OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Tuesday 10 November 2026

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Baggaley, C. Carter, Currie, Keenan, McKiernan, Monk, Tinsley and Yasseen.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillors Bacon, Ismail and Sutton.

Council Officers in attendance:
- John Edwards, Chief Executive
- Judith Badger, Executive Director, Corporate Services
- Rob Mahon, Service Director, Financial Services
- Phillip Horsfield, Monitoring Officer and Service Director - Legal Services
- Kirsty Littlewood, Service Director Adult Care and Integration
- Kevin Fisher, Service Director, Property and Facilities Services
- Simon Moss, Service Director, Planning, Regeneration and Transport
- Fiona Fletcher, System Service Manager - Pathways to Work
- Emma Hill, Head of Democratic Services
- Barbel Gale, Governance Manager
- Kristianne Thorogood, Governance Advisor

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

60. MINUTES OF MEETING WEDNESDAY 7 OCTOBER 2026 OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 7 October 2026 be approved as a true record.

61. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

62. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

No questions were received.

63. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no reasons to exclude the press or public.

64. SEPTEMBER 2026-27 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

At the Chair's invitation, Judith Badger, Executive Director of Corporate Services, introduced the report and advised that the previously forecast

overspend of £5.9 million had reduced to £2.9 million. This improvement had been achieved primarily through work to maximise the use of grant funding, reserves and other available resources, together with ongoing efforts across services to contain expenditure. It was emphasised that although the position had improved significantly, further work remained necessary to address the remaining overspend, with social care pressures continuing to be the principal driver of financial challenges.

Rob Mahon, Service Director of Financial Services, provided a detailed overview of the report. It was explained that the £3 million improvement since July had resulted from a financial exercise undertaken across the Council to maximise external funding opportunities, review grant allocations and challenge service forecasts. Attention had been given to identifying where grant funding could be used to offset existing expenditure and to reviewing budget forecasts to ensure they reflected realistic spending expectations based on previous trends and current delivery plans. Examples were provided, including the over-65s swimming initiative, where actual demand had been lower than anticipated, generating savings while still delivering the intended outcomes. The Board was advised that directorate pressures remained significant, particularly within social care services, although treasury management savings and lower borrowing requirements were helping to offset those pressures. The report also outlined the implications of early receipt of Transport for City Regions (TCR) funding and the allocation of City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) revenue funding.

The Chair invited members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) to raise questions and queries. During the discussion, members focused primarily on workforce pressures, social care costs, treasury management savings, Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) pressures, transport funding and the Council’s wider ability to manage financial risks.

Councillor Keenan sought further information regarding the overspend within Adult Care, Housing and Public Health, particularly the contribution made by agency staffing and overtime costs. Clarification was requested on the measures being taken to address those pressures, whether recruitment efforts had been successful in filling vacancies and the extent to which staffing challenges remained unresolved. In response, officers explained that agency expenditure was concentrated within the Council’s in-house adult care residential provision. Significant recruitment campaigns had already reduced agency dependence, and work was continuing to strengthen permanent staffing levels. Officers advised that future plans included the development of an internal staff bank, similar to NHS arrangements, allowing additional hours to be covered by existing employees rather than external agency workers. It was also noted that regulatory requirements around safe staffing levels limited the Council’s ability to reduce expenditure immediately in these services.

Councillor Keenan also queried an underspend within Public Health arising from staff vacancies, noting the apparent contrast with staffing pressures elsewhere in the organisation. Concerns were raised regarding any service implications that might result from those vacancies. Officers explained that the Public Health underspend reflected normal staff turnover rather than a deliberate decision to hold posts vacant. Vacancies had arisen through employees leaving the authority and the resulting gap before replacement staff were recruited. It was confirmed that there was no recruitment freeze within Public Health and no intentional reduction in staffing capacity.

Councillor Yasseen revisited a theme raised at previous meetings concerning the significant underspend reported within central services, particularly treasury management savings. Information was sought regarding the sustainability of those savings, whether the approach represented a recurring feature of the Council's financial management strategy and how long such savings could realistically continue. Officers explained that treasury management savings arose primarily through postponing borrowing until funds were genuinely required and through slippage within the capital programme, which reduced borrowing costs. Members were advised that although treasury management savings had featured regularly in recent years, the specific savings changed annually and depended upon prevailing economic conditions, capital programme delivery and interest rates. Detailed modelling and scenario planning were undertaken to assess sustainability, although officers acknowledged that future economic changes remained outside the Council's control.

Councillor Yasseen also raised concerns regarding the rapidly increasing DSG deficit and sought a clearer explanation of what the expenditure represented, the factors driving projected growth in the deficit and the implications for the Council. Officers outlined how the deficit related primarily to demand for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) provision, particularly out-of-borough placements. A sharp increase in Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) applications had been experienced nationally, which officers attributed partly to uncertainty surrounding future SEND reforms. Members were advised that current indications from Government suggested that 90% of DSG deficits would continue to be funded nationally, although this had not yet been formally confirmed. Officers acknowledged that the scale of the projected deficit was concerning but stressed that Rotherham's position remained more favourable than that of many authorities nationally.

Further questioning focused on transport funding, particularly the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement and associated feasibility funding. Councillor Yasseen sought clarification regarding references to underspends, additional funding allocations and how future funding decisions would support road safety schemes that residents regularly raised with ward members. Officers explained the distinction between regional underspends within the wider CRSTS programme and local underspends arising from the withdrawal of the Broome Lane scheme

following consultation feedback. It was confirmed that feasibility funding would help develop future transport projects by funding surveys, designs and preparatory work, enabling schemes to be brought forward more effectively. Officers also explained that the future Transport for City Regions programme would provide a separate source of transport investment over the coming years.

