

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday 8 April 2026

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

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

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

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

126. MINUTES OF MEETING WEDNESDAY 11 MARCH 2026 OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 11 March 2026 be approved as a true record.

127. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

128. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

No questions were received.

129. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no reasons to exclude the press or public.

130. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

At the Chair's invitation the Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety, Councillor Alam OBE, advised that the report sought approval to recommend a Community Governance Review to Cabinet. It was noted that the Council had a statutory duty to undertake such reviews approximately every 10-15 years, with the last review completed in 2008. It was explained that the review process required consultation with local residents and other interested parties, including parish councils, elected members and MPs. An initial consultation on current arrangements and potential changes would be undertaken, followed by a further consultation on draft recommendations, prior to Cabinet considering final proposals for submission to Full Council.

Members were advised by the Council's Monitoring Officer, Phillip Horsfield, that the Community Governance Review was an administrative process, with the formal political decision-making at its conclusion. It was noted that the criteria for the review were prescribed by legislation and set out in the agreed terms of reference. Subject to consideration by the

Board and approval by Cabinet, the review would take account of representations received from residents and other stakeholders. The draft recommendations would then be prepared for consideration, which would be subject to further consultation process before final proposals were presented for Council determination.

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

Councillor Blackham noted that the presentation focused on outlining the process but provided limited detail on the criteria to be applied when evaluating parish councils and parish boundaries. He asked for further clarification on the assessment criteria, including how National Association of Local Councils (NALC) requirements and recommendations were considered, and whether the ratio of electors to councillors was a key factor.

In response the Monitoring Officer, Phillip Horsfield explained that boundary considerations included elector-to-councillor ratios and overall workability but also depended on the nature of each area and how residents identified with it. It was noted that there were no fixed minimum or maximum sizes for parishes, as circumstances varied between large towns and small villages. This area-specific approach was given as the reason why criteria were not defined rigidly at this stage, with consultation and feedback from local ward members and parish councils highlighted as essential. It was further emphasised that resident identification with an area was a key consideration, and that failing to take this into account often caused difficulties in boundary reviews.

In a follow up question, Councillor Blackham requested that, given the level of judgement involved due to significant differences across the borough in settlement size and representation, proposals should return to the committee for consideration before being submitted to Cabinet. It was agreed that this could be accommodated if the committee wished, enabling members to review and comment on the judgements applied prior to Cabinet consideration.

In response it was explained that there were no expectation of a wholesale review or widespread changes to all parishes in the borough, based on current indications from engagement with parish councils and previous discussions. It was noted that not all parishes would necessarily be affected; however, if strong representations were to be received from all parishes, this position would be reconsidered. Any such revised position would be presented to members for consideration.

It was noted by Councillor Brent, that respondents to the consultation might raise a wide range of issues beyond the specific questions asked, reflecting differing motivations and concerns. While consultation was supported as a means of gaining a better understanding of parishioner views, concern was expressed about the timing and sensitivity of issues

relating to the parish precept, particularly given emerging public dissatisfaction. It was suggested that, if the precept was to be addressed, questions should be framed positively, and caution was urged to avoid prompting debate on matters where clear or constructive responses might not be possible.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the parish precept was not a boundary matter and that decisions on the precept were the responsibility of parish councils. It was stated that dissatisfaction with such decisions should be addressed through the electoral process rather than by altering administrative arrangements. It was further noted that this distinction would be made clear. Councillor Brent acknowledged this position but expressed concern that the public might not widely understand it.

Councillor Yasseen sought clarification on the variation in councillor-to-elector ratios across parish areas, citing examples where one parish had a significantly lower ratio compared to another. Clarification was sought on why such differences existed between parishes. In response to this, it was explained that there was no fixed councillor-to-elector ratio and that representation was based more on community identity than purely numerical thresholds. It was noted that factors such as population change and growth were considered, but variations between parishes were expected. Emphasis was placed on whether parish arrangements were effective in representing their communities and enabling decision-making, rather than on individual decisions or mathematical calculations. It was confirmed that numerical ratios would be taken into account but would not be the deciding factor.

In a second question, Councillor Yasseen queried the use of a uniform 1.25% population growth assumption and asked how this figure was derived, drawing comparisons with similar assumptions used in education planning that had previously proved inaccurate. Concern was expressed that applying a standard growth rate could create uneven impacts across areas. Councillor Yasseen asked whether this approach might lead to similar issues and whether more localised demographic data should be considered through the consultation and review process.

It was explained that population growth assumptions were based on statistics from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and reviewed as part of a local process over a 10–15-year cycle. It was noted that growth data could lag behind new developments, but this allowed time for residents to identify with the parish or council they felt best represented their area. It was stated that this would be addressed through the consultation, including engagement with residents of new developments. Regular reviews were highlighted as a way of managing timing differences, and it was confirmed that planning officers would be involved in the review process to ensure alignment with the adopted local plan.

Councillor Allen asked what would happen to any accumulated parish precept if a parish council were to be abolished as a result of the review,

and whether funds would be returned to residents or absorbed elsewhere. The Monitoring Officer stated that there was no current proposal to abolish any parish council, although members could consider this. Based on previous experience, it was understood that any remaining funds would transfer to the principal authority, as returning them directly to residents was generally impractical. It was noted that this position would be confirmed to ensure accuracy.

In a further question Councillor Allen queried whether the reorganisation of community governance order would be shared with NALC as a matter of courtesy. It was confirmed that this could be done.

Councillor Monk asked whether there were plans to engage young people as part of the consultation, particularly in light of recent changes to the voting age. It was confirmed that liaison with children's services would take place to support youth engagement, and that a communications plan was being developed to ensure all demographic groups were reached. It was also noted that a further report on the voting age changes would be brought forward once timings were clearer, and that members would be briefed on arrangements being made through elections services and the wider council to ensure eligible voters were informed and supported.

Councillor McKiernan asked whether potential future changes to parish council powers would be considered as part of the consultation and raised concerns about the capacity of the parish council liaison officer to support the process. In response, it was confirmed that responsibility for the consultation would not rest with a single officer, with the elections team leading the work in close collaboration with neighbourhoods' officers and relevant Cabinet portfolio holders to ensure effective engagement with parish and town councils. It was further stated that potential future changes to parish council powers would not be factored into the current review, as any such changes were uncertain and unlikely to align with the timescale of this process.

Councillor Thorp sought clarification that, following consultation, parish boundaries could be amended where parts of an area no longer identified with a parish or where areas strongly identified with a neighbouring parish. A further question was raised about how disputes would be resolved where views were divided.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that boundary changes were possible but would need to be justified by geography and consultation responses. Decisions would be based on an area's practical ability to function as a parish and its identification with the wider locality, rather than dissatisfaction with representation or voting outcomes. Disputes would be determined by the council, taking into account officer recommendations, consultation feedback and geographic considerations, noting that it was rare for these factors not to lead to a clear recommendation.

