

# Rotherham: “Building Stronger Communities”

*[a corporate strategy on community cohesion]*

*DRAFT April 2017*

## A vision for stronger communities throughout Rotherham

Building stronger communities is central to the **vision** set out for the Council – emphasising that Rotherham is a **shared community**, which **values decency**, and **provides opportunities** so that **no one is left behind**.

This vision - first set out by the Leader of the Council in October 2015 and underpinning *all* activity and service delivery across the Council – is as follows:

*“Rotherham is our home, where we come together as a community, where we seek to draw on our proud history to build a future we can all share.*

*“We value decency and dignity and seek to build a town where opportunity is extended to everyone, where people can grow, flourish and prosper, and where no one is left behind.*

*“To achieve this as a council we must work in a modern, efficient way, to deliver sustainable services in partnership with our local neighbourhoods, looking outwards, yet focused relentlessly on the needs of our residents.”*

There can be no clearer statement than this about the central importance of strong, successful and cohesive communities in determining a more successful future for Rotherham – and this overall vision best articulates the **Council’s commitment to making sure that its services and activities work together to build stronger communities throughout the borough**.

Stronger communities will mean different things to different people, but for the purposes of this document it is intended to mean, very simply:

*“People living and working in harmony, with a shared sense of community spirit - having respect for each other as citizens and respect for Rotherham as a place”.*

In achieving this, there are a number of central aspects or themes:

- We will need **a strong civic community and pride of place**, with people trusting local institutions based on their demonstrable commitment to acting fairly and honestly in arbitrating between different interests, and their transparency and accountability. To be effective, engagement with local people should be carried out on their terms and be an ongoing dialogue aimed at understanding the issues and challenges faced by communities, whilst recognising their strengths and aspirations.
- The Council and partners must be proactive in providing opportunities to **bring people together**, fostering positive relationships between people from different backgrounds and facilitating the range of community voices and resident-led neighbourhood initiatives.
- This, in turn, will support a positive view of diversity, encouraging people to live and work together on the basis of shared values and ensuring people understand their **rights and responsibilities towards each other**: people know what everyone expects of them, and what they can expect in turn. A crucial part of this is challenging extremism and those who would seek to weaken and divide our community and intimidate individuals.

- Finally, there is a fundamental requirement to **expand opportunity and economic security**, with people from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities, access to services and treatment. There is a particularly important role for community development and for the voluntary, community and faith sector in tackling the barriers which prevent people from participating fully in society and the life of our borough.

In taking this work forward, the Council **will also work in partnership** with others across Rotherham. Achieving the goal of stronger communities is a **shared priority of the Rotherham Together Partnership**, which brings together the key public, private and community sector voices from across the borough. As well as setting out how the Council itself will work to engage with and support local communities, this statement also explains how all services will work with others, as part of the new, shared “Rotherham Plan”.

Stronger communities mean better service delivery as the Council and its partners become more responsive and attuned to the needs of local people. With the impact of austerity and the increasingly difficult choices about where and how to invest tax-payers’ money, they are also central to the future sustainability of public services across Rotherham.

There is an increasing emphasis being given to community-led solutions to both provide more public services directly, as well as to reduce the demands on the public purse. Central to the Council’s long term vision is communities taking on greater responsibility and this requires different communities to work positively together, on the basis of shared values.

Building stronger communities also underpins the Council’s “One Rotherham” values and behaviours for its workforce, which help define how it works in the best interests of the Rotherham public, namely:

- **Honest:** open and truthful in everything we say and do
- **Accountable:** we own our decisions, we do what we say, and we acknowledge and learn from our mistakes
- **Respectful:** we show regard and sensitivity for the feelings, rights and views of others
- **Ambitious:** we are dedicated, committed and positive, embracing change with energy and creativity
- **Proud:** we take pride in our borough and in the job that we do

## **History and context**

With a population of around 260,100 Rotherham borough comprises a diverse and vibrant mix of people, cultures and communities. 70% of Rotherham’s area is rural in nature, and the borough benefits from a wealth of natural and built environments.