Following additional discussion, Councillor Yasseen sought confirmation that the withdrawal of the Broome Lane proposal related specifically to the cycling infrastructure scheme rather than wider road safety measures. Officers confirmed that the underspend arose from the decision not to proceed with the proposed cycling scheme following public consultation, rather than from the cancellation of broader road safety initiatives.

Councillor Currie focused attention on savings arising from staff vacancies across the Council. Reference was made to previous concerns regarding vacancy factors within budgets and whether apparent savings could simply reflect posts remaining unfilled. Information was requested on the total value of vacancy-related savings across directorates and whether those savings formed a significant element of the overall financial position. Officers explained that vacancy-related savings naturally arose through staff turnover during any financial year and were not being driven by instructions to deliberately hold posts vacant. While a specific figure for the overall vacancy-related underspend was not immediately available, officers committed to providing that information following the meeting. It was reiterated that services continued actively recruiting to vacancies where operationally required.

Councillor Baggaley questioned officers regarding the Council's principal budget pressures and whether any were causing particular concern. Clarification was sought regarding how those pressures were being managed and how officers intended to ensure that financial challenges would not adversely affect outcomes for residents. In response, officers identified Children and Young People's Services placements and some adult social care pressures as the most significant concerns. However, it was reported that adult social care placements had improved compared with previous years and that substantial attention was being given to managing the remaining pressures. Members were assured that most overspends reflected growing demand for services rather than a reduction in provision and that residents were not currently experiencing detrimental impacts because of the financial position. Officers stressed that more difficult decisions would only become necessary if financial pressures worsened significantly.

Councillor McKiernan expressed concern that some reported savings appeared to arise from projects not progressing as originally intended, rather than from genuine efficiencies. Concerns were raised that, were the Council able to deliver all planned activity exactly as budgeted, the underlying financial position might appear significantly worse. Councillor McKiernan specifically sought clarification regarding future funding from

the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA), including whether devolved funding arrangements represented either an opportunity or a financial risk. Officers explained that SYMCA would increasingly move towards funding derived from business rates and income tax growth rather than specific grant streams, providing greater freedom and flexibility. However, this approach would also expose SYMCA to economic risks similar to those faced by local authorities. Officers advised that the Council remained actively engaged in discussions with SYMCA to ensure that future arrangements did not adversely affect Rotherham's funding position.

During the debate, John Edwards provided assurance that performance information was continually monitored alongside financial performance. While acknowledging some delays within the capital programme, it was reported that operational performance data across key services did not indicate any significant deterioration that would suggest residents were receiving reduced service standards because of financial pressures.

The Chair also sought clarification regarding the impact of rising inflation and fuel costs on Council budgets. Officers advised that fuel-related pressures within transport and waste services remained manageable. Energy costs had increased by approximately £300,000 during the financial year, although the Council's advance purchasing strategy had successfully protected it from much of the volatility experienced in wider energy markets.

Towards the conclusion of the discussion, the Chair asked how officers intended to eliminate the remaining £2.9 million overspend and restore a balanced budget position by year-end. Officers confirmed that extensive work was underway with Executive Directors, Service Directors and budget holders to identify opportunities to reduce non-essential spending, maximise income and review vacant positions where doing so would not adversely affect service delivery. It was stressed that the Council had a strong track record of improving forecast outturn positions during the second half of the financial year and that officers remained confident that the final position would improve further before year-end.

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

1. Note the current General Fund Revenue Budget forecast overspend of £2.9m.
2. Note the updated position of the Capital Programme.
3. Approve the capital budget variations as detailed in Section 2.17 of the report.
4. Note early payment of £3.052m grant from the Transport for City Regions (TCR) fund, as detailed in section 2.18.5 of the report.
5. Note the allocation of City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) Revenue Fund grant from South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) as detailed in 2.24 and delegate the decision to allocate and spend all future tranches to

the Service Director of Planning, Regeneration and Transport in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and the Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy.

Further actions that arose from discussions were that:

- The Service Director for Financial Services to provide OSMB members with the total vacancy-related underspend across all directorates contained within the September 2026/27 forecast position, as requested during the meeting.

65. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

At the Chair's invitation, Judith Badger, Executive Director of Corporate Services, explained that the report represented a technical update to the Council's financial planning assumptions rather than a set of final budget proposals. The review reassessed key assumptions that underpinned the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, including funding levels, inflation, demand pressures, income projections, and treasury management forecasts. Members were advised that, when the budget had been approved earlier in the year, the Council had a balanced position for 2027-28 and 2028-29 but faced a projected funding gap of approximately £11 million in 2029-30. Following a reassessment of assumptions and available information, the updated position now showed projected surpluses in the two succeeding years and a significantly reduced gap in 2029-30. Whilst this represented a more favourable position, it was emphasised that any future decisions to utilise apparent surpluses would create recurring costs that would need to be funded in subsequent years. The update therefore established a revised baseline from which future budget decisions would be developed.

Presenting the detailed financial position, Rob Mahon, Service Director of Financial Services, outlined how revised assumptions on business rates, council tax collection, inflation, treasury management, and Government funding had altered the Council's outlook. Members were advised that the Council now projected an underspend of £3.7 million in 2027-28 and £2.2 million in 2028-29, although a significant funding challenge remained in 2029-30. Officers explained that the latter year coincided with the beginning of the next Government spending review period and therefore remained subject to considerable uncertainty. A substantial element of the improved position had arisen from a more favourable outlook for retained business rates, linked both to the ongoing Government operation of the steelworks site and expectations surrounding the delayed Fair Funding Review. Members were also advised that strong council tax and business rates collection performance continued to place the authority in a comparatively robust position. Officers further highlighted the impact of treasury management savings, revised inflation forecasts, and assumptions regarding Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits. It was explained that the Council's planning assumptions currently reflected Government indications that 90% of future DSG deficits would be funded nationally, whilst local authorities would remain responsible for addressing

the remaining proportion.