The Chair asked if assurances could be provided to ensure that the

consultation would be meaningful. In response the Monitoring Officer confirmed this assurance, explaining that the outcomes would be reported transparently to the committee, cabinet and council. It was emphasised that the process would be open to challenge, subject to scrutiny, and robust, with members able to hold officers to account where necessary.

Councillor A Carter asked whether the review would consider the number of councillors on parish councils, noting that high numbers often led to vacancies, co-options and uncontested elections. It was suggested that fewer councillors could result in more effective parish councils and more robust elections. In a further question clarification was also sought on whether the review would allow for the abolition of existing parish councils or the removal of areas from a parish, and conversely whether currently unparished areas could be included within a parish boundary if consultation supported this.

The Monitoring Officer responded that the review could consider changes to the number of parish councillors, including reductions, increases or no change, depending on what was effective for each area. It was noted that fewer councillors did not necessarily result in more contested elections, and that evidence on election outcomes would be presented to members to support informed decision-making.

It was confirmed that the abolition of a parish council was possible but would be considered only as a last resort and would require strong supporting evidence and consultation support. It was also confirmed that the review could consider incorporating currently unparished areas into parishes, subject to consultation with affected residents, with any proposals brought forward for Council consideration at the conclusion of the review.

The Chair asked whether the abolition of a parish council would require a petition supported by a specified proportion of local residents before it could be considered. The response provided confirmed that legislation provided a mechanism for residents to trigger consideration of boundary changes or abolition through a petition, based on a defined proportion of the electorate. It was emphasised that abolition would require a significant and sustained level of local support, normally demonstrated over an extended period. It was noted that only in exceptional circumstances, such as prolonged inactivity and a complete absence of engagement, might abolition be considered without such petitioning, in line with statutory guidance.

Councillor Tinsley asked whether the reference to petitions triggering a community governance review was effectively part of, or a precursor to, the consultation process. In response the Monitoring Officer explained that petitions meeting the required thresholds could be incorporated into the current review rather than requiring a separate, standalone review. This approach was intended to ensure flexibility and efficiency, allowing any qualifying petitions arising during the process to be considered within

the scope of the ongoing review.

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

Further actions that arose from discussions were that:

- It was agreed that the final Community Governance Review report would be presented to OSMB as part of its pre-decision scrutiny work ahead of its consideration by Cabinet.

131. COUNCIL PLAN UPDATE - YEAR AHEAD PLAN 2026/27

At the Chair's invitation the Leader of the Council introduced the annual delivery plan, explaining that it set out actions for the year within the context of the wider Council Plan and longer-term objectives. It was noted that the plan had been brought forward ahead of end-of-year performance figures, which would be reported later in the municipal year.

The plan included 81 priority actions aligned with existing decision-making frameworks, 35 corporate performance measures, and a small number of annual social care measures to ensure service-level performance remained visible within corporate reporting. Members were advised that the overall structure and thematic approach were consistent with the previous year.

A correction was highlighted relating to a performance measure on enforcement activity, clarifying that it applied specifically to the Street Safe Team. It was explained that the measure was intended to provide an indication of overall activity for the newly established service, recognising that its role extended beyond enforcement to include softer support and creating welcoming environments. The measure would be reviewed over the year to assess its suitability.

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

Councillor Allen raised concerns about the wording of Social Care Measure SC5, which referred to safeguarding outcomes being "at least partially met." It was queried whether this reflected a lack of ambition to fully meet personal outcomes, whether it implied acceptance of falling short of full potential, and whether such wording could risk encouraging complacency among staff in meeting individuals' needs.

The Leader responded that the social care measure referenced was a nationally recognised performance measure rather than one developed locally. It was emphasised that the measure was not intended to suggest that partially meeting outcomes was acceptable, nor to lower expectations for practice. Instead, it was designed to focus on the lived experiences and perceptions of adults involved in safeguarding processes, rather than solely on activity-based or output measures, ensuring service user

experience remained central to performance reporting.

The Executive Director, Adult Care, Housing and Public Health, Ian Spicer, explained that, in safeguarding cases, it was not always possible to fully resolve every outcome a person might wish to achieve, due to the complexity and limits of intervention. It was emphasised that the measure focused on ensuring individuals had as positive an experience as possible during safeguarding processes, recognising that the circumstances prompting those interventions were often challenging. While the wording might appear unambitious when read in isolation, it reflected a nationally set measure and acknowledged that not all desired outcomes could realistically be delivered in every case.

In a further question, Councillor Allen queried why actions relating to reference P31, 'Increase the proportion of waste sent for reuse' and reference 16 'Plant at least 500 trees across the borough', were allocated to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety, and sought clarification on whether this was intentional. The Leader suggested that the allocation may have been an administrative error and that the portfolio attribution would be checked and corrected if necessary.

Councillor Yasseen made two general observations. The first related to ongoing challenges with engagement, particularly the under-representation of young people and ethnic minority communities in consultations. Concern was expressed about a perceived disconnect between strategic plans and neighbourhood working, with a view that such plans should be more clearly translated to ward-level relevance and discussed within neighbourhood structures to support effective implementation.

The second observation related to the quality of equality analysis. It was noted that while the Council was aware of deprivation, health inequalities and demographic differences across wards, equality impact assessments often suggested there were no barriers. The member questioned how this aligned with known inequalities and whether the analysis sufficiently acknowledged structural and practical barriers, citing examples such as unmet needs impacting adult social care demand and budgets.

In response, the Leader explained that the delivery plan represented a borough-wide set of corporate priorities intended to complement, rather than replace, neighbourhood working. It was acknowledged that stronger links between neighbourhood engagement and corporate planning were needed, and that work was underway to better align neighbourhood services, policy development, communications and governance to achieve a more holistic approach to engagement and decision-making.

On equality analysis, it was acknowledged that barriers did exist within society and that the equality section of the report provided a high-level assessment of the overall impact of the plan. It was emphasised that individual actions and projects would be supported by more detailed

equality work as they were delivered. The challenges of engaging under-represented groups, particularly younger people, were recognised as ongoing and requiring targeted effort. It was confirmed that addressing inequality remained a priority, although it was accepted that progress was complex and incremental.

Adding to the response the Director of Policy, Strategy and Engagement, Chris Paddock stated that equality remained a recognised and ongoing challenge, closely linked to neighbourhood engagement. Members were advised that a forthcoming Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy would seek to better translate Council Plan objectives at neighbourhood level, taking account of geography as well as factors such as diversity, age and different community groups.

