Authorities. 23.5% of pupils have either a statutory plan for Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND), known as an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP), or are receiving SEND support (previously known as school action and school action plus). This compares to an average of 19.6% across all England Authorities.</p> <p>In the 2023/ 24 academic year 64.3% of Rotherham 5-year-olds met the expectation for a Good Level of Development (GLD). In the 2024/25 academic year Rotherham's GLD rate was 65.0%. This is slightly below National (68.3%), Yorkshire & Humber (66.3%), and Statistical Neighbours (66.4%).</p>

Despite strengths, 35% of children are not achieving GLD — a significant proportion needing targeted support. To meet the local target of 73.3%, Rotherham needs an increase of 8.3 percentage points within three years from the current 65.0%.

Key findings

Rotherham has a strong foundation in early developmental outcomes in the first years of life, high levels of engagement with Family Hubs and Children's Centres, and strong uptake of early education among most groups. Nonetheless, several critical challenges remain:

- Developmental inequalities persist and widen between the ages of 2½ and school entry, particularly for boys, children from low-income families, and children in deprived neighbourhoods.
- Literacy and communication difficulties are some of the primary barriers to achieving a Good Level of Development.
- Rising SEND demand, including a 44% increase in EHCPs, is placing significant pressure on services.
- Early education takes up gaps in the most disadvantaged areas, indicating a need for targeted intervention.
- School readiness outcomes at the end of Reception remain below national expectations despite strong early progress at age 2–2½.

Implications for the Best Start Local Plan

- To address these challenges, the Best Start Local Plan will prioritise:
- Maintaining high levels of Family Hub and Children's Centre engagement while tailoring services to emerging needs.
- Enhancing early SEND identification, specialist support, and inclusive early years practice.
- Strengthening early language, literacy and communication pathways from birth to age 5.
- Targeting support to disadvantaged communities, focusing on narrowing gaps in early development and school readiness.
- Improving early education access in the most deprived areas through targeted outreach and provider capacity building.
- Strengthening the transition pathway from early years settings into school to maintain strong development trajectories.

Rotherham Council's ambition for a family-friendly Borough, where all children and young people achieve, ensures child-focused strategies create a golden thread aligning high level goals with practical, community-based support focused on early intervention and integrated partnership working.

The Rotherham Council Plan (2025–2030) includes the establishment of Best Start Family Hubs creating a network of main and satellite Family Hubs to provide a single point of access to advice and support. Expansion of Early Education to create capacity to meet the government's expanded 30-hour free childcare entitlement for working parents of children from 9 months to age five by September 2025 and activity to address inequality including the provision of cost-of-living support packages, auto-enrolment of eligible children for free school meals and school uniform assistance.

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy commitment to “Enable all children and young people up to age 25 to have the best start in life, maximise their capabilities and have influence and control over their lives” underpins a partnership response which starts before a child is conceived. This includes activity in community health to facilitate easier access to wellness services via the launch of the "Rotherhive" digital platform, delivery of the universal Baby Packs and targeted outreach support focusing on improving take-up of early education places in specific areas like Central Rotherham to close development gaps.

The Children and Young People’s transformation workstream under the Health and Care Place Plan was instrumental in the development of the Best Start and Beyond Framework. Key activities include the Health and Wellbeing Board’s “Supporting a Breastfeeding Borough” declaration and the development and delivery of the associated "Rotherham Backs Breastfeeding" campaign, community support and early identification of speech and language needs.

Key activities in the Early Help Strategy include the expansion of the physical and digital Family Hub Start for Life offer, including midwifery, health visiting, "Stay and Play" sessions and multi-sensory baby development classes (e.g., Bloom Baby, Toddler Sense) to promote language and emotional bonding, as well as access to evidenced-based parenting support and a range of targeted family help.

Actions

All stakeholders have an essential role to play in improving the number of children who achieve a good level of development in Rotherham, the Council and all of its partners, including the NHS, Early Years, Education, Family Help and the voluntary and community sector are already working together.

Health services provide key developmental reviews and performance in this area is high and compares positively to regional and national averages.

The Family Information Service promotes activities, SEND updates, and regular communications to strengthen family support.

Parenting initiatives are delivered via Family Hubs, complemented by home learning programs that promote parental engagement.

Community engagement is enhanced through partnerships with the voluntary sector, for example Grimm & Co, which deliver creative literacy, cultural storytelling, and parental support, alongside links to Sheffield Hallam for impact evaluation.

Professional development is embedded through the annual Early Years Conference, bespoke school visits, ROSIS-led moderation and best practice meetings, and targeted training on curriculum, assessment, and EYFS requirements.

Date to scope and plan your Equality Analysis:	03 February 2026
Date to complete your Equality Analysis:	03 February 2026

Lead person for your Equality Analysis (Include name and job title):	Helen Sweaton, Joint Service Director Commissioning, Quality and Performance
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5. Governance, ownership and approval

Please state here who has approved the actions and outcomes of the screening:

Name	Job title	Date
Nicola Curley	Director of Children's Services	04 February 2026

6. Publishing

This screening document will act as evidence that due regard to equality and diversity has been given.

If this screening relates to a **Cabinet, key delegated officer decision, Council, other committee or a significant operational decision** a copy of the completed document should be attached as an appendix and published alongside the relevant report.

A copy of **all** screenings should also be sent to equality@rotherham.gov.uk For record keeping purposes it will be kept on file and also published on the Council's Equality and Diversity Internet page.

Date screening completed	03 February 2026
Report title and date	Best Start Plan 2026 - 2029
If relates to a Cabinet, key delegated officer decision, Council, other committee or a significant operational decision – report date and date sent for publication	16 March 2026
Date screening sent to Performance, Intelligence and Improvement equality@rotherham.gov.uk	04 February 2026

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PART B – Equality Analysis Form

As a public authority we need to ensure that all our strategies, policies, service and functions, both current and proposed have given proper consideration to equality and diversity.

This form:

- Can be used to prompt discussions, ensure that due regard has been given and remove or minimise disadvantage for an individual or group with a protected characteristic
- Involves looking at what steps can be taken to advance and maximise equality as well as eliminate discrimination and negative consequences
- Should be completed before decisions are made, this will remove the need for remedial actions.

Note – An Initial Equality Screening Assessment (Part A) should be completed prior to this form.

When completing this form consider the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics Age, Disability, Sex, Gender Reassignment, Race, Religion or Belief, Sexual Orientation, Civil Partnerships and Marriage, Pregnancy and Maternity and other socio-economic groups e.g. parents, single parents and guardians, carers, looked after children, unemployed and people on low incomes, ex-offenders, victims of domestic violence, homeless people etc. – see page 11 of Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance.

1. Title	
Equality Analysis title:	
Best Start Plan 2026 - 2029	
Date of Equality Analysis (EA): 04 February 2026	
Directorate: CYPS	Service area: Commissioning, Quality & Performance
Lead Manager: Helen Sweaton	Contact number: 07554 436546
Is this a:	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strategy / Policy	<input type="checkbox"/> Service / Function <input type="checkbox"/> Other
If other, please specify	

2. Names of those involved in the Equality Analysis (Should include minimum of three people) - see page 7 of Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance

Name	Organisation	Role (eg service user, managers, service specialist)
Helen Sweaton	RMBC/ NHS SY	Service Director Commissioning, Performance and Quality
Kelly White	RMBC	Service Director Family Help
Niall Devlin		Service Director Education and Inclusion
Alex Hawley	RMBC	Public Health Consultant
Michael Ng	RMBC	Strategic Commissioning Manager (Public Health)

3. What is already known? - see page 10 of Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance

Aim/Scope (who the Policy/Service affects and intended outcomes if known)

This may include a group/s identified by a protected characteristic, others groups or stakeholder/s e.g. service users, employees, partners, members, suppliers etc.)