The Chair invited members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) to raise questions and queries. The ensuing discussion focused on the sustainability of the MTFS assumptions, ongoing demand pressures, treasury management savings, children's placement costs, housing finances, reserves, and DSG risks.

Councillor Baggaley questioned the apparent improvement in the MTFS position and sought clarification on why projected surpluses were emerging despite the overspends and service pressures reported earlier in the financial monitoring report. Information was requested on whether these underlying pressures had been fully reflected within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. In response, officers explained that some current-year pressures were not expected to continue into future years. For example, pressures within waste management were anticipated to reduce once operational improvement projects had been fully implemented. Home-to-school transport pressures had already been partially accounted for within the MTFS through annual budget increases. Adult social care was reported to be in a stronger position than in previous years, with savings plans progressing and ongoing work aimed at reducing reliance on agency staffing. Officers acknowledged that the most significant unresolved pressure remained within Children and Young People's Services (CYPS), particularly around placement costs. It was explained that discussions were still ongoing regarding the extent to which those pressures should be reflected in future budgets and that further consideration would form part of the formal budget-setting process.

Councillor Baggaley also explored the assumptions underpinning future treasury management savings. Concern was expressed regarding the reliance on savings generated by borrowing strategies and slippage within the capital programme, given the uncertainty associated with those factors. Officers explained that detailed modelling had been undertaken using historical borrowing patterns, capital programme delivery rates, and cash flow forecasts. The Council had accumulated several years of data demonstrating consistent treasury management savings, allowing a higher degree of confidence to be applied to future forecasts. However, officers acknowledged that they could not predict wider economic events, interest rate movements, or global market conditions and that these factors would continue to present risks. It was noted that improved delivery of the capital programme itself would ultimately reduce some treasury management savings, although this would be regarded as a positive outcome because it would indicate successful project delivery.

Towards the end of the discussion, Councillor Baggaley returned to the issue of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits. Clarification was sought regarding how the Council would respond should Government support not materialise at the level currently assumed. Officers explained that the absence of significant Government support would create substantial financial pressures for local authorities nationally. In such circumstances,

the Council would be required to draw upon reserves in the short term while undertaking a comprehensive review of its medium-term budget position. Officers stressed that they considered such a scenario unlikely and remained of the view that Government would be unable to transfer the full burden of DSG deficits onto local authorities without significant consequences for the sector.

Councillor Currie focused on Children and Young People's Services and asked whether investment-to-save approaches similar to those implemented previously were being considered to reduce future placement pressures. Specific reference was made to earlier initiatives which had sought to increase local provision and reduce dependency on expensive external placements. Councillor Currie also sought clarification regarding the relationship between the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan, noting the long-term nature of housing finances and querying whether investment through the HRA could help address wider financial challenges.

In response, officers outlined the extensive work underway to increase in-house residential provision within CYPS. Members were advised that additional children's homes were being developed and that, although progress had been slower than anticipated owing to recruitment difficulties and regulatory requirements, these investments were expected to generate significant future savings by reducing reliance on costly external placements. Officers also explained that other initiatives involving fostering and kinship care arrangements continued to be pursued. Regarding housing finances, members were informed that the HRA and General Fund were legally separate and could not be used to subsidise one another. Whilst both financial plans were developed alongside each other and overseen through similar governance processes, expenditure, and resources within the HRA could not be used to address pressures within the Council's General Fund budget.

Councillor Monk concentrated on the assumptions underpinning the CYPS budget position. Reference was made to statements within the report indicating that no additional budget provision had been made because it was considered achievable to maximise occupancy within the Council's residential provision. Councillor Monk sought assurance that such assumptions remained compatible with ensuring placements were always in the best interests of children and not solely driven by financial considerations.

Officers acknowledged the challenge and explained that placement decisions would continue to be made based on the needs of individual children. Whilst maximising occupancy within Council-run provision would produce significant savings, officers accepted that matching children to appropriate placements would not always align perfectly with available capacity. Nonetheless, the completion and full utilisation of the Council's residential provision was expected to reduce overall placement costs significantly. Officers further reported that the number of looked-after

children had begun to stabilise and that future work would focus on ensuring placements were delivered as cost-effectively as possible without compromising outcomes for children.

Councillor Yasseen began by commenting positively on the Council's financial management over an extended period, particularly in light of major challenges such as austerity measures and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst recognising the strong financial controls that had been exercised, Councillor Yasseen emphasised that the cumulative loss of funding over many years had inevitably affected service provision and the level of support available to residents. It was suggested that there was value in maintaining transparency with residents regarding those long-term funding pressures and their consequences.

Councillor Yasseen then raised concerns about future resilience and emergency planning, particularly considering recent national discussions regarding preparedness for major incidents or disruptions. Questions were asked regarding how the Medium-Term Financial Strategy accounted for potential unforeseen events and whether the Council possessed the financial resilience necessary to respond to severe emergencies affecting residents. In response, officers explained that emergency planning and business continuity arrangements would guide the operational response to such situations. From a financial perspective, the Council's reserves represented the primary safeguard against major unforeseen risks. Reference was made to the Council's minimum reserve provision of £25 million, which had been deliberately rebuilt over several years to strengthen resilience. Officers noted that these reserves had enabled the authority to respond effectively during the Covid-19 pandemic and would provide the financial flexibility needed to respond to future emergencies while awaiting any Government support that might become available.