Reference was made to the ward prioritisation process, which used data analysis aligned to Council Plan themes to identify specific geographic and community-level issues, and to the development of a Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy aimed at strengthening the role of ward councillors in these processes. It was noted that these approaches were intended to improve inclusion, equitable involvement and councillor input where issues were identified.

The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence, Fiona Boden, clarified the reference within the equality analysis, noting that earlier sections of the document set out significant detail on existing barriers faced by residents, particularly those who were most vulnerable. It was highlighted that the plan brought together existing actions and mitigations already underway across services, rather than proposing new initiatives.

It was acknowledged that wording within the equality analysis could have been clearer and better aligned with the broader narrative, which recognised the presence of structural and practical barriers. The member emphasised that these barriers were addressed through existing activity and that more detailed, individual equality assessments would be undertaken at the relevant decision-making stages for specific actions contained within the plan.

A further question was asked by Councillor Yasseen who emphasised the need for clearer linkage between the delivery plan and neighbourhood-level activity. Concern was expressed that wards were contributing to the plan's outcomes without having structured discussions about implementation or oversight at neighbourhood meetings. By way of example, reference was made to youth provision, including the Healthy Holidays programme, where opportunities existed to better align planned provision with identified local issues. It was suggested that stronger cohesion was needed to ensure neighbourhoods were aware of initiatives coming forward, could monitor progress, and support effective local delivery.

Councillor Monk sought clarification on the presentation of social care

performance measures, noting that some indicators were marked as non-applicable. While this was understood in relation to measures such as children at risk of exploitation, questions were raised about adult measures. In particular, clarification was requested as to why the proportion of adults with social care support remaining at home was listed as non-applicable, while a low number of new admissions to residential care was treated as a positive outcome, given that residential care may be the appropriate and necessary response to meet individuals' needs.

Following upon the original question, Councillor Monk sought clarification on adult social care performance measures, particularly the distinction between measures relating to adults remaining at home and those relating to admissions to residential care. Concern was expressed about how these measures were assessed where residential care was the appropriate outcome to meet individuals' needs.

The Executive Director, Adult Care, Housing and Public Health, Ian Spicer, explained that the measure relating to adults remaining at home, reference SC1, referred to the length of time an individual continued to live at home following a social care intervention, and was intended to demonstrate the effectiveness of support in preventing readmission to hospital or residential care. It was noted that this measure was difficult to report on consistently, as the duration could only be confirmed once a subsequent episode occurred, which explained why figures were sometimes recorded as non-applicable.

Further clarification was provided that the measure was based on the period an individual remained at home post-intervention, which could vary significantly and, in some cases, be indefinite, making real-time measurement challenging.

Councillor McKiernan sought clarification on a recruitment-related action within the plan, specifically the reference to a "flexible" recruitment approach to reflect communities and support delivery of the inclusion strategy. Clarification was requested as to whether this referred to any specific intended changes or current review of HR recruitment processes, or whether the wording was intended to be more general.

The Leader explained that HR was undertaking a significant review of recruitment processes following concerns that the existing online-only system was outdated, lengthy, and creating barriers for potential applicants, with evidence of incomplete applications and under-representation from some communities. Initial work had focussed on improving the accessibility and functionality of the system, alongside wider activity aimed at improving engagement within communities and promoting the Council as an attractive employer. It was noted that this was an evolving area of work and that the action within the plan was intended to set a point at which progress could be assessed, rather than to prescribe a fixed or finalised solution.

Following up on the question Councillor McKiernan welcomed the update on recruitment work, referring to a recent scrutiny visit where recruitment difficulties had been identified, including trials of accepting physical CVs rather than requiring online applications. Particular concern was raised about requirements such as providing three years of employment references, which could present barriers for young people and first-time job applicants. It was suggested that similar challenges could also affect progress towards apprenticeship targets. In response, it was acknowledged that the point about reference requirements had been noted and would be taken away for consideration. It was also reported that progress on apprenticeships was generally positive and would be reflected in future performance reporting.

Councillor Thorp raised concerns about the consistency of enforcement-related performance indicators within the plan, particularly where some measures set numerical targets and others set percentage thresholds. It was suggested that this approach could inadvertently encourage inconsistent enforcement practices over the year, with officers potentially delaying action to meet percentage targets later. It was also questioned whether clearer thresholds for when enforcement action should be taken would be more appropriate, and argued that certain issues, such as fly-tipping, should be subject to a consistent and robust enforcement approach wherever possible.

In response to concerns about the consistency of enforcement-related performance indicators, it was explained that the measures reflected different aspects of enforcement activity and should be viewed collectively rather than sequentially. It was clarified that some measures such as reference P4, 'Deliver at least 50 enforcement interventions, including formal warnings, FPNs and notices', related specifically to the Street Safe service and that wording errors would be corrected where necessary.

It was emphasised that the intention of the measures was to demonstrate both a commitment to enforcement and the effectiveness of that enforcement. Members were advised that simply issuing high numbers of penalties did not necessarily lead to better outcomes, particularly where fines were unlikely to be paid or enforcement action failed to address underlying behaviours.

It was noted that, while certain issues such as fly-tipping often warranted direct enforcement action, other matters, including hate crime-related behaviour, could require a more nuanced approach focused on engagement and behaviour change. The suite of measures was therefore intended to balance visible enforcement activity with proportionality and effectiveness, rather than incentivising enforcement solely to meet numerical targets.

Councillor Blackham raised two points. Firstly, concern was expressed about the effectiveness of several business support performance indicators, noting that the measures, E3-E6, appeared process-focused

rather than outcome-focused. It was suggested that targets such as the number of businesses contacted or supported could be met without necessarily delivering meaningful economic impact, and that greater emphasis should be placed on tangible outcomes such as investment, growth or long-term benefit rather than activity alone.

Secondly, concern was raised about the progress of the Dinnington project, which had been in development for several years. It was noted that the plan indicated a contractor would not be appointed until later in the year, giving the impression that the project was not being prioritised. While acknowledging previous land acquisition issues, Councillor Blackham emphasised the importance of maintaining momentum and visibility, given the significance of the project to surrounding communities.

A follow-up question was raised by the Chair seeking assurance that sufficient capital, capacity and commitment existed across Council services, contractors and partners to deliver all actions within the proposed timescales.

The Executive Director, Regeneration and Environment, Andrew Bramidge responded that the business support indicators were intended to be meaningful and outcome-focused. It was clarified that key account management involved sustained, structured engagement with businesses over the course of the year rather than one-off contact, and that the impact of this support would be demonstrable by year end.