The DfE issued targets for Local Authorities (LAs) to improve Good Level of Development (GLD) as part of its "Best Start in Life" strategy, aiming for 75% of 5-year-olds nationally to reach GLD by 2028 issuing new data tools and funding to guide local planning and intervention.

This report provides an overview of current activity across Rotherham to improve early years outcomes, tackling inequalities, and ensure all children, especially disadvantaged ones, get a strong foundation for school, contributing to the Council's wider ambition that children and young people achieve.

The report outlines the key activity undertaken in developing the new Best Start Plan, including a comprehensive needs analysis, engagement and consultation.

The report seeks approval of the Best Start Plan and outlines the timeline for implementation to achieve the ambitions identified.

Priorities

The Best Start plan will support children in Rotherham and their families to improve early years outcomes. Tackling inequalities, to ensure all children, especially disadvantaged ones, get a strong foundation for school, contributing to the Council's wider ambition that children and young people achieve.

The target for the general population across Rotherham is to improve Good Level of Development (GLD) by 2028 for at least 73.3% of 5-year-olds, however this must include at least 56.6% of 5-year-olds eligible for Free School Meals (FSM).

Research highlights that certain groups are disproportionately vulnerable due to underlying inequalities. These inequalities increase the likelihood of not achieving outcomes.

This plan reflects Rotherham's commitment to unite efforts across the Borough to enhance early years experiences and create a more equitable future for all.

Priorities

- Strengthening early communication, language and literacy for all children
- Increasing early education access for disadvantaged children
- Improving the quality of early years provision, including Reception for all children
- Identifying needs early and supporting children with SEND and vulnerable families
- Providing joined-up family support through our Family Hubs
- Tackling inequalities across the 0–5 system

What equality information is available? (Include any engagement undertaken)

- 90.7% children received their mandated health review at 2-2.5 years
- 88.2% of children meet developmental expectations at their mandated health review at 2-2.5 years
- 29.1% of Rotherham pupils were eligible for free school meals
- 23.5% of pupils have either a statutory plan for Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND), known as an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP), or are receiving SEND support (previously known as school action and school action plus).
- 64.3% of children achieved a good level of development, however this reduced to 47.6% for children eligible for free school meals.
- 67.8% of children achieve expected levels in writing and 72.1% achieve expected levels in word reading.
- 22.2% of children remain at emerging levels in Communication and Language.
- A gender gap persists, with boys significantly less likely to achieve GLD than girls (56.4% vs 72.3%).
- 39% of male children eligible for free school meals achieved a good level of development
- Rotherham has a higher proportion of children with identified SEND than the national average, with 20.4% of pupils recorded as having SEND, compared with 17.1% nationally.

- In the most recent term, 72% of eligible 2-year-olds with SEND took up a funded early education place, increasing to 93.3% among 3 and 4-year-olds.
- 89% of children aged 0–5 registered with a family hub, rising to 92% in the 30% most deprived areas.
- 73% of all 0–5s and 78% of those in the most deprived neighbourhoods access children centre services.
- 85.7% to 96.6% (across the academic year) of 2-year-olds, take-up an early education place. 90.6% to 97% 3 - and 4-year-olds take-up their universal entitlement to early education. However 12.9% of disadvantaged 3 and 4-year-olds did not take up a place compared with 8.9% in more affluent areas. 100% of children in care take-up early education entitlements. Take-up of early education has a positive impact on outcomes for children.
- Around 3,900 people (a rate of 3.3%) aged 16 and over in Rotherham were unemployed in the year ending December 2023. This has decreased compared with the year ending December 2022 (4.0%) and is better when compared to 3.4% across Yorkshire and The Humber.
- Data on the rate of children who have been referred to social care (per 10,000 children in each area) and are on a child protection plan shows a continued safe and steady decline. Low child protection rates are good. Rotherham has seen a reduction from a peak in 2017 of 114.3 to 70 at the end of March 2023.
- Healthy life expectancy at birth, 2018-2020, in Rotherham is 58.7 years for a male, 56.5 years for a female, significantly lower than the England average of 63.1 and 63.9 respectively.

Are there any gaps in the information that you are aware of?

Ethnicity data is limited and offers no themes from trend analysis however this could be considered in more detail particularly when multiple inequalities are present.

What monitoring arrangements have you made to monitor the impact of the policy or service on communities/groups according to their protected characteristics?

Progress against the delivery plan and review of objectives will be undertaken regularly by the Best Start and Beyond Steering Group and overseen annually by Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Board.

<p>Engagement undertaken with customers. (date and group(s) consulted and key findings)</p>	<p>On the 1st December 2025 a Summit led by Rotherham Council brought together multi-agency partners, aiming to foster collaborative discussion and actionable strategies for improving early years development outcomes. Presentations provided a comprehensive needs analysis with a range of quantitative and qualitative information, including feedback from children and families, delivered by Children and Young People’s Services, Early Years Education and 0-19 Public Health. Participants engaged in two workshops: the first focusing on current practices and the second on generating ideas for doing things differently. The summit concluded by agreeing the appropriate next steps, informing the development of the Best Start Plan.</p> <p>The Summit captured examples of current activity evidencing delivery of a comprehensive early year’s support system through integrated health checks, family engagement, robust multi-agency delivery including a vibrant voluntary and community sector and workforce development. Collectively, these actions aim to improve school readiness, reduce inequalities, and foster strong home learning environments.</p> <p>This engagement informed the development of the Best Start Plan.</p>
<p>Engagement undertaken with staff (date and group(s) consulted and key findings)</p>	<p>A number of RMBC staff were involved in the Summit referenced above.</p>

4. The Analysis - of the actual or likely effect of the Policy or Service (Identify by protected characteristics)

How does the Policy/Service meet the needs of different communities and groups? *(Protected characteristics of Age, Disability, Sex, Gender Reassignment, Race, Religion or Belief, Sexual Orientation, Civil Partnerships and Marriage, Pregnancy and Maternity) - see glossary on page 14 of the Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance)*

The Best Start Plan describes how partners will work together to ensure continued progress towards the achievement of the DfE issued target to improve Good Level of Development (GLD) so that 73% of 5-year-olds across Rotherham reach GLD by 2028. The plan targets all children not achieving a good level of development, specifically aiming to improve take up of universal health and development reviews, promote universal activities, SEND updates and communications to strengthen communication and literacy, reading and writing, and increase the take up of early education.

The plan acknowledges that some children face deeper inequalities, such as those who are male and those living in areas of higher deprivation.

Protected characteristics, including disability, sex, race, age, religion, and sexual orientation, are carefully considered to ensure fair access to services and opportunities.

Does your Policy/Service present any problems or barriers to communities or Groups?

No

Does the Service/Policy provide any positive impact/s including improvements or remove barriers?

Based on the analysis of local need; the following priorities are identified:

1. Strengthening early communication, language and literacy for all children
We know that communication and language are the biggest drivers of school readiness. Improving early speech, language and literacy is central to our ambition to increase the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development.

2. Increasing early education access for disadvantaged children

While many families take up funded early education places, too many children in our most disadvantaged communities still miss out – including 12.9% of 3–4-year-olds in IMD 30% areas. Closing this gap is essential to closing our GLD gap.