In common with the rest of the UK, Rotherham has an ageing population with as many people aged 65+ as children under 16. This trend is particularly apparent in the very elderly; the number of people over 85 increased by 41% from 4,100 in 2001 to 5,800 in 2015. This trend has clear implications for the provision of health and social care services.

Rotherham’s minority ethnic population is 8.1% (2011), which is well below the national average of 20%. The largest minority ethnic group within Rotherham is the Pakistani & Kashmiri community with 3.1% of the total population.

Rotherham has experienced significant migration of EU citizens since the accession of 8 new countries in 2004. In Rotherham, around half of EU registrations for National Insurance have been from either

Poland (1,938) or Roma people from the Slovak and Czech Republic (2,845) and, since 2014, from Romania (620 - the majority of whom are Roma).

The Casey Review into opportunity and integration, published in December 2016, made four clear recommendations: build local communities' resilience in the towns and cities where the greatest challenges exist; improve the integration of communities in Britain and establish a set of values around which people from all different backgrounds can unite; reduce economic exclusion, inequality and segregation in our most isolated and deprived communities and schools; and increase standards of leadership and integrity in public office.

The review also identified Rotherham as one of the country's top ten areas in which the ethnicities of school populations were most out of kilter with the overall population of school aged children in the area – meaning that there are disproportionately high levels of minority ethnic concentrations in particular schools.

Many of the challenges facing the borough stem from the decline in the traditional coal and steel industries. This has resulted in massive changes within the local economy, changing jobs and businesses as well as the environment, communities and social conditions.

There has been much success in attracting new jobs to Rotherham in emerging sectors such as call centres, which was evidenced by the growth in the number of jobs between 1995 and 2005, an increase of 30,000 or 40%, one of the highest growth rates in the country. Despite job losses since 2007, Rotherham still has a higher percentage of its workforce in manufacturing than the national average. The number of VAT registered businesses in Rotherham per 1,000 population remains below the national average and there are too few businesses in high value-added sectors. Rotherham's average weekly wage is only 86% of the average for England as a whole, although the local cost of living is also lower.

The employment rate in Rotherham has generally fallen over recent years with 67.7% of those aged 16-64 in employment in 2016, 6.4 percentage points below the national average. The recent fall in employment rate is a result of a rise in economic inactivity rather than unemployment rates.

The claimant count of unemployment in Rotherham fell by 705 claimants between March 2015 and March 2017, mirroring falls seen across the country. The claimant count rate stood at 2.8% of working age population in March 2017, 0.5 percentage points above the regional rate and 0.9 percentage points above the national rate.

Some areas of Rotherham are affected by acute economic and social deprivation. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2015 showed that 50,400 (19.5%) Rotherham residents are living in the 10% most deprived areas of England. This has increased significantly from 44,170 in 2010 and 30,400 in 2007. As Rotherham's overall IMD "ranking" has changed little since 2010, the data suggests that deprivation is becoming more concentrated in the poorest parts of the borough.

The central area of Rotherham is the main area of deprivation although there are also pockets of high deprivation in Maltby, Rawmarsh, Dinnington, Thurgroft, Wath, Swinton and Aston. The main forms of deprivation are low educational attainment and adult skills, poor health, high rates of disability and high worklessness, notably long term sickness.

Educational attainment in Rotherham has been rising with the percentage of 16 years olds with 5 or more GCSEs A\*-C, including English and maths, having risen from 37.4% in 1997 to 73.3% in 2010. This is still below the national average of 76.1% although the gap has closed significantly. The number

of people aged 16-64 in Rotherham with no qualifications is above the national average (15.8% compared to 12.2% for England & Wales in 2009).

Rotherham's particular recent history – including that set out in Dame Louise Casey's Corporate Governance Inspection (CGI) report (February 2015) - is that, while the Council often had the right policies and procedures on paper with regard to equalities and community cohesion, they were not embedded in the way services operated; and all too often ignored in the way that the Council behaved in practice. The Council also failed, previously, to work effectively in partnership with others on these critical issues.

The CGI report criticised the Council for not facing up to some of the most urgent issues surrounding race and cohesion because of a fear of the impact this could have on its reputation; and was highly critical of the Council's past political and managerial leadership in failing to confront these issues.