Councillor McKiernan questioned the projected use of reserves within the MTFS and sought clarification regarding the apparent reduction in reserve balances during the planning period. Concern was expressed regarding the sustainability of drawing down reserves and how the Council intended to maintain an appropriate level of financial resilience.

Officers explained that much of the reserve movement reflected the planned use of recovery grant funding which had been received over a three-year period and deliberately profiled into future budgets. Members were advised that approximately £10 million of recovery grant funding would pass through reserves before being utilised to support the budget position in 2028-29. Additionally, provisions had been included to manage the anticipated impact of DSG accounting changes. Officers reiterated that the Council did not view the use of reserves as a sustainable method of funding ongoing expenditure and confirmed that the long-term intention remained to rebuild reserve balances wherever possible. The position reflected a temporary financial planning mechanism rather than an ongoing reliance on reserves to balance the budget.

Throughout the discussion, officers consistently emphasised that the report represented a technical update to the financial baseline rather than a final budget strategy. Whilst members welcomed the improved financial outlook, detailed discussion highlighted continuing concerns regarding CYPS placement costs, DSG pressures, future Government funding arrangements, and the need to maintain adequate reserves. Members were advised that a more comprehensive report setting out detailed budget proposals would be presented to the Board in January 2027 after the provisional local government finance settlement had been received and the budget-setting process had progressed further.

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

1. Note the MTFS 2026/27 to 2029/30 update.

66. PROGRESS UPDATE ON THE ECONOMIC INACTIVITY TRAILBLAZER PROGRAMME AND THE CONNECT TO WORK PROGRAMME (PATHWAYS TO WORK)

At the Chair's invitation, Councillor Williams, Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, highlighted that the programme had moved beyond its initial mobilisation phase and was now delivering tangible outcomes for residents across the borough. Members were advised that almost 1,000 residents had engaged with support, more than 200 people had moved into employment, and many others had progressed into training and skills development. Emphasis was placed on the programme's success in supporting residents facing significant barriers to employment through a combination of Council services, voluntary and community sector organisations and employer partnerships. The development of a "single front door" approach for residents was highlighted along with the growth of employer engagement activity and the introduction of innovative recruitment initiatives aimed at helping residents access sustainable employment. It was noted that whilst funding for the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer Programme was currently confirmed only until March 2027, the programme had established a strong foundation and was already demonstrating benefits for residents, employers and the wider borough.

Providing a detailed presentation, Fiona Fletcher, System Service Manager for Pathways to Work, who was also accompanied by Simon Moss, Service Director, Planning, Regeneration and Transport outlined the development of the programme since its launch. Members heard that the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer and Connect to Work programmes were funded through the Department for Work and Pensions via South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA), with Rotherham acting as the system manager. Officers explained that significant effort had been devoted to moving away from traditional programme silos and towards a more integrated system that enabled residents and employers to access support through a single point of contact. Members were advised that

over 1,000 residents had now been supported through the Trailblazer and associated programmes, including economically inactive residents and individuals already in work who required assistance to remain employed or progress in their careers. At the time of reporting, approximately 265 confirmed job outcomes had been achieved, with further job starts and offers awaiting formal confirmation. In addition, almost 200 residents had progressed into skills and training programmes. Officers highlighted that job conversion rates had improved significantly during the second year of delivery, increasing from around 20% in the first year to approximately 33% in the current year.

Members were informed that the programme had received national recognition through a visit from evaluators commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions and the National Centre for Social Research. Officers reported that Rotherham's approach had been identified as distinctive within South Yorkshire because of its integrated delivery model and strong partnership working. Significant progress had also been made within the Connect to Work programme, particularly through supported employment services for neurodivergent residents, individuals involved with the criminal justice system, survivors of domestic abuse and residents at risk of homelessness. Members noted that the Council had recently secured Supported Employment Fidelity Accreditation through the British Association for Supported Employment, (BASE), receiving a Silver Award at the first assessment.

The Board also received a detailed overview of the programme's employer engagement work. Officers described the development of the "course-to-job" model, whereby training provision was designed directly with employers and linked to specific vacancies rather than simply offering generic training followed by applications and interviews. Examples were provided of successful partnerships with employers including Concentrix, Detectronic, Yorkshire Water, ESH Construction and McLaren. Members heard that some programmes had achieved exceptionally strong conversion rates, including one initiative which had resulted in every participant progressing directly into employment. Officers further explained that a coordinated employer engagement approach had been adopted across Council services through a single point of contact and shared management systems, reducing duplication and making engagement easier for businesses.

Members were also advised of the role being played by voluntary and community sector organisations in delivering personalised employment support and wider interventions relating to health, wellbeing, skills, financial resilience and housing. Officers reported that performance across the voluntary and community sector had strengthened significantly during the second year of the programme, with job outcomes increasing substantially. The introduction of a central triage service had further strengthened the programme by allowing residents to access advice through a single route and then be directed to the most appropriate support. Members heard that more than 1,500 referrals had been

processed since the launch of the triage service, with self-referrals and word-of-mouth recommendations remaining the most significant referral sources. Officers described this as evidence that awareness of the programme within communities was increasing.