3. Improving the quality of early years provision, including Reception for all children

The first years of education shape life chances. We will work with providers, childminders, schools, Stronger Practice Hubs and RISE to improve practice, strengthen transitions and raise outcomes for all children.

4. Identifying needs early and supporting children with SEND and vulnerable families

With SEND prevalence above national levels and rising EHCP demand, we must act earlier and more collaboratively to ensure children get the right help at the right time – reducing escalation and improving long-term outcomes.

5. Providing joined-up family support through our Family Hubs

Rotherham’s Family Hubs network is already strong. Through these hubs we will offer integrated health, early help, childcare and community support so families experience a seamless pathway from pregnancy to school age.

6. Tackling inequalities across the 0–5 system

We are determined to narrow the gaps linked to deprivation, SEND, health inequalities and access to opportunity. Our actions will target the communities who need us most, helping to level the playing field and improve the life chances of every child.

What affect will the Policy/Service have on community relations? (may also need to consider activity which may be perceived as benefiting one group at the expense of another)

The plan will ensure that the service continues to work with the specific specified groups identified through the Protected Characteristics and does not differentiate between different groups.

Please list any **actions and targets** that need to be taken as a consequence of this assessment on the action plan below and ensure that they are added into your service plan for monitoring purposes – see page 12 of the Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance.

5. Summary of findings and Equality Analysis Action Plan

If the analysis is done at the right time, i.e. early before decisions are made, changes should be built in before the policy or change is signed off. This will remove the need for remedial actions. Where this is achieved, the only action required will be to monitor the impact of the policy/service/change on communities or groups according to their protected characteristic - See page 11 of the Equality Screening and Analysis guidance

Title of analysis: Best Start Plan 2026 - 2029
Directorate and service area: CYPS
Lead Manager: Helen Sweaton - Service Director, Commissioning, Quality and Performance
Summary of findings:
<p>The Best Start Plan places a strong emphasis on equality and inclusivity, ensuring that its aims and outcomes serve diverse communities and groups, especially those most affected by systemic inequalities.</p> <p>The plan is committed to supporting more children to achieve a good level of development at age five years.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Primary Beneficiaries:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Children and Families: The strategy targets children not achieving a good level of development at age 5 (35.7%), their parents/ carers and communities and the people who work with them across the education, health, care and voluntary sectors.2. Groups Identified by Protected Characteristics:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ The plan acknowledges that some children are less likely to achieve a good level of development due to their characteristics such as males (43.6% not achieving) and those eligible for free school meals (52.4% not achieving) and males eligible for free school meals (61% not achieving).○ Other protected characteristics, including disability, race, religion, and sexual orientation, are carefully considered to ensure fair access to services and opportunities.

Action/Target	State Protected Characteristics as listed below	Target date (MM/YY)
Cabinet paper approval	As Above	15 February 2026

*A = Age, D= Disability, S = Sex, GR Gender Reassignment, RE= Race/ Ethnicity, RoB= Religion or Belief, SO= Sexual Orientation, PM= Pregnancy/Maternity, CPM = Civil Partnership or Marriage. C= Carers, O= other groups

6. Governance, ownership and approval		
Please state those that have approved the Equality Analysis. Approval should be obtained by the Director and approval sought from DLT and the relevant Cabinet Member.		
Name	Job title	Date
Nicola Curley	Strategic Director, CYPS	04 February 2026
Cllr Victoria Cusworth	Lead Member, CYPS	

7. Publishing	
The Equality Analysis will act as evidence that due regard to equality and diversity has been given.	
If this Equality Analysis relates to a Cabinet, key delegated officer decision, Council, other committee or a significant operational decision a copy of the completed document should be attached as an appendix and published alongside the relevant report.	
A copy should also be sent to equality@rotherham.gov.uk For record keeping purposes it will be kept on file and also published on the Council's Equality and Diversity Internet page.	
Date Equality Analysis completed	03 February 2026
Report title and date	Best Start Plan
Date report sent for publication	
Date Equality Analysis sent to Performance, Intelligence and Improvement equality@rotherham.gov.uk	04 February 2026

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Appendix 6 – Carbon Impact Assessment – Cabinet Report, Best Start Plan 2026 - 2029

Will the decision/proposal impact...	Impact	If an impact or potential impacts are identified			
		Describe impacts or potential impacts on emissions from the Council and its contractors.	Describe impact or potential impacts on emissions across Rotherham as a whole.	Describe any measures to mitigate emission impacts	Outline any monitoring of emission impacts that will be carried out
Emissions from non-domestic buildings?	No change	Emissions will remain at similar levels to current across the borough. Any proposed new services would be considered individually.	Emissions overall will remain at similar levels	Any adaptations to deliver new interventions across the borough will be completed to current building code and overseen by asset management service.	This will be dependent upon the new delivery/commissioned activity.
Emissions from transport?	Minimal change	If staff are required to travel as a consequence of new interventions/ service delivery there may be some variations to current emissions from transport.	If families/ partnership staff are required to travel as a consequence of improved access to information/ services there may be some variations to current emissions from transport.	Mitigating measures are encouraged e.g. use of public transport, cycling, car share etc By delivering services in localities families have to travel less to access them.	This will be dependent upon the new delivery/commissioned activity.
Emissions from waste, or the quantity of waste itself?	No change	There will be no change in the overall amount of waste generated	Waste levels across the borough will remain at similar levels to present.	Most organisations have a waste management process	This will be dependent upon the new delivery/commissioned activity.
Emissions from housing and domestic buildings?	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Emissions from construction and/or development?	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Carbon capture (e.g. through trees)?	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Identify any emission impacts associated with this decision that have not been covered by the above fields:

The plan articulates Rotherham's ambition and commitment to improving the number of children who achieve a good level of development at aged 5.

The plan will ensure that leisure and culture, health, education, early years, family help and voluntary and community services work together to Strengthening early communication, language and literacy for all children, increasing early education access for disadvantaged children, Improving the quality of early years provision, including Reception for all children, identifying needs early and supporting children with SEND and vulnerable families, Providing joined-up family support through our Family Hubs and Tackling inequalities across the 0–5 system.

Please provide a summary of all impacts and mitigation/monitoring measures:

The delivery of the Best Start Plan has no direct carbon impact for monitoring purposes.

Supporting information:

Completed by: (Name, title, and service area/directorate).	Helen Sweaton Joint Service Director, Commissioning, performance and quality.
Please outline any research, data, or information used to complete this [form].	N/A
If quantities of emissions are relevant to and have been used in this form please identify which conversion factors have been used to quantify impacts.	N/A
Tracking [to be completed by Policy Support / Climate Champions]	

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 16 March 2026

Report Title

Transport Capital Programme 2026-27

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

Yes

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report

Andrew Bramidge, Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment

Report Author(s)

Nat Porter, Interim Head of Transportation Infrastructure Service
nat.porter@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report details the Transport Capital Programme for the upcoming 2026-27 financial year, including its funding sources and programme areas, and explains how projects will be managed within them.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Notes the schemes and allocations of funding, as set out in paragraph 2.3, subject to approval of the Council Budget on 4 March 2026.
2. Approves the schemes and allocations of funding outlined in Section 2 of this report, including the reallocation of savings made on capital projects delivered within budget as described in paragraph 1.6.
3. Delegates authority to the Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, to determine the schemes to be delivered in 2026-27 through to 2029-30 with the Minor Works allocation, subject to approval of the Council Budget in March 2026.
4. Delegates authority to the Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and

the Local Economy, to determine the schemes to be delivered in 2026-27 with the School Crossing Patrol Improvements allocation referred to in paragraph 2.2.6.