Tackling the legacy of these historical failings has been a key priority of the Council's improvement programme since government intervention following the CGI report.

Rotherham has been a focal point nationally for far-right protests for a number of years, with 17 taking place in the town since 2012. Aside from the economic and social disorder impacts, these recurrent protests and counter-demonstrations have put a substantial strain on the community – inciting racial and religious hatred and emphasising difference rather than what people have in common.

Rotherham, in many ways, is no different to other areas of the country in this respect, but does have this particular local context to bear in mind. For example, in consultation and engagement with the public, migration and cohesion issues are consistently voiced as top concerns; and hate crime reports in Rotherham have increased by more than 50% in the last year. Rotherham's recent history – child sexual exploitation (CSE) and the associated court trials; numerous protests; high profile racially motivated attacks, including the murder of an 81-year old man on his way to prayers at the local mosque; and reports of deteriorating community relationships with the police in particular - all serve to make dealing with these issues a top priority. These issues are likely to continue to have a continuing and profoundly local impact over the coming years.

In addition, this recent history and context has had a particular impact on girls and women of all ages, from all communities, across Rotherham.

However, Rotherham also has a thriving voluntary and community sector (VCS) to capitalise on, with over 47,000 active volunteers. There are numerous examples of VCS leadership and innovation in Rotherham to build upon, including national exemplar work on "social prescribing". A revised "Compact" is being launched in March 2017, following extensive consultation, to reset the relationship between the voluntary sector and all Rotherham's public service providers.

## **What have we already done?**

### **A strong civic community and pride of place:**

- We engaged hundreds of residents from all communities across the borough in our **Views from Rotherham** consultation, helping to shape the Rotherham Plan, our ambitious proposals for the future of the borough.
- Making **Rotherham Town Centre** feel and look a safe, welcoming place for all is at the core of the Council's commitment to a new "masterplan" that seeks to re-energise the

town centre through commercial, retail and residential development. There is a commitment to ensuring community focus in the masterplan, e.g. taking opportunities to create spaces for people to get together.

- The intensive work by the Council to **support the victims and survivors of CSE and bring perpetrators to justice**, regardless of their background or heritage, is an important part of rebuilding trust between communities and restoring confidence in public services. This touches upon the critical roles of both adult and children's social care in supporting stronger communities.
- Raising **public awareness of key issues affecting Rotherham** to inform and enable the public to take action. Recent examples including putting key information about hate crime and CSE on bus tickets, and the launch of the 'Ending the Silence' toolkit. This is a community toolkit that has been developed to raise awareness amongst South Asian parents and families about CSE and grooming.
- To provide the operational infrastructure to support engagement with communities, a **review of the Council's neighbourhood and engagement function is being finalised**. The aim is to provide more effective support to elected ward members in having a better understanding of their local communities and issues that impact on cohesion. This intelligence will be fed back to service teams, via elected members directly and service managers, to embed improved understanding of local issues.
- Continuing to honour the borough's civic traditions, including the Civic Parade and our annual **Armed Forces Day** celebrations, including members from all sections of the community.

### Bringing people together:

- The Council is involved with an extensive **programme of events** across the borough every year to foster positive relations – this has included the Diversity Festival as part of the Rotherham Show, Holocaust Memorial Day commemorations, Rotherham Carnival, the "Love is Louder" campaign, Volunteer Walk, "Reclaim the Night", Rotherham Pride, Workers' Memorial Day and International Women's Day.
- Funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner has been used by the Safer Rotherham Partnership and Rotherham United Community Sports Trust for the **Building Bridges project**, bringing together young people from different communities using film, sports and the arts to discuss difficult issues such as racism.
- For new arrivals who settle in Rotherham, the Council has an important role in **citizenship ceremonies** – we will seek to make this more explicitly linked to life in Rotherham.
- The **Love is Louder** partnership project run by Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance (REMA), which has worked with over 50 local organisations, has won a national Epic award as part of BBC Radio 3's Free Thinking Festival. Love is Louder won for celebrating diversity by counteracting negative perceptions of the town through an inclusive and creative approach to community cohesion.
- An enhanced focus on the Council's **arts, culture and tourism** will fully explore what more can be done through public events to bring communities together.