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

Councillor Baggaley sought clarification regarding residents who had engaged with the programme but had not yet progressed into employment or training. Concern was expressed that, based on the headline figures presented, a significant proportion of participants appeared not to have secured positive outcomes, and clarification was requested regarding what support remained available to those individuals. In response, officers explained that residents did not leave the system without support. Many participants required intensive pre-employment interventions before being ready to enter work, including support with housing, finances, confidence-building, health issues and employability skills. Officers outlined how residents could be referred into specialist provision, skills programmes or wraparound support services before progressing back into employment support when ready. Members were assured that participants continued to receive support tailored to their circumstances and that individuals were not simply discharged because they had not yet moved into employment.

Councillor Baggaley also asked whether the programme had identified recurring barriers preventing residents from moving into employment and whether delivery models had been adapted in response. Officers explained that the programme collected detailed information regarding barriers through its customer management system and used this intelligence to shape provision. Examples included commissioning additional counselling support through Mind after identifying mental health as a recurring obstacle and expanding wraparound support services in response to emerging needs. Officers emphasised that the programme remained flexible and continued to adjust its delivery model according to evidence gathered from participants.

Councillor Currie praised the programme's achievements and highlighted the value of supporting residents with complex barriers to employment, including neurodivergent individuals, people leaving the criminal justice system and young people who were not in education, employment or training. Councillor Currie sought information regarding the baseline levels of economic inactivity in Rotherham at the start of the programme and requested details on how success would ultimately be measured at borough level. Questions were also raised regarding the long-term sustainability of the programme and whether plans existed to continue support if external funding ended.

In response, officers advised that the economic inactivity rate in Rotherham had been approximately 28.2% when the programme began, with more than 48,000 jobless households recorded across the borough.

Updated figures showed a modest but positive reduction in economic inactivity, with the rate reducing to approximately 25.7%, although officers noted that wider economic factors also influenced the figures. It was explained that measuring the direct impact of the programme on borough-wide inactivity remained complex. Officers further advised that funding arrangements remained a challenge, particularly as the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer Programme was only funded until March 2027. However, discussions were ongoing locally and regionally regarding future funding arrangements, including the potential incorporation of employment and skills funding into longer-term regional funding settlements administered through SYMCA. Members were informed that officers continued to actively manage the risks associated with funding uncertainty.

Councillor Monk sought further information regarding the “course-to-job” model and asked how it differed from more traditional apprenticeships and training programmes. Clarification was also requested regarding the origins of the model and whether it had been developed in response to feedback from employers, participants or both. Officers explained that the model had emerged from previous experience of programmes where training was not directly connected to live employment opportunities. Unlike traditional schemes which often offered training followed by a guaranteed interview, the course-to-job model began with identified vacancies. Training was then designed around the needs of employers, ensuring participants developed the exact skills and knowledge required for those roles. Officers emphasised that the approach was strongly employer-led and aimed to remove barriers within conventional recruitment processes. Apprenticeship opportunities continued to be promoted through partnerships with the South Yorkshire Apprenticeship Hub, ensuring that residents could access longer-term progression opportunities once employed.

Councillor Monk later questioned how the programme supported participants whose employment outcomes proved unsustainable and whether employers were also supported to understand and address workplace barriers. Reference was made to neurodivergent residents and the need for employers to understand issues relating to wellbeing, communication and sensory environments. Officers explained that extensive employer engagement work formed part of the programme, including training on inclusive recruitment, workplace wellbeing and reasonable adjustments. Support was also provided through partnerships with health organisations and the Health and Growth Accelerator, helping employers create more inclusive workplaces and improve the sustainability of employment outcomes. Officers advised that specialist training regarding neurodiversity and workplace support formed part of this approach.

Councillor Yasseen welcomed the programme and particularly commended the focus on neurodivergent residents, people facing mental and physical health challenges and those who had become disconnected

from the labour market. Councillor Yasseen reflected on the scale of economic inactivity across the borough and questioned how the programme could be expanded to reach a far greater proportion of residents. It was observed that the current programme represented only a small contribution when measured against overall levels of economic inactivity, and concern was expressed regarding how successful interventions could be expanded and sustained in the longer term. Councillor Yasseen also emphasised the importance of addressing confidence, aspiration and self-belief among residents who may have become detached from employment opportunities.

Whilst no specific policy changes were proposed during the meeting, officers agreed that long-term sustainability and expansion remained key considerations. Discussion highlighted the continuing challenge of balancing available resources with the scale of demand and reinforced the importance of securing future funding and strengthening partnerships with employers and community organisations.

Councillor Tinsley focused on participants who had not yet progressed into employment and sought assurance that they remained engaged with support services rather than leaving the system altogether. Officers explained that residents frequently moved between different forms of support depending on their individual circumstances and progress. It was emphasised that participants often remained connected to services for extended periods and could return to previous interventions if their circumstances changed. Officers stated that the system had been intentionally designed to remain flexible and responsive rather than operating within fixed timescales.

Councillor Tinsley also explored the programme's geographical reach and questioned how support was being made accessible in communities across the borough rather than concentrating activity within central locations. Officers described a network of co-located services, community-based provision and voluntary sector partners operating throughout Rotherham. It was explained that commissioning arrangements had been designed to ensure both geographical coverage and targeted support for specific groups. Officers acknowledged that further work was required to strengthen neighbourhood-level outreach but advised that this had become a key priority within future planning discussions. Councillor Tinsley encouraged officers to share information with members to help promote opportunities through ward-level networks and community events.

Throughout the discussion, members expressed strong support for the aims and achievements of the programme. Recognition was given to the integrated nature of the Pathways to Work system, the emphasis placed on supporting residents with complex barriers to employment, and the innovative partnership approaches that had been developed with employers, health services and voluntary sector organisations. Members also emphasised the importance of demonstrating long-term impact on

economic inactivity rates and securing sustainable funding arrangements beyond March 2027.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board agreed:

1. That progress on the Economic Inactivity Trailblazer, Connect to Work and the wider Pathways to Work programme be noted.