5. Delegates authority to the Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, to determine the use of any underspends across the Transport Capital Programme to fund the delivery of other approved transport programmes, or the progression of designs for potential future projects.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Part A – Initial Equality Impact Screening Assessment
Appendix 2 Carbon Impact Assessment

Background Papers

[City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements: guidance for mayoral combined authorities](#)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Transport Capital Programme 2026-27

1. Background

- 1.1 In July 2022, the Department for Transport (DfT) confirmed a new round of funding known as the City Regions Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS). This funding is distributed to Local Transport Authorities within Combined Authority areas for a funding period from 2022-2027.
- 1.2 Within the Council's £72.4 million allocation described above, £6 million has been allocated for the Local and Neighbourhood Transport Complementary Programme (LNTCP) over the five years. As previously reported this funding is intended to support localised transport improvements, including the Local Neighbourhood & Road Safety schemes and specific interventions.
- 1.3 This report considers the LNTCP funding that remains to be allocated in the 2026-27 financial year (the fifth and final year out of the 5-year period).
- 1.4 The DfT expects that all CRSTS funding, including LNTCP, will contribute to the overarching objectives of, amongst other things, driving growth and productivity, decarbonisation and promoting modal shift from cars to public transport, walking and cycling. The Council therefore has a requirement to monitor against delivery on these outputs and outcomes from the programme.
- 1.5 Two capital projects have delivered well within budget. It is therefore proposed to reallocate funding not required for these projects to support the 2026-27 capital programme as follows –
- CGC082 Moving Traffic Offences Enforcement (£193,122 of RMBC Capital - £400,000 original total budget) and,
 - CGC068 Morthen Road pedestrian crossing (£56,000 of CRSTS-LNTCP - £375,000 original total budget.)
- 1.6 There is also an additional new 2026-27 allocation of £426,400 for highway structures asset maintenance. This is part of the separate CRSTS Network Asset Maintenance block funding.

2. Key Issues

2.1 The 2026-27 Local Neighbourhood Transport Programme

The 2026-27 financial year is the final year of the current five-year funding round.

- 2.1.1 Based on spend to date and current commitments the present forecast for available funding for 2026-27 is £344,000. This is made up of the remaining CRSTS-LNTCP block funding of £95,000 and reallocation of the remaining funding for the delivered moving traffic offences pilot, and the crossing at Morthen Road referred to at 1.5 above.

Table 1 Proposed 2026-27 Local Neighbourhood Transport Programme (LNTCP)

£ thousands	LNTCP 26-27	Reallocation from Project No. CGC082	Reallocation from Project No. CGC068	Total
Pedestrian crossings	95	89	41	225
Monitoring & evaluation			15	15
School Crossing Patrol improvements		104		104
Total	95	193	56	344

2.1.2 Pedestrian Crossings

An allocation of £225,000 from 26-27 funding is proposed to enable the delivery of the first prioritised crossing following the completion and approval of the prioritisation process undertaken and reported as part of the 25-26 capital programme.

2.1.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

Given the need for the Council to monitor against delivery on outputs and outcomes for all Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) /CRSTS funded schemes, a proposal for a £15,000 allocation is required for year 3 monitoring and evaluation assessment of the Moor Road, Manvers TCF scheme, as well as monitoring the performance of the broader programme to inform future work.

2.1.4 School Crossing Patrol Improvements

This theme is intended to fund design and delivery of works to support the safe operation of the School Crossing Patrol service. Risk assessments are presently being undertaken to review and prioritise any sites requiring investigations to address safety risks. An allocation of £104,000 is proposed for investigation and delivery of schemes to mitigate risks at School Crossing Patrol Sites, and delegation is sought to determine the schemes to be delivered in 2026-27.

2.2 Structures Capital Programme 2026-27

As detailed in paragraph 1.6, there is an allocation of £426,400 for structures for the 2026-27 financial year. It is proposed this is allocated to the following:

- Bridge Joint Replacement Programme (£150,000)
- Grafton New Bridge concrete and parapet repairs (£200,000)
- Minor essential maintenance arising from inspections (£76,400)

2.3 Council Capital Investments

A number of Capital Investments have been proposed in the Council's Budget to commence from the 2026-27 financial year as follows –

- **Ward Road Safety Plans** - £160,000 over two years (£80,000 per annum) for the development of Ward Road Safety Plans in each of Rotherham's 25 wards, forming the development of capital Road Safety projects.
- **Old Flatts Bridge parapet repair** - £1,900,000 in addition to £600,000 already allocated, to enable the deficient parapet to be repaired and cease temporary lane closures on Rotherham Parkway.
- **Structure 2026-2-27 Maintenance** - £1,000,000 for a more proactive structures inspections programme and to conduct loading assessments.
- **Fleet Bridge reconstruction design** - £600,000 for the design of a replacement bridge to allow revocation of the current weight limit.
- **Pedestrian Crossings Programme Pipeline** - £268,000 for designing five pedestrian crossings in order to be ready for construction as funding arises.
- **Transportation Minor Works Programme extension** - £81,000 p.a. until the end of 2029-30 (£324,000 total) to allow response to minor matters that may be important to the community or to individuals and where not suitable for use of external funding.
- **Treeton Lane Crossroads – Design Works** £150,000 to develop a scheme for improvements at the junction of Treeton Lane and Main Street, Aughton.

3 Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 Option 1 – do not agree to receiving the CRSTS Funding referred to in Section 1 of this report. This would severely impact on the Council's ability to maintain and improve its transportation assets and would carry significant reputational risk for future awards of funding. This is option is not recommended.
- 3.2 Option 2 – utilise available funding as set out in paragraph 2.1 onwards. This would require Cabinet approval to be sought to approve the list of schemes as they are identified where this is not described in this report; this is not recommended, as the additional time required to finalise all projects and submit for Cabinet approval would add delay to programme delivery. This would include for the Minor Works Programme.
- 3.3 Option 3 – as option 2, and additionally delegate responsibility to the Executive Director, Regeneration and Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, Job and the Economy to confirm –

- Schemes to be taken forward under the School Crossing Patrols Improvement theme;
- Schemes to be taken forward under the Minor Works budget approved by Council in March 2025.
- The reallocation and use of any underspends.