## Our rights and responsibilities towards each other:

- The **Safer Rotherham Partnership and Strategy**<sup>1</sup> has a crucial role to play, and has set out “building confident and cohesive communities” as a top priority for council and police joint work. Its wider **focus on disorder, anti-social behaviour** and other forms of enforcement which help to make Rotherham a safer, more welcoming place are critical to building community confidence and also bringing people together. The Council’s new, **robust taxi licensing policies and enforcement** activity is a further example, placing paramount importance on the safety of customers.
- **Tackling environment issues** – including through an enhanced focus on enforcement of littering, fly-tipping and other “enviro-crimes” - is also a major factor. Beyond this, however, it is critical for services to work with communities to **improve understanding** of how environmental services are delivered and what the **responsibilities are of all Rotherham citizens** in looking after and being proud of their local area.
- Where there are **particular issues to tackle in specific localities** the Council also has a key role to target activity, including the work of partners. One example is the dedicated **Eastwood Action Plan**, addressing the issues and challenges in this area and bringing people together to understand local needs and promote integration, including new arrivals. The Council will explore with local communities where similar, local action plans could add value.
- The Council also works with others to address the specific issues that threaten to undermine strong local communities, where people feel unsafe or unprotected. This includes through tackling issues such as **hate crime** with the police (where measures such as Operation Solar have improved reporting); and by working with **schools** in terms of their duty<sup>2</sup> to promote and report on cohesion issues.
- The Safer Rotherham Partnership has funded a **Hate Crime Advocates** project in 2016/17, helping to build the confidence of BME women and strengthen Rotherham’s response to hate crime.
- There is no room for **extremism or intolerance** from any part of the community or society in Rotherham – and the Council will do everything it can, working with partners, to challenge the negative influences that seek to undermine local communities and divide citizens. This includes fulfilling its **Prevent** duties, as a council and through schools.
- Distinct from Prevent, the Council is working on community responses to extremism and engaging with the Home Office counter extremism strategy through the appointment of a community engagement co-ordinator to support mainstream voices that are against extremism or intolerance.
- The Council also has particular responsibilities in response to the **right-wing marches and counter protests** that have had such a damaging impact on the town and its communities over recent years. While the Home Office has promised a full review of current legislation, this failed to emerge in 2016 and current powers mean it is almost

<sup>1</sup> See the Safer Rotherham Partnership (SRP) website at [www.rotherham.gov.uk/srp/homepage/3/priorities](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/srp/homepage/3/priorities)

<sup>2</sup> The Education and Inspections Act 2006 inserted a new section 21(5) to the Education Act 2002 introducing a duty on the governing bodies of maintained schools to promote community cohesion

impossible to stop these protests going ahead, despite the disruption they cause. In addition to managing the impacts of these marches and doing all it can to minimise the impact on the public and businesses, the Council has a further role to **bring community and faith leaders together** to reach a better mutual understanding of the long-term impacts on local communities. The “Enough is Enough” campaign is one example of the joint work in this area.

- The Council attends the South Yorkshire **Police and Crime Commissioner’s independent panel on protest marches**, to ensure a better understanding of the wider social, community and economic impacts of the protests, beyond the disruption on the day. As the threat of protests continues into 2017, this community leadership role will again be critical.