In relation to the Dinnington project, it was confirmed that contractor procurement would take place within the year, with demolition works commencing and the main contract works to follow. Confidence was expressed that progress would be made during the year.

Addressing the wider question of capacity and funding, it was confirmed that all actions contained within the annual delivery plan were fully funded and deliverable within the agreed timescales. While some longer-term projects would require additional funding in future years, sufficient resources were available to deliver the actions scheduled for the current year.

Following up on the earlier question, Councillor Blackham, clarified that earlier comments on business support performance measures were intended to emphasise the importance of outcomes rather than activity alone. It was reiterated that the expectation was for future reporting to demonstrate tangible achievements and added value, rather than simply confirming that numerical targets had been met.

The Chair asked the Leader whether the high-risk actions within the plan had been identified, what specific mitigations were in place to address potential delays or failures, and sought assurance that appropriate oversight and controls were in place to manage delivery risks at a leadership level. In response to questions about delivery risk, it was explained that a detailed risk ranking of actions was not held at that

moment, though officers could undertake further analysis if required. It was noted that timescales had been set with appropriate contingency where possible and that actions included within the plan were based on available funding and capacity at the time of drafting.

Members were advised that progress against the plan was monitored internally through regular service reporting, with quarterly performance reports provided to Cabinet to identify areas on track and areas requiring intervention. Updates were also reported to members on a six-monthly basis. It was stated that these arrangements provided appropriate opportunities for leadership oversight and corrective action where delivery challenges arose. It was further noted that, based on previous experience, the majority of planned actions were typically delivered each year, while maintaining a sufficiently stretching programme to drive improvement and avoid complacency.

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

132. CRISIS AND RESILIENCE FUND

At the Chair's invitation, the Leader of the Council introduced the report, reminding members of the former Household Support Fund, which had provided grant funding for cost-of-living measures, including council tax support top ups and free school meal holiday vouchers. This funding had been replaced by the Government's Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF), with a modest increase in funding but clearer requirements on how it had to be used.

The CRF required four elements. First, year-round crisis payments had to be available for residents experiencing financial emergencies, including energy costs. Given previous demand, £1m had been allocated to this element. Second, discretionary housing payments had to be included, with a similar level of funding allocated. Third, a small amount of funding had been set aside for community coordination to support oversight, engagement and promotion of schemes. Fourth, a significant proportion of the fund had to be used for "resilience", defined as advice and advocacy services. Existing provision had been expanded, including the Open Arms scheme and additional support for care leavers.

Commitments for council tax support top up payments were to continue to be funded through the CRF. In relation to free school meal holiday vouchers, recent changes in Government guidance now allowed provision, but limited resources meant the scheme could not continue in the previous form. Instead, a single voucher payment would be made during the summer holidays to target support at a peak period of financial pressure for families. This would replace regular holiday payments. Other support, including Healthy Holidays food and activity provision, remained in place and was being expanded.

Overall, the approach aimed to balance proactive support for those most vulnerable to financial shocks, compliance with Government requirements on resilience services, and the availability of crisis support throughout the year.

The Interim Director of Policy, Strategy and Engagement, Chris Paddock noted that paragraph 2.10 of the report set out the outcomes used to define resilience services, and members were encouraged to refer to this section, as it underpinned the distinction between resilience and crisis support and reflected the concerns raised about how resilience was defined.

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

A question was raised by Councillor Allen about whether spend under this fund would be reported separately or included within general financial monitoring. It was confirmed that expenditure would be closely monitored through existing financial reporting arrangements, with specific oversight and reporting in place where required by the grant conditions.

Councillor Allen suggested that, given the importance of the issues addressed by the fund, a separate programme report might be helpful to track progress, while recognising that the overall level of funding was relatively small. It was asked whether information could be brought back to scrutiny and Cabinet through existing processes. In response, it was noted that more detailed updates could be incorporated into quarterly financial monitoring, providing specific information on spend and any reallocation between elements. However, it was highlighted that such reporting would be retrospective and potentially time-lagged. It was confirmed that the fund was closely monitored internally, with delegated authority in place to allow adjustments to allocations where necessary, and that no more effective or proportionate public reporting mechanism during the year was identified beyond existing arrangements.

In response, the Leader explained that discretionary housing payment arrangements had been in place for many years and that clarification would be provided on whether payments were made directly to tenants or to landlords, including when the council was the landlord. It was noted that previous experience, particularly during energy crisis payments, showed that direct payments to providers were not always practical, for example where residents used prepayment meters, which required cash support to purchase credit.

It was confirmed that Government guidance required a “cash-first” approach, which was considered to support dignity and choice. Experience indicated that recipients overwhelmingly used payments for intended purposes. The scheme was designed on the basis that individuals would normally receive only one crisis payment per year, to avoid creating ongoing dependency, with flexibility to make exceptions in

exceptional or life-critical circumstances. This approach was intended to balance individual responsibility and autonomy with safeguards against repeated reliance on crisis funding.

Councillor Yasseen welcomed the range of activities and interventions set out in the report and noted the value of the evaluation work undertaken, particularly given its targeted and different approach compared with previous funding arrangements. It was highlighted that strengthening existing infrastructure reflected lessons learned from earlier crises, where this had been a key strength locally.

The importance of establishing baselines and measurable outcomes was emphasised, with a suggestion that clearer measures would help demonstrate the difference being made. It was also noted that the fund should be understood within the context of wider support provision, with recognition that families may be accessing multiple forms of support simultaneously and that a layered approach was often necessary.

Questions were raised about coordination arrangements and whether the resources allocated were sufficient, while acknowledging that close working across council teams and community partners could mitigate this. Overall, it was stated that the ambition was for the scheme to align effectively with existing provision and to demonstrate, in a measurable way, that it was delivering tangible benefits for residents.

In response, the Leader acknowledged that these were fair challenges. It was noted that, with greater medium-term certainty over the funding, there was now an opportunity to move away from short-term decision-making and take a more strategic approach.

It was outlined that the intention was to use the funding to put cash directly into the hands of those most in need, while also strengthening longer-term support through joined-up, place-based services. This included better integration between crisis support, social supermarkets, food banks, voluntary sector provision, advice services, libraries and other community venues.

Reference was made to improved links with employability support, following the first year of the Pathways to Work programme, and to closer alignment with children's social care and other frontline services that routinely support families facing financial hardship. The aim was to ensure services worked in a complementary and coordinated way, with a stronger presence in communities.

Overall, it was emphasised that the approach sought to provide a continuum of support that enabled residents not only to move out of crisis but to achieve greater independence and choice, with services working together horizontally to deliver practical and tangible outcomes.