This is the recommended option.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 No community consultation has yet taken place on the 2026-27 transport infrastructure programme. This is to be undertaken once further detail on projects within each scheme are identified and sufficiently developed to enable meaningful consultation.
- 4.2 Consultation on individual projects takes place at levels consistent with the scale of each project. For example, small schemes often engage with Ward Councillors and local community interests whereas larger schemes require wider community and public engagement.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 Following approval of the Council's transport capital programme budget, the programme will be delivered as part of the 2026-27 capital programme of the Council.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 This report outlines recommendations on how to allocate existing external funding to the Council's capital programme. The Council must ensure that it abides by any conditions stipulated by the grant funder to minimise the risk of clawback. It also details the new investments proposed as part of the Council's Budget and Council Tax Report 2026-27 to be considered at Full Council on 4th March 2026. Delegation is sought to manage underspends within the transport programme and this must be complementary to existing delegations and capital governance procedures.
- 6.2 To support delivery of the programme, all procurement activity must be procured in compliance with the relevant procurement legislation (Public Contracts Regulations 2015 or the Procurement Act 2023) dependent on the route to market, as well as the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 The recommendations of this report are in compliance with the Council's Constitution and there are no substantive legal implications arising from the contents of this report.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no Human Resources implications arising from this report. The programme will be delivered through existing staff resources within the Transportation and Highways Design Service within Planning, Regeneration and Transportation. Specialist consultants, the internal highways service provider (Highways Delivery Team) and external works providers will be used as required, in accordance with Council procurement procedures, and where able to offer the required services.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 The implications of the programme will depend on the detail of schemes that will be delivered. Typically, measures such as improved crossings and local transport improvements can be expected to improve conditions for children, young people and vulnerable adults – this will need to be confirmed by Equalities Impact Assessment for each project as appropriate as they are developed.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 An Equalities Screening Assessment is attached at Appendix 1 of this report. The implications of the programme will depend on the detail of the schemes that will be delivered. Typically, measures such as improved crossings, reduced road traffic collisions and local transport improvements can be expected to improve outcomes. This will need to be confirmed by Equalities Impact Assessments for each project as appropriate as they are developed.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 CO2 emissions impacts have not been quantified, as it is not possible to do this at this stage of programme development. However, at high level it is anticipated these will fall into three categories: –

- Emissions from transport (impact unknown).
- Emissions from construction (forecast increase emissions).
- Operational emissions (forecast increase emissions).

11.2 Further detail can be found in the Carbon Impact Assessment at Appendix 2.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1. Transport infrastructure schemes carry implications for all road users – which in practice is everyone. In terms of partner agencies and organisations, key stakeholders are the emergency services, utility provider companies, transport operators (road & rail), road haulage associations and companies, key highway user groups such as motoring, cycling, walking and disability representation bodies. The exact nature of these implications will vary considerably between individual schemes.

- 12.2 Where required engagement takes place with interested parties during scheme development and at construction. Any implications that may arise through specific measures would be addressed as part of the scheme design and / or Traffic Regulation Order process that governs the operation and use of the road network.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 Project risks are identified within scheme design, business case preparation and then at operational level during the construction process. These are managed using recognised risk register approaches and in accordance with the Council's contract procedure rules for the approval of any project or programme changes.

14. Accountable Officers

- 14.1 Lucy Hudson
Head of Transportation Infrastructure Service
Email: lucy.hudson@rotherham.gov.uk

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	John Edwards	27/02/26
Executive Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	27/02/26
Service Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	27/02/26

Report Author:

Nat Porter, Interim Head of Transportation Infrastructure Service

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

PART A - Initial Equality Screening Assessment

As a public authority we need to ensure that all our strategies, policies, service and functions, both current and proposed have given proper consideration to equality and diversity.

A **screening** process can help judge relevance and provide a record of both the process and decision. Screening should be a short, sharp exercise that determines relevance for all new and revised strategies, policies, services and functions.

Completed at the earliest opportunity it will help to determine:

- the relevance of proposals and decisions to equality and diversity
- whether or not equality and diversity is being/has already been considered, and
- whether or not it is necessary to carry out an Equality Analysis (Part B).

Further information is available in the Equality Screening and Analysis Guidance – see page 9.

1. Title	
Title: Transport Capital Programme 2026-27	
Directorate: Regeneration & Environment	Service area: Transportation Infrastructure Service
Lead person: Nat Porter	Contact: nat.porter@rotherham.gov.uk
Is this a:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Strategy / Policy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Service / Function
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	
If other, please specify	

2. Please provide a brief description of what you are screening
Approval of Transport Capital Programme 2026-27.

3. Relevance to equality and diversity
All the Council's strategies/policies, services/functions affect service users, employees or the wider community – borough wide or more local. These will also have a greater/lesser relevance to equality and diversity.
The following questions will help you to identify how relevant your proposals are. When considering these questions think about age, disability, sex, gender reassignment,

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race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, civil partnerships and marriage, pregnancy and maternity and other socio-economic groups e.g. parents, single parents and guardians, carers, looked after children, unemployed and people on low incomes, ex-offenders, victims of domestic violence, homeless people etc.		
Questions	Yes	No
Could the proposal have implications regarding the accessibility of services to the whole or wider community?	✓	
Could the proposal affect service users?	✓	
Has there been or is there likely to be an impact on an individual or group with protected characteristics?	✓	
Have there been or likely to be any public concerns regarding the proposal?	✓	
Could the proposal affect how the Council's services, commissioning or procurement activities are organised, provided, located and by whom?		✓
Could the proposal affect the Council's workforce or employment practices?		✓
If you have answered no to all the questions above, please explain the reason		

If you have answered **no** to all the questions above please complete **sections 5 and 6**.

If you have answered **yes** to any of the above please complete **section 4**.

4. Considering the impact on equality and diversity

If you have not already done so, the impact on equality and diversity should be considered within your proposals before decisions are made.

Considering equality and diversity will help to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and take active steps to create a discrimination free society by meeting a group or individual's needs and encouraging participation.

Please provide specific details for all three areas below using the prompts for guidance and complete an Equality Analysis (Part B).

- **How have you considered equality and diversity?**

The report details a programme of work, and its division of themes. General consideration has been given to equalities implications of work in these themes; however specific impacts will not be identifiable until individual schemes are identified. It is proposed as schemes are identified under each theme, the programme and schemes

within them will be subject to an update of this Initial Screening Assessment, with individual schemes subjected to Equality Analysis as required by RMBC Policy.

Parts of the 2026-27 programme relates to allocation of money to ongoing schemes subject to their own individual processes. Consequently, this screening applies only to the following parts of the programme -

- The allocation of funds for works to prioritise and design an additional pedestrian crossing and the delivery of a further pipeline of schemes.
- The approval of the extension of the Minor Schemes programme.
- The approval of funds for further monitoring and evaluation.
- The approval of funds for waiting restrictions and works associated with school crossing sites.
- The allocation of funds to ward road safety plans.
- The allocation of funds to design works at Treeton Crossroads.
- The allocation of monies for the Structures Capital Maintenance Programme and Fleet Bridge Design.

• **Key findings**

Local and national data identify a number of inequalities in respect of transport which will need to be considered in the development of the programme, some of which may be cause of or an effect of existing traffic and transport conditions. Headline inequalities identified are –

- Children, young people and the elderly are overrepresented amongst road traffic casualties relative to their population size;
- Wheelchair and mobility scooter users express notably worse satisfaction with provision of safe and level crossing points, and obstruction of footways, than others;
- Men are overrepresented amongst road traffic casualties relative to the average;
- Access to cars is lower amongst people of non-White ethnicity, and amongst lower income households;
- People without access to cars travel significantly less far despite spending similar (but slightly lesser) amounts of time travelling compared to the average. They are also more dependent on non-motorised travel, and especially buses, for their mobility.