Further actions that arose from discussions were that:

1. Future reports include evidence of how the programme is reducing economic inactivity in Rotherham, including comparison with regional and national trends where available.

2. Future reports set out plans for the programme after March 2027 and explain any risks if external funding ends.

3. Future reports include information on which employer engagement activities have led to job opportunities and employment outcomes.

4. Members of OSMB would be provided with a list of the voluntary and community sector organisations delivering personalised and wraparound support through the programme.

67. INVESTING IN OUR COMMUNITY FACILITIES - UPDATE REPORT

At the Chair's invitation, Judith Badger, Executive Director of Corporate Services, reminded members that the Council had previously allocated £600,000 through the capital programme to improve community buildings that had fallen into disrepair or, in some cases, had become unavailable for community use. Members were advised that additional external funding had subsequently been secured, increasing the available investment to approximately £1.2 million. Officers explained that this additional funding would enable a greater scope of work to be delivered across the programme, although some projects would continue into the following financial year to ensure all available grant funding was utilised effectively.

Presenting the detailed update, Kevin Fisher, Service Director for Property and Facilities Services, reported that the original programme had focused on five facilities: Oaklea Retreat, The Meeting Place, Artworks, the community building operated by Clifton Learning Partnership and Black Hut. Since the programme commenced, two further facilities had been added: the United Multicultural Centre and the Shiloh Centre. Members were informed that improvement works at Oaklea Retreat, The Meeting Place, Artworks, Clifton Learning Partnership and the United Multicultural Centre had all been completed. Work at the Shiloh Centre remained at an earlier stage, with officers working alongside users of the building to determine the precise requirements, which were expected to include roof replacement and internal refurbishment works.

Attention was given to the future of the Black Hut, which officers described as the catalyst for the wider programme. Members heard that extensive engagement had been undertaken with community groups, ward members and partner organisations to determine the future requirements of the site. Officers reported that design work was nearing completion and that proposals were being developed to demolish the existing building and replace it with a new modular facility. It was explained that the proposed development remained within the overall programme budget and that discussions were taking place with other Council services to maximise community use of the new facility, including opportunities to incorporate additional community services such as library provision. Officers advised that feedback received on completed schemes had generally been positive.

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

Councillor Yasseen sought clarification regarding the criteria used to select buildings for inclusion within the programme, particularly the two facilities that had been added after the original programme was approved. Questions were raised regarding how decisions were made about which buildings should receive investment and whether wider considerations relating to community use and accessibility had been considered.

In response, Kevin Fisher explained that the Council maintained an ongoing review of its property portfolio and prioritised buildings according to condition, repair requirements and community impact. Officers stated that both the United Multicultural Centre and the Shiloh Centre had come to attention through urgent maintenance issues. The United Multicultural Centre had experienced severe water ingress which affected electrical systems and forced closure of the building, whilst concerns at the Shiloh Centre centred around the building’s physical condition and its importance as a heavily used community facility. In both cases, officers had assessed the urgency of repairs alongside the potential impact on local communities and service delivery before determining priorities.

Councillor Yasseen welcomed investment in community buildings but questioned whether sufficient consideration was being given to how facilities were used once refurbished. Concerns were raised that not all buildings within the programme were equally accessible to their local communities and that some facilities had experienced periods of limited use. It was suggested that investment should be linked to stronger expectations regarding community access and utilisation. Further concerns were expressed regarding consultation arrangements and whether all ward members had been fully involved in discussions relating to facilities within their areas.

Responding to those concerns, officers acknowledged that stronger links with neighbourhood services would be beneficial and accepted that

engagement arrangements could be improved. It was recognised that responsibility for community engagement had sometimes been assumed to sit with neighbourhood teams when a more coordinated approach across services was required. Officers committed to strengthening future engagement with ward members, neighbourhood teams and community stakeholders as additional facilities were considered for investment.

Councillor Baggaley concentrated initially on the proposed redevelopment of The Black Hut. Concerns were raised about the timetable for delivery and whether procurement processes might delay implementation, particularly given previous challenges experienced elsewhere within capital programmes. Clarification was sought regarding the current procurement position and the realism of the proposed delivery timescales.

Officers advised that demolition works had already entered procurement and that preparations for acquiring the replacement building were well advanced. Members were informed that the proposed replacement would be a high-quality modular building rather than a temporary structure and that existing utility connections would simplify installation. Officers expressed confidence that the proposed timetable remained achievable and that procurement arrangements were progressing as planned.

Councillor Baggaley also sought assurance that investment in facilities would lead to long-term community benefit once the physical works had been completed. Questions were asked regarding how community groups would be supported to ensure buildings remained sustainable and well used, particularly in the case of facilities such as The Black Hut that had previously been unavailable.

In response, officers explained that the programme extended beyond building refurbishment alone. Alongside physical improvements, work was being undertaken to review governance arrangements, lease arrangements and community outcomes for each facility. Members heard that the Council was working with neighbourhood services and other directorates to identify an organisational sponsor for each building who would act as a key liaison point and help ensure that intended community outcomes were delivered. Officers stated that this wider support package was intended to maximise the long-term value of the Council's investment.

Councillor Baggaley later questioned reported underspends on completed projects, particularly at Oaklea Retreat and The Meeting Place. Clarification was sought regarding whether those underspends reflected reductions in project scope or genuine efficiencies achieved during delivery.