A question was raised by Councillor Tinsley BEM, regarding the eligibility

of home-educated children for free school meals and whether they could be considered within the policy, particularly given increases in home education and the financial pressures faced by some low-income families.

In response, it was noted that eligibility was assumed to follow nationally recognised free school meals criteria, but that clarification would be provided in writing. It was explained that free school meals had been used as a proxy means test because it was a well-established and straightforward way of identifying households in need. It was stated that introducing an additional or separate means-testing process would be challenging, as increased administrative costs would reduce the amount of funding available for direct support. While recognising that some families outside the standard eligibility criteria might experience significant need, it was emphasised that the scheme aimed to remain lean to maximise the funds reaching residents.

The Chair asked about how the value of the summer free school meal voucher payment had been determined, particularly in the context of rising inflation and the cost of providing meals for children.

The Leader explained that the figure was based on maximising the amount of support available to eligible families while meeting the wider commitments of the fund. The approach was not to set a fixed voucher value in advance, but to determine how much funding could be allocated to this cohort after other required elements of the scheme had been provided for. It was noted that, as a single payment, this represented more support during the summer period than families received previously, though it was less support across the full year compared to earlier arrangements. This was described as a necessary trade-off given limited resources.

It was confirmed that families experiencing further financial difficulty could still access crisis payments if needed, and that other support, including Healthy Holidays provision, remained available. While acknowledging the challenge for families, it was stated that the council was maintaining support within the available funding at a level comparable to, or better than, many authorities where similar schemes had been withdrawn entirely.

The Chair asked about how the council would monitor and evaluate the impact of reduced family support on child poverty and food insecurity in 2026–27.

In response, it was noted that identifying clear headline impacts would be difficult unless there were significant changes in the number of children accessing services, as wider external factors such as cost-of-living pressures were likely to have a greater influence. However, it was acknowledged that, with greater certainty over funding, there was a need to strengthen evaluation and reporting. This would include gathering feedback from service users on the impact of support received and

reviewing broader indicators, particularly demand and pressures within children's services. It was recognised that any assessment over a 12-month period would provide only a partial and imperfect picture.

It was noted that, as the Policy, Strategy and Engagement directorate developed, greater emphasis would be placed on improving the use of data and evidence to better understand and anticipate financial hardship affecting residents. This included strengthening qualitative insight from frontline and community-level engagement to inform policy development, alongside improved use of data and analysis to support earlier and more informed decision-making.

Reference was made to work linked to the Thriving Neighbourhoods strategy, which aimed to better capture lived experience of financial crisis and feed this into policy and service design. It was also highlighted that scenario planning was underway in relation to known risks, such as the end of energy price protections, to ensure the authority was better prepared for potential impacts on residents. Work was ongoing to identify and invest in appropriate data sources to support timely and effective responses.

A question was raised by Councillor Monk about how the quality of resilience and advice services would be assessed, beyond simply measuring access and usage. Assurance was sought that residents would receive a consistent standard of advice regardless of whether services were accessed through council-run provision, drop-in centres, or voluntary and community sector organisations.

The Leader explained that common standards for advice provision were already in place through existing agreements with voluntary sector organisations, which set clear expectations about the models and quality of advice to be delivered. These standards had been established for some time and would be reinforced through service level agreements linked to the resilience and advice provision.

It was noted that, while provider standards were clear and well embedded, further work was needed to confirm how feedback from residents about their experience of advice services would be captured and assessed. An undertaking was given to provide further information on how service-user feedback and quality assurance would be monitored, alongside existing performance and compliance arrangements.

In a further question Councillor Monk raised concerns about how some resilience outcomes would be measured, particularly reductions in the need for crisis payments and food support. It was noted that food parcels could be accessed from a range of providers beyond this scheme, making attribution difficult. It was also highlighted that a reduction in applications for crisis payments did not necessarily indicate reduced need, given limits on eligibility and the possibility that unmet need might remain hidden.

It was explained that requests for crisis payments would be recorded over time, even where payments were limited, allowing trends in demand to be monitored. It was noted that exceptions could be made in exceptional or severe circumstances.

In relation to food support, it was stated that the council worked with the majority of crisis food providers across the borough and already held good intelligence on levels of demand, referral routes and underlying drivers. It was highlighted that many providers had shifted from emergency food provision towards more sustainable support models, including low-cost food offers and links to wider services. As a result, the number of emergency food parcels issued had reduced compared with previous years, and it was considered possible to track changes in demand for crisis food support with a reasonable degree of confidence.

The Chair asked about how the council would ensure that the most vulnerable residents, including those who were digitally excluded, were made aware of and able to access the fund. In response, the Leader explained that the primary approach was proactive targeting, with a significant proportion of funding automatically provided to households already identified as most financially vulnerable, without the need for an application. It was further noted that access would be supported through a strong place-based approach, working with community-based provision such as social supermarkets and food and crisis partners, so that support was available in locations residents already accessed when experiencing hardship.

In addition, broader promotion would take place, including local awareness activity alongside national communications, recognising that demand could be influenced by the level of central Government promotion. Overall, the combination of automatic payments, community-based access points and targeted promotion was intended to ensure that those most in need, including digitally excluded residents, were able to benefit from the fund.

The Chair noted that two additional actions were proposed: to provide confirmation on whether crisis payments would be made to tenants or directly to landlords, and to clarify free school meal eligibility for home-educated children.

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

Further actions that arose from discussions were that officers were asked to confirm:

- Whether crisis payments were made to tenants or directly to landlords.
- The free school meal entitlement position for home-educated children.

133. CLIMATE EMERGENCY ANNUAL REPORT

At the Chair's invitation the Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment, Andrew Bramidge, reported that the annual climate change report set out the Council's work to address climate change, including progress against agreed targets for the Council's own emissions to reach net zero by 2030 and for borough-wide emissions to reach net zero by 2040.

The report outlined activity across seven thematic areas: monitoring and measurement, energy, housing, transport, waste, the built and natural environment, and influencing and engagement. Members were asked to note the achievements delivered through the 2025–26 Climate Change Action Plan and to approve the proposed activity for 2026–27.

The report also sought delegated authority for the allocation of funding to specific projects within corporate property and electric vehicle infrastructure, to be exercised jointly by the relevant Cabinet Member and Service Director. In addition, approval was requested to reallocate £1m previously assigned to a renewable energy project that was no longer proceeding, to support the development of rooftop and car-park solar schemes in line with a motion approved by Council in January of the previous year.