In light of these headlines, the following initial findings are made –

- Introduction of an additional pedestrian crossing can be expected to advance equality of opportunity for those amongst children and young people, the elderly, people with disabilities and those without access to cars – however this will depend upon the final prioritised crossing. A screening assessment will be made as part of the report to enter the prioritised crossing into the programme.
- Introduction of enhanced walking, cycling and crossing infrastructure enhancements can be expected to advance equality of opportunity for those amongst children and young people, the elderly, people with disabilities and those

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<p>without access to cars.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As children, young people and men are overrepresented in road traffic collisions, there is a risk of adverse outcomes of reallocation of Collision Investigation & Prevention monies for these groups. However, in the context of the study into school crossing interventions any works and/or changes in policy arising from the study will be subject to their own Equalities Impact Analysis. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actions - Ensuring consultation and engagement activity seeks the view of groups with protected or other characteristics where there may be inequalities of which we are unaware and/or lack information. - Conduct an Initial Equality Screening Assessment on projects within each theme as these are developed. This will include an assessment to be included as part of the decision report for the prioritisation of the new pedestrian crossing. - Progress schemes to Equality Analysis where screening assessment indicates this is required. 	
Date to scope and plan your Equality Analysis:	See Actions – above.
Date to complete your Equality Analysis:	See Actions – above.
Lead person for your Equality Analysis (Include name and job title):	Nat Porter, Interim Head of Transportation Infrastructure Service

5. Governance, ownership and approval

Please state here who has approved the actions and outcomes of the screening:

Name	Job title	Date
Nat Porter	Interim Head, Transportation Infrastructure Service	6 th February, 2026
Andrew Brookfield	Interim Service Manager, Transport Planning and Policy	6th February, 2026

6. Publishing

This screening document will act as evidence that due regard to equality and diversity has been given.

If this screening relates to a **Cabinet, key delegated officer decision, Council, other committee or a significant operational decision** a copy of the completed document should be attached as an appendix and published alongside the relevant report.

A copy of **all** screenings should also be sent to equality@rotherham.gov.uk For record

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keeping purposes it will be kept on file and also published on the Council's Equality and Diversity Internet page.	
Date screening completed	06 Feb '26
Report title and date	Transport Capital Programme 26/27 16 Mar '26
If relates to a Cabinet, key delegated officer decision, Council, other committee or a significant operational decision – report date and date sent for publication	
Date screening sent to Performance, Intelligence and Improvement equality@rotherham.gov.uk	06 Feb. 26

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Will the decision/proposal impact...	Impact	If an impact or potential impacts are identified			
		Describe impacts or potential impacts on emissions from the Council and its contractors.	Describe impact or potential impacts on emissions across Rotherham as a whole.	Describe any measures to mitigate emission impacts	Outline any monitoring of emission impacts that will be carried out
Emissions from non-domestic buildings?	None	Not applicable in this instance	Not applicable in this instance	Not applicable in this instance	Not applicable in this instance
Emissions from transport?	Increase emissions	Additional emissions may be expected from travel related to the development and construction of projects in the Transport Capital Programme.	Generally, schemes which reduce demand for travel, or facilitate active travel and/or public transport may be expected to reduce emissions. Measures which facilitate car ownership or use, or additional travel more generally, may be expected to increase emissions.	Where possible scheme PMs will be expected to provide estimates of changes in carbon emissions consequential to the schemes.	To be determined once projects and their impacts are understood in more detail.
Emissions from waste, or the quantity of waste itself?	Increase emissions	Most schemes will result in excavations and/or disposal of materials as part of construction, with consequential one-off increase in waste and associated emissions.		Scheme PMs will be expected to work with designers and contractors to ensure carbon emissions are minimised as far as practicable, including actively seeking opportunities to cut emissions from existing operation.	

Appendix 2 – Carbon Impact Assessment

Will the decision/proposal impact...	Impact	If an impact or potential impacts are identified			
		Describe impacts or potential impacts on emissions from the Council and its contractors.	Describe impact or potential impacts on emissions across Rotherham as a whole.	Describe any measures to mitigate emission impacts	Outline any monitoring of emission impacts that will be carried out
Emissions from housing and domestic buildings?	None	Not applicable in this instance	Not applicable in this instance	Not applicable in this instance	Not applicable in this instance
Emissions from construction and/or development?	Increase emissions	All highway/structural schemes have construction emissions arising from the supply, installation, maintenance and operation of the schemes. The scale and nature of these cannot be confirmed until schemes are identified and more developed.	No impact expected beyond the contribution from RMBC and its contractors.	Scheme PMs will be expected to work with designers and contractors to ensure carbon emissions are minimised as far as practicable, including actively seeking opportunities to cut emissions from existing operation.	
Carbon capture (e.g. through trees)?	Impact unknown	It is possible schemes will be identified involving removal of small numbers of trees.	No impact expected.	Impacts on trees will be avoided in the first instance. The advice of arboriculturists will be sought in respect of replacement planting in the event of tree impacts being identified.	To be determined once projects and their impacts are understood in more detail.
Identify any emission impacts associated with this decision that have not been covered by the above fields:					

Appendix 2 – Carbon Impact Assessment

Will the decision/proposal impact...	Impact	If an impact or potential impacts are identified			
		Describe impacts or potential impacts on emissions from the Council and its contractors.	Describe impact or potential impacts on emissions across Rotherham as a whole.	Describe any measures to mitigate emission impacts	Outline any monitoring of emission impacts that will be carried out
<p>Will the proposal affect Council services' resilience to climate change, or the capacity of people living in the Borough to adapt to climate change?</p> <p>Investment in highways assets may increase the resilience of the local transport system to the effects of climate change. Proactively identifying and resolving issues and improving the network decreases exposure to climate risk, throughout the highways network. The 2026 – 2027 capital programme will be supported by revenue proposals which are to investment in highways asset inspections and risk-based management software, as considered in CIA 575</p>					

Please provide a summary of all impacts and mitigation/monitoring measures:

In summary, the following impacts are expected, with the scale and balance of emissions unknown until projects are further developed -

- A one-off increase in emissions associated with development and construction of the projects;
- An ongoing increase in emissions associated with the maintenance and operation of the projects;
- Potential but as yet unknown change in emissions from transport resulting from the schemes;

The increases associated with development, construction, maintenance and operation reflect the systemic nature of the carbon emissions problem; whilst the energy and construction systems are emitters of carbon, any additional activity utilising these systems can be expected to result in increases in emissions.

The changes are thought likely to be very small in the context of overall transport emissions in Rotherham, and very small in the context of the NZ30 and NZ40 targets.

Mitigation will principally consist of emissions estimates being prepared as schemes are developed, PMs being required to ensure emissions are reduced as far as practicable in the design and construction of the projects, and this feeding into scheme development.

Appendix 2 – Carbon Impact Assessment

Supporting information:	
Completed by: (Name, title, and service area/directorate).	Nat Porter Interim Head, Transportation Infrastructure Service Regeneration & Environment
Please outline any research, data, or information used to complete this [form].	A previous climate impact assessment, CIA 414 (relating to a previous annual round of the Council's transport capital programme) was used in preparing this assessment. CIA 575 (transport programme revenue proposals) was also referenced, as cited above.
If quantities of emissions are relevant to and have been used in this form please identify which conversion factors have been used to quantify impacts.	
Tracking [to be completed by Policy Support / Climate Champions]	Tracking reference: CIA 595 Arthur King Principal Climate Change Officer Finance and Customer Services