### Expanding opportunity and economic security:

- The Council agreed a new **Equality and Diversity Policy** in July 2016<sup>3</sup>, the delivery of which is now supported by officer and community reference groups overseeing a detailed strategy and action plan: “**Equality for All**”. This sets out the Council’s commitment to addressing the needs of all protected characteristic groups, as set out in legislation; but goes wider than this to tackle inequalities across the board – including in terms of socio-economic and health factors. Importantly, the strategy includes helpful profiles of different local communities across Rotherham (in terms of ethnicity, disabilities, religion, age, gender and sexual orientation and identity). A key focus of this work is to bring these different groups together and directly support the ambitions to build stronger communities that understand and can celebrate differences.
- Through the economic growth plan for 2015-25, progress is already being made in creating jobs by supporting businesses to start up and grow and attracting investment. The **new university centre** in the town centre, due to open in 2018, will help to boost skill levels and add to the vibrancy of the town centre as the new masterplan takes shape. To help people who find it difficult to secure and maintain decent employment, local partners will work with Sheffield City Region to develop a **work and health programme**. This will provide individually tailored support, focusing particularly on those with health problems or disabilities.
- **English language provision** is supported through the Council’s adult learning service. There is good provision of English language courses in Rotherham – but more needs to be done to reach out to those who are ineligible but in need of support, as well as alternative ways of delivering English language beyond the classroom setting. This includes conversational approaches and taking English language tuition into sports, arts and cultural settings. A particular focus is also needed to reach out to women who may be marginalised by mainstream English language courses. A first step will be to fully map current provision and discuss with the community how gaps and shortcomings can be addressed.
- Celebrating the **positive and strong role of women in Rotherham** is a further theme that demands particular focus through the partnership-wide commitment. For example, a Rotherham “Louder Together” group is developing positive ideas to create a “social movement” which shares and celebrates the many positive female role models in the town, encourages respect for women, increases aspiration and self-confidence, and

<sup>3</sup> See <http://moderngov.rotherham.gov.uk/documents/s106464/Appendix%20-%20Corporate%20Equality%20and%20Diversity%20Policy.pdf>

challenges sexist attitudes and behaviours. The group is keen to use social media to share positive stories of strong local women to challenge stereotypes, demonstrate the impact that supporting women has, and develop self-belief.

- The Safer Rotherham Partnership has supported **Remedi Girls Group**, working with girls aged between 13-17 who have been identified as vulnerable (e.g. they have low self-esteem, find it difficult to form relationships, or are being bullied at school or by siblings at home). The overall aim of the programme is to help girls and young women improve their level of self-esteem.

## **Working in Partnership – a shared commitment and programme of action**

The Council cannot achieve its ambitions to support stronger communities across Rotherham without ***working alongside its partners in the Rotherham Together Partnership***<sup>4</sup>.

This Partnership - re-launched and expanded in the autumn of 2015 – includes all the strategic partnership organisations across Rotherham with a clear priority to bring communities together.

The Partnership has now launched its new, long-term “*Rotherham Plan*” setting out a shared ambition for a more prosperous borough; and *building stronger communities* is a key theme within this.

The Council will therefore seek to focus and target its work to support stronger communities through the Rotherham Together Partnership structures. Specifically, it will work with its partners to set out a fresh programme of activity, including:

### **1. Establish a new community-led, Stronger Communities Forum for Rotherham**

An important first step will be to establish a new **Stronger Communities Forum for Rotherham** to change the terms of community-led debate on these critical issues, and advise all agencies involved in the Rotherham Together Partnership.

This should bring together service leads from across the Partnership with local community representatives and faith-based organisations, to rethink what actions and support are needed to bring people together.

The forum will build on engagement mechanisms established to respond to the impacts that repeated right-wing and counter protests have had on Rotherham over recent years. But it will also overtly bring different community voices and opinions together in a safe environment, and there is also commitment from local universities to support this work and bring in new thinking, analysis and expertise. In this way, we will be well placed to pick up signs of particular issues, difficulties, or breakdowns in integration.

The approach will focus on dialogue, but with communities in the driving seat. The forum would give communities the opportunity to engage directly with the full range of public service providers in Rotherham – the police, NHS, fire service, education institutions etc.

### **2. Provide a Stronger Communities grant programme to fund practical, community-led projects**

The **Council will provide £5,000 of funding** to design a community-led programme of support and activity with Voluntary Action Rotherham, to be **matched by a further £5,000 from the Rotherham Together Partnership**. Other public agencies and partners are called upon to add to this wherever they can, with the aim of producing a rolling pot of funding that can support small scale initiatives.

<sup>4</sup> See [www.rotherhamtogetherpartnership.org.uk](http://www.rotherhamtogetherpartnership.org.uk)

To further support and facilitate this, the Council will also **deliver against its plans to re-energise neighbourhood level working** (as noted above) by clarifying the role of ward-level support officers and local engagement teams who help ensure that the needs of local citizens are effectively communicated back to those that design and deliver the Council's services, as well as to partner agencies.