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

Councillor Tinsley began by asking about whether the 2030 target for achieving net zero emissions for the Council remained realistic, particularly given current challenges with decarbonising the vehicle fleet. It was noted that suitable electric technology was not yet available for some larger operational vehicles, such as refuse collection vehicles, and clarification was sought on whether the target should be reviewed.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment acknowledged that the 2030 target for achieving net zero emissions was extremely challenging, due in part to factors outside the Council's control, including slower-than-anticipated decarbonisation of the national electricity grid. It was noted that current indications suggested full grid decarbonisation was more likely to be achieved around 2032–33.

It was explained that, while the Council continued to take action within its control, overall progress was dependent on national developments. During the current financial year, further analysis would be undertaken to assess projected emissions by 2030, alongside accelerated work to support the transition to electric vehicles as part of the procurement plan.

It was stated that a further report would be brought back to Cabinet in the next financial year, setting out a detailed assessment of progress and proposing whether the current targets remained realistic or required

revision.

Councillor McKiernan raised concerns that a number of actions within the climate change action plan had been delayed across several areas, including where delays were not solely attributable to external factors. It was questioned whether the Council was taking delivery of the programme as seriously as required and whether sufficient urgency was being applied given the scale and breadth of the delays identified.

It was stated that the Council was taking climate change action seriously, with strong internal governance through an established Climate Change Board and committed officer involvement. Specific delays, particularly in relation to the vehicle fleet, were attributed in part to recent staffing challenges, including prolonged absence at senior level. It was reported that a new senior appointment had recently been made, with responsibility for progressing electric vehicle procurement and assessing alternative options.

Work was underway to complete procurement of remaining electric vehicles and to carry out cost-benefit analysis on converting parts of the fleet to alternative fuels as a transition away from diesel. Initial trials had indicated potential operational benefits, including reduced breakdowns, although costs were higher. Further analysis was being undertaken to determine whether savings in maintenance and repairs could offset increased fuel costs, with findings expected later in the year and the potential to improve reported carbon outcomes.

Councillor McKiernan welcomed the provision of electric vehicle chargers, noting that the installations would place chargers within three miles of a significant proportion of residents. However, concern was raised that 22kW chargers were described as “fast”, when this was not considered sufficient by many electric vehicle users, for whom higher-capacity chargers were required.

Councillor McKiernan then queried whether the overall strategy included plans to install higher-powered fast chargers across the borough, as the current council installations did not appear to meet this standard and existing fast chargers were limited. It was acknowledged that there were constraints related to the Northern Powergrid, and clarification was sought on whether plans were in place to address these issues through improved charging provision.

Kevin Fisher, the Service Director, Property and Facilities Services reminded Members that a report on the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund had been presented to Cabinet in December of the previous year. It was explained that the fund was government-financed and delivered via the Sheffield City Region Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA), which was in the process of procuring a provider to deliver chargers across South Yorkshire, including Rotherham. It was then advised that the programme included investment in charging infrastructure, with 22kW

chargers installed where appropriate, and higher-capacity chargers provided where greater infrastructure and power provision were required.

The Chair asked how well the proposed EV chargers would be protected against vandalism.

The Service Director, Property and Facilities Services explained that vandalism could not be completely prevented if individuals were determined to cause damage. Early EV charger installations had experienced cable theft due to exposed copper wiring, but newer infrastructure largely used integrated or socket-based chargers, which had significantly reduced theft. Higher-wattage chargers still required attached cables, and officers would work with providers to ensure these were installed in suitable locations to minimise vandalism and theft. Under the new contract, responsibility for theft and damage would sit with the suppliers, meaning there would be no direct financial impact on the Council, aside from potential inconvenience. Officers would continue to work with suppliers to select appropriate charger types and locations to reduce vandalism and theft as far as possible.

Councillor Yasseen reiterated points raised at previous meetings regarding the scale of change required to meet climate objectives and noted that policy decisions were political rather than formal declarations of emergency. It was acknowledged that the magnitude of change required could be difficult to fully comprehend. Appreciation was expressed for the clarity and transparency of the report appendices, particularly the use of graphs, which provided an honest assessment of current performance. Reference was made to the report indicating that only two relevant KPIs were currently being met, highlighting the significant work still required.

Concerns were raised around transport and modal shift, particularly in relation to EV charging infrastructure. It was noted that many residents wishing to reduce emissions by switching to electric vehicles were unable to charge outside their homes due to physical constraints, such as trees or street layout. It was suggested that a more flexible and creative approach could be considered, including balancing environmental trade-offs, such as replacing trees where necessary, to enable home charging access.

It was also noted that around 43% of road transport emissions related to trips outside South Yorkshire, limiting the impact of local measures alone. Concerns were expressed that cycling uptake had declined despite continued investment in cycle lanes, and that not all residents were able or willing to switch to cycling. The importance of enabling residents to actively support emissions reduction through practical and realistic measures was emphasised, as this could make a significant contribution to overall targets.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment noted that the borough's long-term target was to achieve net zero by 2040 and that

recent efforts had primarily focused on reducing the Council's own emissions. It was highlighted that increased engagement with residents and businesses was required. Reference was made to the recently launched South Yorkshire transport strategy, including plans to transition the bus fleet to electric vehicles, which was expected to have a significant impact. It was acknowledged that emissions targets would not be met through cycling alone and that expanding EV charging infrastructure would be an important part of the approach.

The Service Director, Property and Facilities Services acknowledged that addressing behavioural change and modal shift was a complex issue being experienced locally, regionally, and nationally. It was noted that officers continued to engage regularly with communities, regional partners, and the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority. Recent work had focused on the Council's own assets, where relatively straightforward measures had delivered emissions reductions, but a broader review of the climate programme was now underway.

Reference was made to the publication of a new biodiversity report and the Council's approach to biodiversity net gain, including the potential to locally offset environmental impacts where necessary. It was confirmed that work was ongoing with regional partners on transport initiatives, including measures linked to the mainline station. Officers were adopting a programme and portfolio management approach to align climate, transport, biodiversity, and energy security objectives, with a review of targets for 2030 and 2040 to follow, focused on delivering tangible outcomes.

In a further question Councillor Yasseen raised concerns regarding the application of biodiversity net gain and how environmental impacts were balanced. Specific reference was made to cycling infrastructure, noting that the carbon impact of construction itself had not been clearly accounted for, and that low usage raised questions about how long it would take to offset the emissions associated with development. It was highlighted that reports did not clearly set out the timescale required to achieve carbon neutrality from such schemes, unlike approaches typically applied to housing developments. Concerns were also expressed that major infrastructure projects, often led through mayoral or regional bodies, lacked transparency around how biodiversity net gain and carbon impacts were assessed, and clarification was sought on whether the Council was able to influence these processes.