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – Work Programme 2025-26		
Chair: Councillor Brian Steele		Vice-Chair: Cllr Joshua Bacon
Governance Manager: Barbel Gale		Link Officer: Phil Horsfield
The following principles were endorsed by OSMB at its meeting of 5 July 2023 as criteria to long/short list each of the commission's respective priorities:		
Establish as a starting point:		
· What are the key issues?		
· What is the outcome that we want?		
Agree principles for longlisting:		
· Can scrutiny add value or influence?		
· Is it being looked at elsewhere?		
· Is it a priority – council or community?		
Developing a consistent shortlisting criteria e.g.		
T:	Time: is it the right time, enough resources?	
O:	Others: is this duplicating the work of another body?	
P:	Performance: can scrutiny make a difference	
I:	Interest – what is the interest to the public?	
C:	Contribution to the corporate plan	
Meeting Date	Responsible Officer	Agenda Item
Wednesday 7 May 2025	Sharon Kemp / Jo Brown	Council Plan 2025 - 2028 & New Year Ahead Delivery Plan - Pre-decision
	Ian Spicer	Review of the Non-Residential Charging Policy - Pre-decision
	Barbel Gale	Work Programme
	Each Governance Advisor	Work in progress from Select Commissions
	Barbel Gale	Forward Plan of Key Decisions
Wednesday 4 June 2025	Judith Badger / Rob Mahon	Finance Update - June 2025 - Pre-decision
	Sharon Kemp / Jo Brown	Social Value Annual Report - Pre-decision
	Ian Spicer / John Holman	Employment Solutions 2025-26 - Pre-decision
	Barbel Gale	Work Programme
	Each Governance Advisor	Work in progress from Select Commissions
Barbel Gale	Forward Plan of Key Decisions	
Wednesday 2 July 2025	John Edwards / Jo Brown	Council Plan 2022-2025 and Year Ahead Delivery Plan Progress Update 2024-25 - Pre-decision
	Judith Badger	Ethical Procurement Policy - Pre-decision
	Judith Badger / Rob Mahon	Financial Outturn 2024- 25 - Pre-decision
	Judith Badger / Rob Mahon	Treasury Management Outturn 2024-25 - Pre-decision
	Judith Badger / Rob Mahon	May 2025-26 Financial Monitoring Report - Pre-decision
	Barbel Gale	Work Programme
	Each Governance Advisor	Work in progress from Select Commissions
Barbel Gale	Forward Plan of Key Decisions	
Tuesday 9 September 2025	Andrew Bramidge / Simon Moss / Fiona Fletcher	Progress update on the implementation Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme
	Barbel Gale	Scrutiny Annual Report 2024-2025
	Judith Badger / Rob Mahon	July 2025-26 Financial Monitoring Report - Pre-decision scrutiny
	Andrew Bramidge / Emma Ellis	Community Safety Strategy 2025-2028 - Pre-decision scrutiny
	Judith Badger / Kevin Fisher	Investing in our Community Facilities - Pre-decision scrutiny
	Barbel Gale	Work Programme
	Each Governance Advisor	Work in progress from Select Commissions
Barbel Gale	Forward Plan of Key Decisions	
Wednesday 8 October 2025	Andrew Bramidge	Rotherham Employment & Skills Strategy - Pre-decision scrutiny
	Andrew Bramidge	Selective Licensing Policy - Pre-decision scrutiny - joint with IPSC
	Barbel Gale	Work Programme
	Each Governance Advisor	Work in progress from Select Commissions
	Barbel Gale	Forward Plan of Key Decisions
Wednesday 12 November 2025	Judith Badger & Rob Mahon	Medium Term Financial Strategy Update - Pre-decision scrutiny.
	Craig Cornwall, Lewis Coates & Andrew Bramidge	General Enforcement Policy - Pre-decision scrutiny
	Andrew Bramidge/Sam Barstow	Call-In - Selective Licensing
	Fiona Boden	Complaints Annual Report
	Barbel Gale	Work Programme
	Each Governance Advisor	Work in progress from Select Commissions
Barbel Gale	Forward Plan of Key Decisions	
	Lindsay Wynn & Rob Mahon	2026/27 HRA Business Plan & Rent Setting - Pre-decision scrutiny

Wednesday 10 December 2025	Judith Badger	Inclusion Strategy and Annual Report – Pre-decision scrutiny
	Andrew Bramidge	Library Strategy – Pre-decision scrutiny
	Simeon Leach & Andrew Bramidge	Rotherham Employment & Skills Strategy - Pre-decision scrutiny
	Barbel Gale	Work Programme
	Each Governance Advisor	Work in progress from Select Commissions
	Barbel Gale	Forward Plan of Key Decisions
Tuesday 13 January 2026	John Edwards	Council Plan and Year Ahead Delivery Plan Progress Update - Pre-decision Leader Q&A - to be scheduled after Council plan on the agenda.
	Judith Badger & Rob Mahon	November 2025-26 Financial Monitoring Report – Pre-decision scrutiny
	Andrew Bramidge & Andy Duncan	Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Update – Pre-decision scrutiny
	Judith Badger & Rob Mahon	MTFS Presentation
	Barbel Gale	Work Programme
	Barbel Gale	Forward Plan of Key Decisions
	Tuesday 3 February 2026	Judith Badger & Fiona Boden
Ian Spicer		Rotherham Baby Packs – Outcomes and Future Commissioning - Pre-decision Scrutiny
Kerry Grinsill-Clinton		HSC - Access to Contraception Review Report
Barbel Gale		Work Programme
Each Governance Advisor		Work in progress from Select Commissions
Barbel Gale		Forward Plan of Key Decisions
Wednesday 4 February 2026		Question and answer session, Mayor Coppard, South Yorkshire Combined Mayoral Authority.
	Judith Badger & Rob Mahon	Budget and Council Tax Report 2026-27 - Pre-decision Scrutiny
Wednesday 11 March 2026	Andrew Bramidge / Nat Porter	Transport Capital Programme 2026/27 – Pre-decision Scrutiny
	Nicola Curley / Helen Sweaton / Niall Devlin / Alex Hawley	Best Start Plan 2026- 2029 – Pre-decision Scrutiny
	Barbel Gale	Work Programme
	Each Governance Advisor	Work in progress from Select Commissions
	Barbel Gale	Forward Plan of Key Decisions
Wednesday 8 April 2026	Andrew Bramidge	Climate Emergency Annual Report - Pre-decision Scrutiny
	Mike Thomas	Community Governance Review – Pre-decision Scrutiny
	Jayne Metcalfe	Progress Update on Future Rothercare Model
	Barbel Gale	Work Programme
	Each Governance Advisor	Work in progress from Select Commissions
	Barbel Gale	Forward Plan of Key Decisions
Substantive Items for Scheduling		
July 2026		Leader Q&A - to be scheduled after Council plan on the agenda.
Jul-26	John Edwards	Council Plan 2025 - 2028 & New Year Ahead Delivery Plan - Pre-decision
Sep-26	Kevin Fisher & Judith Badger	Investing in our Community Facilities - An update report be provided in 12 months to include the updated condition survey results, where available.
Expected April / May 2026	Joanne Hacking & Mat Dyson	Children's Commissioners Takeover Challenge
Nov-26	Andrew Bramidge / Simon Moss / Fiona Fletcher	Progress update on the implementation of the Pathways to Work Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme - The programme will be a good way through year 2, therefore members will receive an update on both year 1 outcomes, year 2 developments and target forecasts.
Reviews for Scheduling		
In progress	Sam Barstow	A spotlight review - Life-saving equipment and related byelaws
Items to be Considered by Other Means (e.g. off-agenda briefing, workshop etc)		
Autumn 2026	Andrew Bramidge	An update on progress following the implementation of Waste Service Route Optimisation programme be brought back to OSMB within twelve months via an off-agenda briefing.
Autumn 2026	Andrew Bramidge	An update on the progress following the implementation of the Street Safe Team programme be brought back to OSMB within twelve months via an off-agenda briefing.
Sep-26	Andrew Bramidge	Replacement of refuse vehicles: Off-agenda briefings to be provided to give an update on the procurement of the new refuse vehicles and progress against the target for renewal of the fleet. These briefings should be split to represent the different phases of the programme.