Officers explained that early estimates had been developed using high-level building assessments. As design work progressed and more detailed surveys were undertaken with community organisations and stakeholders, project costs had been refined and reduced. The underspends therefore

reflected more accurate cost estimates rather than any reduction in the agreed scope of works. Members were also advised that any unspent funding remained available within the overall programme budget to address future requirements or potential cost pressures elsewhere in the programme.

Councillor Currie welcomed the programme and highlighted the proposed investment in The Black Hut, emphasising the importance of community-led regeneration within areas experiencing high levels of deprivation. Positive comments were made regarding engagement with residents and neighbourhood teams and the role that investment could play in strengthening community pride and participation. Councillor Currie stressed that communities should be encouraged to take ownership of facilities and develop the skills necessary to manage them successfully in the future.

While not raising concerns regarding the programme itself, Councillor Currie emphasised the importance of ensuring that local communities remained actively involved following investment and that facilities continued to be supported through community development and capacity-building work.

The Chair sought further information regarding how facilities would be promoted to a wider range of community groups once improvement works had been completed. Concern was expressed that buildings should serve the broader community rather than being used by a limited number of organisations. The Chair also asked whether future leasing arrangements would be used to provide greater security and support opportunities for community organisations seeking external funding.

In response, officers explained that promotion and utilisation of community facilities would require close collaboration between neighbourhood teams, local groups, ward members and the voluntary sector. Existing community networks and organisations such as VAR were expected to play an important role in increasing awareness and encouraging wider community participation. Officers emphasised that lease arrangements formed a significant part of the programme and confirmed that work was underway to review lease terms, governance structures and responsibilities. Members were informed that longer-term leases, typically in the region of 60 to 65 years, often enabled community organisations to secure external funding and therefore strengthened their long-term sustainability.

Throughout the discussion, members welcomed the progress made through the community facilities programme and recognised the significant scale of investment that had been secured. The debate focused on ensuring that investment delivered long-term community benefits, the importance of meaningful engagement with ward members and local communities, and the need to ensure that refurbished facilities were fully utilised and supported by appropriate management and

governance arrangements. Officers acknowledged the value of strengthening engagement processes and emphasised that the programme was intended not only to improve physical buildings but also to create sustainable and accessible community assets.

Resolved That: The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:

1. Considered and commented on progress in delivering the Community Facilities Programme, including completed works, the inclusion of Shiloh Centre and United Multicultural Centre, and the remaining works and funding position set out in this report.

68. WORK PROGRAMME

At the Chair's invitation the Governance Manager, Barbel Gale provided an update on the Board's work programme. Members were advised that consideration of the Housing Stock Condition Survey / Energy Efficiency Update had been scheduled for 26 January 2027 as part of the Improving Places Select Commission's agenda and members of OSMB would be invited to attend. It was reported that the item would include information on the energy efficiency retrofit programme for social housing, including the feasibility and prioritisation of upgrades to heating systems and insulation, the contribution of the programme towards the Council's net-zero ambitions, potential funding opportunities and proposed implementation timescales.

An update was also provided regarding the planned scrutiny session with Yorkshire Water and Severn Trent Water. Members were informed that 33 questions had been submitted by seven councillors. The questions primarily focused on environmental performance and wastewater management issues, including sewage spills, pollution incidents, network capacity, infrastructure investment, flooding and the impact of future housing growth on existing infrastructure. Further issues raised by Members included arrangements to support vulnerable residents during service incidents, concerns regarding rat infestations linked to sewer infrastructure, the quality of reinstatement works, customer communication and service standards, and the transparency and accountability of investment and decision-making processes. Several questions sought assurances on how residents and elected members would be informed, consulted and able to monitor future performance improvements. A suitable date to hold this meeting was being investigated.

The Board received an update on the Consultation Scrutiny Review. It was reported that six Members had volunteered to participate in the review. Councillor Steele had been appointed Chair of the review, with participation from Councillor Bennett-Sylvester, Councillor Thorp, Councillor Brent, Councillor Currie and Councillor Yasseen, subject to meeting availability. Officers advised that work was underway to identify the key officers who would support the review and to arrange the

inaugural meeting.

During discussion, Councillor Currie referred to the planned scrutiny work on recruitment, agency staffing and vacancies and requested that consideration also be given to the impact of vacancy factors within the Council's budget-setting process. Councillor Currie was advised that the relevant officer was not present at the meeting and that the request would be referred to officers for consideration as part of the planned work and that a response could be provided outside the meeting if required.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:

1. Approved the current work programme.

2. Agreed that the Governance Manager be authorised to make any required changes to the work programme in consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair and reporting any such changes back at the next meeting for endorsement.

69. WORK IN PROGRESS - SELECT COMMISSIONS

The Board received updates from the Select Commissions on recent activity and forthcoming work.

Update from Health Select Commission:

Councillor Keenan reported that, as no meeting of the Commission had taken place since the previous meeting of the Board, there was limited activity to report. Members were advised, however, that two scrutiny reviews were being progressed and expressions of interest had been received from Members wishing to participate. Work was due to commence on the first review, which would examine the provision and accessibility of life-saving equipment across the borough. It was noted that this review would be undertaken jointly with Members of the Improving Places Select Commission.

Councillor Keenan also provided an overview of forthcoming business scheduled for the next meeting of the Commission. This would include consideration of winter planning arrangements, safeguarding matters, the Rotherham Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report, a delivery update report and the Health and Wellbeing Board Annual Report.