**3. Deliver a programme of activity that responds to the specific challenges and increased demand on services resulting from migration and settlement patterns**

The council, supported by a range of partners, will seek external funding, including from the government's **Controlling Migration Fund**, to deliver activity focused on:

- Service integration
- Rogue landlords
- English language support
- Cohesion
- Data and evidence gathering

**4. Commit to a programme of public engagement that seeks to have the “difficult conversations” about Rotherham’s recent history and current challenges, whilst focusing on the positive things that unite people**

A series of “roadshows” will be held across the borough and with a wide range of demographic groups, providing opportunities for an honest and open dialogue. The aim would be to promote understanding and empathy and ultimately develop shared **Rotherham values** that emphasise what people have in common rather than the things that divide them.

**Dedicated support to embed understanding within the Council – while also reaching out to communities**

Delivering against the ambitions and aims set out in this document requires **focused and dedicated support**. While the Council's Cabinet and entire Strategic Leadership Team are fully committed to driving this work forward, it requires coordination within the Council, coordination across partners, and coordination directly with communities and their representative groups.

The Council will therefore secure dedicated officer support to lead on this activity and ensure that there are a range of focused actions. Wherever possible, it will seek to fund this support via relevant external sources of funding, including those from central Government which may be linked to the recommendations included in Dame Louise Casey's independent report on integration and cohesion<sup>5</sup>.

It is envisaged that the officer(s) would:

- Directly support the work of the forum
- Be skilled in direct interaction with community and faith groups about issues associated with cohesion and integration – able to have the “difficult conversations” that are often required
- Channel intelligence back to strategic and service managers, and elected members (including Cabinet)
- Work in tandem with the Neighbourhood and Engagement Service, drawing on their support to elected members to further enhance the information being fed back to service teams on the needs of local communities

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration>

- Have similar access to senior leadership colleagues in all partner organisations
- Facilitate and deliver training and awareness raising amongst Council staff, and also within partner organisations
- Provide direct outreach support to communities, leading projects where appropriate to bring different communities together

## **How the Council will embed its focus on stronger communities**

In addition to the dedicated capacity noted above and the associated learning and awareness-raising associated with it, there are a number of further ways that the Council (and partners) can look to “mainstream” this critical focus on building stronger communities:

- Ensuring a key focus within the refreshed Council (corporate) Plan for 2017/18 onwards, complete with appropriate success/outcome measures defined so that the situation can be monitored, on an ongoing basis, at the highest level.
- Ensuring the supporting service business plans that each Council directorate produces in support of the Council Plan have an overt focus on the role of each service in fostering stronger communities.
- Ensuring that future public satisfaction surveys carried out by the Council address the issue of community cohesion and integration, so that the views and opinions of local people can be tracked and trends analysed.

## **Maintaining focus and looking to the future**

The “Building Stronger Communities” statement will be subject to political leadership at the Council at the highest level by the Leader, who is also the current Chair of the Rotherham Together Partnership.

At officer level activity will be championed and overseen across the Council by the Assistant Chief Executive.

The Stronger Communities Forum will also provide a critical external perspective that can provide robust and constructive challenge, both to the Council and to other partners.

There will be ongoing engagement with the LGA specialist interest group led by Leeds and Luton councils to ensure that Rotherham is aware of and learning from best practice nationally.

## **Resources and further advice**

- The Casey Review: a review into opportunity and integration  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-casey-review-a-review-into-opportunity-and-integration>
- Community Cohesion: Seven Steps A Practitioner's Guide  
[www.tedcandle.co.uk/publications/015%20Community%20cohesion%20seven%20steps%20%20Community%20Cohesion%20Unit%20.pdf](http://www.tedcandle.co.uk/publications/015%20Community%20cohesion%20seven%20steps%20%20Community%20Cohesion%20Unit%20.pdf)
- Local Government Association's helpful resource pages at [www.local.gov.uk/community-safety/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/7878729](http://www.local.gov.uk/community-safety/-/journal_content/56/10180/7878729)