June / July 2026	Andrew Bramidge / Sam Barstow	Public on street bin collections: Off-agenda briefing to be provided regarding the emptying of public bins. This information should include details of how overflowing bins can be reported, how often collections are scheduled for and how those are monitored, what join arrangements are in place with Parish Council's, if any, and a list of the locations of bins under RMBC management, if available.
TBC	Luke Sayers	IT Systems: Workshop to be arranged for members of OSMB to understand what IT systems the Council is using, what the purpose of those systems is, are those systems as up to date as possible, how updates to those systems are managed, how the Council is using artificial intelligence (AI), is the Council using outdated technology, and was the Council spending too much or too little in this area.
TBC	Fiona Fletcher	Pathways to Work Economic Inactivity Trailblazer programme: Agreed that a briefing be provided to share the details of the commissioned VCSE organisations and their geographic reach with members of OSMB.
Items for Future Consideration		
Cross Commission scrutiny opportunities		
Ongoing	Andrew Bramidge	Town Centre Developments (Markets & Library Redevelopments) - visit completed February 2026. Opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny via OSMB when update submitted to Cabinet.
TBC	Ian Spicer/Sarah Clyde	Energy Efficiency: An off-agenda briefing to be provided to members of OSMB and IPSC to provide information on the energy efficiency retrofits in social housing. This should cover aspects such as the feasibility and prioritisation of upgrades to heating systems and insulation across the borough. It would include details on how these retrofits align with the Council's net-zero goals, what potential funding was available to support this and timescales for implementation.

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Health Select Commission (HSC) Chair's Briefing for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) meeting on 11 March 2026

Items covered since the last meeting:

There have been no meetings of the Health Select Commission since the last update to OSMB on 3 February 2026. However, during the 3 February 2026 OSMB meeting, the Health Select Commission presented its Access to Contraception Review Report, which was supported by OSMB for consideration by Cabinet. This report will be considered by Cabinet on 16 March 2026.

Work programme 2025-26 updates:

- **Workshops/Reviews**

In progress:

Work on preparation of the Menopause Review Report is continuing. At this stage, the intention is that this will be presented to the Health Select Commission at its 14 May 2026 meeting.

- **Site Visits**

Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC):

On 24 February 2026, Councillors Brent, Fisher, Harper and Thorp attended the SDEC Centre at Rotherham Hospital to experience first-hand the investment in facilities and the impact the establishment of the facility is having on patient experience and operational effectiveness across Primary and Emergency Care. The visit was undertaken ahead of the Commission receiving an update at its 26 March 2026 meeting, where all members will publicly scrutinise the update provided by The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust (TRFT). The intention of the preceding site visit was to enhance and inform discussions during consideration of that agenda item.

Lung Clinic:

Due to unforeseen circumstances, it has been necessary to reschedule the site visit to the Non-surgical Oncology Lung Clinic at Rotherham Hospital that was due to take place on 26 February 2026. This has been successfully rescheduled for 19 March 2026 to observe operational activity and speak with staff about their experiences and improvements in patient care since the facilities opened. This site visit, like the earlier visit to the SDEC is intended to add value to discussions and consideration of this item at the 26 March 2026 Health Select Commission meeting. Notably, this is a piece of collaborative scrutiny being conducted by Rotherham Council and Barnsley Council, both of whose residents are principally affected by the establishment of this clinic.

Items to be discussed at the next meeting:

At the HSC meeting on 26 March 2026 the following items are due to be considered:

- South Yorkshire Cancer Alliance Lung Clinic Update
- SDEC (Same Day Emergency Care) Implementation Update
- Confirmation of Supplementary Public Health Grants for 2026/27 - Cabinet Report (For Information Only)

Improving Lives Select Commission Chair's Briefing for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board meeting on 11th March, 2026

Items covered since the last update meeting:-

- At the Improving Lives meeting on 10th February, 2026 the following items were considered:-
 1. **Corporate Parenting Partnership Board Update** – Members received a verbal update following the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board meetings held on 9th December, 2025 and 3rd February, 2026.
 2. **OFSTED Inspection Outcome** – Members received the outcome of the Inspection of Children's Services (ILACS) by Ofsted in November 2025. This was a judgement Short Inspection and the Local Authority received an Overall Effectiveness grade of Outstanding. All sub-categories also received a grade of Outstanding with the exception of 'the experiences and progress of Care Leavers', which received a Good. There were two improvement actions, both related to Care Leavers.
 3. **Educational Attainment Update** – Members received a report which provided a comprehensive overview of Education and Inclusion performance in Rotherham for the 2024/25 academic year. It built on the detailed Education Performance Outcomes briefing to present the information in a format tailored and highlighted where outcomes were improving and where concerted action was required. It framed performance through the lens of improving life chances, tackling inequalities (disadvantage, SEND and ethnicity) and strengthened inclusion across the system.

Work Programme 2025-26 Updates:-

- **Support available for vulnerable women in pregnancy following cessation of the PAUSE Project**
An off agenda briefing note to be provided giving full details for information.
- **Children's Capital of Culture Workshop - Impact and Legacy for Children and Young People**
A workshop has been arranged for Tuesday, 21st April, 2026 looking at Impact and Legacy for Children and Young People.

Items to be discussed at the next and future meetings:-

17 March, 2026

- Community Cohesion Projects Update - Building Bridges Together Project and the Together for Tomorrow Project Update.
- Children Not in School Update (including EHE, CME, exclusions, attendance and part-time

provision).

- SACRE Annual Report 2024/25 - for information only.

28 April 2026

- Corporate Parenting Partnership Board Annual Report 2024-2025
- Safeguarding Children From Radicalisation (Prevent Programme Update and Keeping Children Safe in Education) Update
- Child Exploitation Strategy Update

IPSC Chair's Briefing: for OSMB meeting on 11 March 2026

Items covered since the last update meeting:

At its last meeting on Tuesday 27 January 2026, IPSC had opportunity to consider the following items:-

- **Flooding Alleviation Update** – Members of IPSC were provided with an update on the Council's ongoing Flood Risk Management works across the borough, along with detail on the six priority Flood Alleviation Scheme Projects. This included the Whiston Brook scheme, which received Cabinet approval in January 2026 for the allocation of £3 million from Strategic CIL funding.
- **Thriving Neighbourhoods Annual Report 2024-2025** – Members of IPSC received an update from the Head of Neighbourhoods on progress on the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and the Neighbourhood Working model over the course of the year 2024-2025.

Work programme 2025-26 updates:

- **Market/Library Redevelopment Site Visit**
The site visit to the Market/Library redevelopment took place on the afternoon of Tuesday 10 February 2026 with the following Members of IPSC and OSMB - Cllrs Steele, McKiernan, Tinsley, Jones and Thorp (in place of Cllr Bacon). Cabinet Members Cllrs Williams and Marshall also attended, along with officers from Regeneration & Environment. The visit provided a very useful insight for Members into current progress on the development and how the site will look and flow once finished. It is intended that formal feedback will take place via OSMB, once a further update is due to Cabinet.

Items to be discussed at the next meeting:

The next meeting of IPSC on 10 March 2026 will have taken place by the time of the next OSMB meeting. At this meeting, Members are due to scrutinise the following items:-

- **Review of Events 2025-26;** and
- **Draft Playing Pitch Strategy** (for pre-decision scrutiny prior to presentation to Cabinet in April).

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