The Service Director, Property and Facilities Services stated that, following recent discussions on climate change, biodiversity, and related matters, officers had committed to developing clearer policies and standards to manage environmental impacts. It was acknowledged that while carbon impacts were routinely assessed for housing schemes, this approach had not consistently been applied to other infrastructure projects, and work was underway to address this gap. It was noted that sustainability measures, including renewable energy provision, should be

considered at the outset of development rather than retrospectively.

It was confirmed that officers were developing clear local standards and policies to guide infrastructure projects, drawing on best practice from housing delivery. While influence was more challenging at a regional level, the Council was actively lobbying through leadership channels and working with South Yorkshire partner authorities. Establishing clear standards and policies was identified as a key first step in enabling a more consistent approach across all future infrastructure schemes.

Councillor Allen referred to the table on page 189 relating to net zero by 2030 performance measures and queried whether the cumulative percentage change figure in the final row had been calculated correctly, noting that this may require further checking. Officers were asked to review the figures and confirm their accuracy.

Reference was also made to the allocated capital decarbonisation budget. It was asked whether horizon scanning had been undertaken to identify potential alternative funding sources, whether there was any indication of the likelihood of securing such funding, and whether a contingency plan was in place should external funding not be available to match the Council's contribution.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment advised that the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme had concluded and that, while there had been discussion of alternative government funding, no further updates had been received. It was noted that some climate-related funding would be available through the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority as part of its agreed three-year single settlement, although details on allocation and spend were not yet known. Officers intended to pursue opportunities to access this funding, recognising that it would need to be shared across multiple local authorities.

The Service Director, Property and Facilities Services largely reiterated points made previously and outlined the operational challenges around funding availability. It was noted that the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme remained in existence but was no longer open to new bids. Some projects, including solar PV at the markets, had been funded through the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority at no cost to the Council. Officers continued to work with the Combined Authority to clarify what funding was available across South Yorkshire, although the position remained unclear.

It was also noted that there was limited direction from GB Energy, with indications that future focus may be on rooftop solar rather than large-scale renewable schemes. Officers considered there to be significant potential to maximise use of the Council's housing and corporate estate. Horizon scanning remained challenging, but as part of the current review, it was estimated that achieving the 2030 target through direct Council investment would require approximately £40 million, subject

to review.

This was identified as a potential contingency approach, recognising that many renewable investments, such as solar PV, typically delivered a financial return within five to ten years and contributed to energy security as well as emissions reduction. While the scale of investment was significant, it was expected that much of the cost could be recovered over time through business-case-led approaches. Fleet decarbonisation was highlighted as a particular challenge due to its higher costs and associated infrastructure requirements. It was confirmed that a contingency plan existed, although it was acknowledged to be difficult.

Councillor Monk welcomed the inclusion of rooftop solar at Swinton and noted that works had recently begun. A query was raised about how local intelligence was gathered prior to project delivery, particularly given recent antisocial behaviour issues at the library site, including individuals accessing rooftops. Clarification was sought on how officers engaged with neighbourhood teams and used local knowledge to ensure appropriate preventative measures were in place, so that projects were viable in the long term and avoided unnecessary damage.

In response the Service Director, Property and Facilities Services explained that, as with all capital projects, officers engaged with end-user services at an early stage, in this case library services, to understand any operational issues, including antisocial behaviour. It was confirmed that project groups also engaged with local communities, stakeholders, and neighbourhood teams to gather local intelligence and identify potential risks. Officers sought to design out antisocial behaviour wherever possible, acknowledging that risks could not be entirely eliminated. It was noted that climate change considerations were now embedded across all Cabinet reports, with officers reviewing proposals organisation-wide, alongside a wider communications and engagement approach to support the long-term viability of projects.

Councillor Monk asked whether any measures had been installed at the Swinton site to prevent further access to the roof. Councillor Monk was advised that specific details were not immediately available but confirmed that officers were considering measures such as anti-vandal coatings and other preventative options. It was stated that officers would follow up with the relevant team and provide a specific update in relation to Swinton.

Councillor McKiernan raised a question regarding the potential use of battery storage in Council buildings to complement rooftop solar installations. It was noted that while solar panels were effective during summer months, their contribution was reduced in winter, and some buildings had limited capacity for additional panels. Reference was made to the potential for battery storage, including charging overnight, and clarification was sought on whether this was being considered by officers or whether costs currently made it unviable.

The Service Director, Property and Facilities Services confirmed that battery storage was being considered where appropriate. It was noted that planned works at Riverside House included a small solar canopy with associated battery storage, enabling energy generated during daylight hours to be used more effectively during winter or evening periods. Officers were routinely reviewing the inclusion of battery storage and other complementary technologies when assessing renewable energy options, rather than relying solely on solar PV installations.

Councillor McKiernan raised concerns following visits to the markets and new café. It was noted that while significant investment had been made in solar energy, the installed battery capacity was limited and appeared insufficient, albeit with scope for future expansion. Acknowledgement was given that battery storage remains costly.

Further concerns were raised regarding electric vehicle charging for residents without off-street parking. It was highlighted that trailing charging cables across pavements could result in fines. Clarification was sought on whether solutions such as council-installed pavement channels had been considered, or whether residents needed clearer guidance on penalties and safety requirements for cable protection.

The Service Director, Property and Facilities Services referred to the Cabinet report of the 15th, which highlighted issues around on-street electric vehicle charging. It was noted that some local authorities, predominantly in the south, had taken a more permissive approach, while authorities across South Yorkshire were collectively reviewing the Highway Act to improve management of the issue.

Options such as installing underground cabling were being explored. It was also noted that government was considering whether electric vehicle charging infrastructure could be included under existing electrification and communications legislation, which would allow suppliers to undertake roadworks and assume responsibility for reinstatement and maintenance.

It was confirmed that the council was currently required to remain compliant with the Highway Act, but that this position was under review in line with emerging opportunities and national policy developments.

Councillor McKiernan sought reassurance that, where pavements were excavated for infrastructure works, reinstatement would be carried out to an acceptable standard. The Chair confirmed this expectation.

Councillor McKiernan then raised a final question regarding the emerging government proposals for plug-in solar panels. It was acknowledged that responsibility for housing sat elsewhere; however, clarification was sought on whether any work was underway to explore the potential role of such measures, alongside insulation, in improving housing resilience and reducing energy costs.

The response clarified that the council was aware of plug-in solar panel systems, which were widely used in parts of Europe. It was noted that their use was not yet fully approved in the UK due to safety considerations, but that the climate team was aware of the developments and had begun discussions with housing colleagues about potential future use.