Update from Improving Lives Select Commission:

Councillor Monk noted that the written update contained within the agenda pack pre-dated the Commission's most recent meeting, which had taken place on 3 November 2026. Members were advised that the Commission had considered the Maintaining Schools Long-Term Maintenance Plan and the Intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse Strategy. Councillor Monk reported that Members had engaged positively with both

items, raising constructive comments and questions during discussion. It was further reported that the Commission had requested that both matters return to a future meeting as the work progressed, enabling Members to maintain oversight of their development and implementation.

Update from Improving Places Select Commission:

Councillor McKiernan advised that the Commission had recently undertaken pre-decision scrutiny of the Playing Pitch Strategy. A key issue arising from the discussion was the importance of ensuring that ward councillors were kept informed of developments affecting playing pitches within their areas. Members had also emphasised the need to ensure that future planning considerations were appropriately reflected in the ongoing management and provision of playing pitch facilities.

An update was also provided on scrutiny of the Local Neighbourhood Road Safety Scheme Programme. It was reported that Members had highlighted the importance of evaluating completed road safety interventions to determine whether they had achieved their intended outcomes and delivered value for money. The Commission had stressed the need for stronger post-implementation assessment to ensure that schemes were delivering the expected benefits and lessons could be learned for future projects.

Looking ahead, Members were informed of a forthcoming visit to the RiDO Business Centre, which would provide an opportunity to view the range of office, laboratory and workshop facilities available at the site. The Commission was also promoting participation in the forthcoming Cultural Strategy Workshop, scheduled for 15 December 2026, to support Member input into the future development of culture and creative activity across the borough.

It was noted that the December meeting of OSMB would be held in Committee Room 1, rather than the Council Chamber. In response to a query Members were assured that the proposed meeting room had sufficient capacity to accommodate the members of the Board. It was explained that officer attendance would be managed through phased attendance arrangements to ensure that presenters were available when required whilst maintaining adequate space within the meeting room.

The Chair invited questions and comments from Members on the updates provided. No questions were raised and the updates were noted.

70. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Governance Manager, Barbel Gale provided an overview of items provisionally scheduled for the Board's December meeting and highlighted those that may be suitable for pre-decision scrutiny. Members were advised that the proposed agenda included the annual complaints

report and potentially the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, Rent Setting and Service Charges 2027/28. Consideration was also being given to the inclusion of the Crisis Support and Resilience Fund, subject to Members' views on whether pre-decision scrutiny would be beneficial.

Members received a summary of items expected to be considered by Cabinet in December 2026. These included the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, Rent Setting and Service Charges 2027/28, the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership Intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse Strategy, property transactions, arrangements relating to crisis support within the borough, the Library and Neighbourhood Hubs Strategy, and Cabinet's response to the Board's scrutiny review of lighting columns. Members also noted that applications for business rates relief were scheduled as non-key decisions.

During consideration of the Forward Plan, the Chair suggested that the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan, Rent Setting and Service Charges 2027/28 should be included on the Board's agenda for scrutiny, reflecting the Board's usual involvement in considering the proposals prior to Cabinet. Members indicated their agreement with this approach.

Discussion then focused on the Library and Neighbourhood Hubs Strategy. The Head of Democratic Services, Emma Hill clarified that the Library and Neighbourhood Hubs Strategy item scheduled for Cabinet in December sought approval for a further period of public consultation rather than approval of the strategy itself, with the final strategy expected to be presented at a later date.

Councillor Currie highlighted the relevance of the proposed consultation to the Board's ongoing scrutiny review of consultation and engagement. It was suggested that consideration of the item could provide a useful opportunity to examine how consultation activity was being undertaken and demonstrate the importance that the Council attached to engaging residents in decision-making processes. Councillor Currie also commented that lessons arising from the scrutiny review could help strengthen future consultation activity across the authority.

In response, the Chair acknowledged the importance of consultation and noted that the Library Service had generally demonstrated good practice in engaging communities. The Chair then confirmed that, ahead of publication of the agenda, discussions would take place with officers to clarify the nature of the items due to be considered by Cabinet and whether they would be appropriate for scrutiny consideration by the Board.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:

1. Agreed that the following items would be added to the December agenda as part of OSMB’s pre-decision scrutiny work:
    a. HRA Business Plan, Rent Setting and Service Charges 2027-28

b. Library and Neighbourhood Hubs Strategy

71. SOUTH YORKSHIRE MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair provided the Board with an update on the work of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the period since the Board's previous meeting. Members were advised that the Committee had not held a formal public meeting during the reporting period but had instead undertaken three briefing sessions to consider significant developments affecting the South Yorkshire region.

The Chair reported that a substantial proportion of the Committee's activity had focused on developments relating to the future of Doncaster Sheffield Airport, referred to during the meeting as South Yorkshire Airport. Members were informed that briefings had considered proposals to move away from previous lease-based arrangements towards direct acquisition of the airport site. It was reported that the proposal had subsequently been approved by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Board. The update highlighted the strategic significance of the decision for the region, reflecting ongoing efforts to secure the future operation and development of the airport as an important economic asset for South Yorkshire.

The Board was also advised that the Committee had received a series of briefings concerning the progression of bus franchising proposals across South Yorkshire. These sessions had focused on providing elected members with updates on the development of the franchising model, the stages completed to date and the next steps in the decision-making process. Members heard that further discussions on bus franchising were scheduled to take place later the same day through an additional briefing session. The Chair noted that the issue remained one of the most significant areas of regional transport reform currently under consideration by SYMCA and was therefore receiving ongoing scrutiny attention.

No substantive questions were raised by members of the Board following the update, and there was no further discussion on the matters reported.

Resolved That: The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board received an update on the activities of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

72. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no call-in issues.

73. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items.