A preference was expressed for hard-wired solar panels, which were considered safer, particularly for new-build developments, with retrofit options also being considered. It was confirmed that while plug-in systems remained under consideration pending government approval, initial exploratory conversations were underway.

The recommendations were supported by a majority with one abstention.

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

Further actions that arose from discussions were that:

- In response to a question raised by Councillor Monk, information would be provided on what specific measures had been installed to address anti-social behaviour and prevent roof access to the solar panels at Swinton Library.

134. WORK PROGRAMME

The Governance Manager advised the Board that in relation to potential review regarding antisocial behaviour in country parks, it was noted that information had been requested from officers on the number of local and country parks, along with related antisocial behaviour statistics. Members were informed when this information had been received.

Councillor Allen raised questions regarding the work programme format, specifically why certain items were presented as information briefings rather than formal committee reports. It was suggested that bringing matters to the committee as reports could improve transparency, scrutiny, and democratic accountability. An alternative proposal was also raised to consider related matters together through a single Regeneration and Environment directorate OSMB session.

The Chair responded that work programmes were determined by individual committees. A personal view was expressed that where work was intended to progress to Cabinet, it should be supported by a formal report to enable effective scrutiny and recommendations. However, it was noted that a lack of member volunteers to undertake work programme items had presented challenges. Members were encouraged to be more proactive in shaping work programmes when consulted. While reservations were expressed about relying on information sheets, it was acknowledged that some items had progressed through the appropriate governance processes, and agreement was expressed with the principle

of clearer and more structured reporting.

Resolved: That the Work Programme be approved.

135. 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:

This update was noted as presented within the agenda pack.

Update from Improving Places Select Commission:

The Chair of Improving Places Select Commission, Councillor McKiernan reported on a recent site visit to Rother Valley Country Park, noting that attendance had been limited but that the visit had been productive and treated as a scrutiny exercise. It was stated that members reviewed what had worked well and what had not, with issues identified primarily relating to HR and procurement.

The concerns around procurement were highlighted as an area potentially outside the Places remit, and it was indicated that this issue could potentially be brought back to the committee for consideration. It was also noted that similar scrutiny visits had been undertaken, including visits to libraries and the new café, with the intention of increasing the number of site visits in future to support effective scrutiny of council activities.

Councillor Blackham sought clarification on whether the issues raised related to a specific procurement matter or a broader, general procurement issue. It was confirmed that the concerns related to general procurement processes.

Councillor McKiernan explained that procurement issues had contributed to delays in opening, with some ordered items arriving late. Further difficulties were highlighted in relation to catering supplies, where standard procurement arrangements designed for school catering had not aligned well with the needs of a café setting. It was noted that, as a local authority, procurement was required to follow government legislation, including formal tendering and framework agreements, which limited flexibility in purchasing day-to-day items. An issue relating to the YPO framework was acknowledged and was being pursued separately.

The Chair sought clarification on whether the café was council-run or operated by a private provider. In response it was confirmed that the café was council-owned and council-run, which explained some of the HR challenges encountered. It was noted that recruitment had been affected by the council's requirement for three years of references, which had

created difficulties for younger applicants and those returning from university.

It was highlighted that the café operated with a dedicated head chef, which was unique within the council's cafés. If successful, this role could support improvements across other council-run cafés in country parks. The café was also noted to be producing food in-house rather than relying on pre-purchased products, which had implications for procurement processes.

The Chair commented that, as the café was newly opened, it would need time to settle before any formal scrutiny review could be undertaken into the issues raised at the meeting. It was emphasised that the café would be expected to operate on a viable, income-generating basis. Any future scrutiny, if undertaken, should consider all council and externally operated cafés across the borough, rather than focusing solely on one location.

136. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Board considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions, with the Chair outlining the proposed items for inclusion on the next OSMB agenda. It was noted that the Progress Update on Future Rothercare Model would be considered at the May meeting, having been deferred due to the length of the current agenda. Additional items proposed for consideration were the Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy, Rotherham Market and Libraries (with a focus on financial and programme issues), and the Selective Licensing Community Impact.

Councillor Yasseen raised concerns about agenda length and the risk of excessive items limiting effective scrutiny, suggesting that a maximum of three substantive items may be more manageable, in line with practice elsewhere.

The Chair emphasised the importance of scrutiny and noted that failure to scrutinise items could lead to concerns being raised later. It was highlighted that the frequency of OSMB meetings had reduced in recent years, and that effective scrutiny could still be achieved provided members prepared in advance by reading reports and submitting focused questions.

The Chair proposed that all four items be included on the next agenda. A vote was taken, and it was agreed that all four items would be brought forward to the next OSMB meeting, with no votes against or abstentions recorded.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:

1. Agreed that the following items would be added to the May agenda as part of OSMB's pre-decision scrutiny work:
 - Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2026
2031

- Rotherham Markets and Libraries
- Selective Licensing Community Impact

137. SOUTH YORKSHIRE MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

An update was provided by the Chair on South Yorkshire Combined Authority (SYMCA) matters, with it noted that bus franchising was the most significant recent development and was progressing well. SYMCA had taken control of the bus stations, including responsibility for repairs, and was progressing plans for electric buses across South Yorkshire. No specific issues were raised at that stage.

Councillor Blackham raised concerns regarding electric bus procurement, highlighting recent media commentary on the impact of overseas manufacturers, particularly from China, undercutting UK bus manufacturers. It was suggested that consideration should be given, where possible, to the impact on UK manufacturing and jobs when procuring vehicles.

The Chair responded that procurement processes required open competition and compliance with regulations, and that contracts would be awarded based on value for money. It was noted that a range of fleet options were being considered to ensure the best financial outcome and passenger experience for residents.

Councillor McKiernan asked for clarification on progress relating to the devolution proposals involving the South Yorkshire Fire Authority and its potential incorporation into SYMCA. Concerns were raised about the lack of clarity around the governance and scrutiny arrangements, and it was requested that this be raised through SYMCA scrutiny channels. The Chair advised that the matter had previously been raised and that plans were still developing. Members were reminded of recent training sessions with SYMCA officers, which had low attendance but had provided relevant information. It was also noted that further engagement opportunities were planned by the SYMCA Mayor, including six-monthly consultations with elected members, some of which had been delayed due to elections. It was agreed that the issue could be raised again.

Councillor Yasseen raised reports that Doncaster Council had withdrawn support for Doncaster Sheffield Airport and asked whether this could be followed up to understand any implications for South Yorkshire and previous investment plans. The Chair responded that the Mayor's position may differ and that this was a matter primarily for SYMCA leadership. It was agreed that the issue would be discussed with the Leader to seek clarification.

138. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no call-in issues.

139. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items.