

Background to the Budget and Financial Strategy

1.	Budget Challenges
1.1	Strategic Context
1.1.1	The last three years have seen unprecedented impacts on society. From the lockdowns and restrictions of Covid-19, to the acute challenges posed by the rising cost of living, collectively these matters have had unparalleled impacts on the lives and livelihoods of people, families and organisations. During 2022/23 the global economic position significantly changed with rising inflation (10.5% as at December 2022) and substantial increases in energy prices dramatically increasing the base costs for Local Authorities. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy update report to Cabinet in November 2022 reported that the Council faced a budget gap of almost £10m per year from 2023/24 onwards as a result of the rise in base costs. These cost pressures and the uncertainty surrounding them remain the main financial challenge facing the Council's Budget and MTFS.
1.1.2	Amidst the uncertainty that this has created, the constant throughout these events in the borough has been the unwavering support provided within and between communities and organisations to support those that needed it. Through the Rotherham Heroes programme alone, for example, over 1,280 people offered their services as volunteers to support those that needed it.
1.1.3	Nevertheless, a significant amount of national and international research has illustrated that these events have widened existing inequalities across a range of indicators. Meanwhile forecasts from independent organisations such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies suggest that the rising cost of living will disproportionately impact the most vulnerable groups this winter. Critically, this body of evidence illustrates that the case for levelling up the country has never been stronger.
1.1.4	However, as outlined in the main report the fiscal pressures impacting public finances are extremely significant. At a time when demand for services is growing and costs continuing to rise with inflation. Like families across the country, this necessitates having to consider where costs can be reduced or additional income generated.
1.2	Local Context
1.2.1	In facing these pressures, it makes it even more imperative to remain focused on delivering the central ethos of the Council Plan to drive

	<p>better outcomes for the people and places of the entire borough. This requires actions and progress across its five priority themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every neighbourhood thriving • People are safe, healthy and live well • Every child able to fulfil their potential • Expanding economic opportunity • A cleaner, greener local environment
1.2.2	<p>Our new Council Plan has already made significant progress in the delivery of key activities over the last year that are making real, tangible changes including:</p>
	<p>Every neighbourhood thriving:</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s Euros - programme of cultural events took place alongside the four matches and Women of the World Festival in July 2022. • Towns and villages fund delivery underway with schemes complete in Greasbrough, Hellaby and Maltby West, and Dalton and Thrybergh. Two further projects are currently being delivered in Hooper and Swinton Rockingham, with three more ready to deliver. • Rotherham Show took place, welcoming more than 60,000 residents to Clifton Park. • Keppel’s Column opened to the public following restoration programme.
	<p>People are safe, healthy and live well</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council gained ‘Exemplar’ status for tenant engagement from Tpas. • Cabinet approved plans for new £2.1m day centre in Canklow to provide opportunities for Adults with Learning Disabilities. • Delivering decent and affordable homes across the borough that will support 400 families, with work complete on 45 already.
	<p>Every child able to fulfil their potential</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being officially rated good’ for children’s services by Ofsted, in the inspection since intervention finished and where it evidenced that progress has been sustained and further improvements made. • Work started on a new £4.5 million state-of-the art facility to replace the upper school buildings at Newman School. • Cabinet agreed increase in fees and allowances paid to foster carers and campaign launched to campaign to recruit more local foster carers.

	Expanding economic opportunity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commencing construction on the £47m Forge Island scheme in the Town Centre scheme that when completed will be homes to a state-of-the-art cinema, 69 room hotel, and six restaurants providing food from around the world. • Supporting 760 people into employment or training through the Pathways and Inspire programmes since November 2020. • Ground broken on £5.4m business centre at Century Business Park. • £10.87 million pounds of social value commitments secured through council contracts in 2022.
	A cleaner, greener local environment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flood risk reduced with the new Forge Island Flood Barrier operational and new pumping station and drain completed. • Consultation on the masterplans for improvements at Rother Valley and Thrybergh Country Parks. • 7391 trees will be planted this financial year by trees and woodlands. • Winter working plan to grub and weed 240 areas across the borough by March 2023. • Street bin replacement project 75% complete and on track to complete by August 2023. • APSE land audit management system (LAMs) launched in the grounds and streets service to benchmark against other local authority users. • Digitizing the grounds and streets service by introducing a new IT system called Confirm. • Increased wildflower areas from 5000m² to 15000m². • Waste delivered to landfill down to 0.84% from a 5% target within the BDR partnership.
1.2.3	<p>However, despite this progress, the borough continues to face significant challenges that have impacted on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), including:</p> <p>A changing population:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 265,800 people, with 47,100 children (under 15) and 68,600 over 60s live in the borough. The population is ageing with one in four people aged over 60, a proportion slightly higher than the national average. • Approximately nine out of ten (92%) usual residents of Rotherham were born in the UK. This shows that the borough has become more diverse over the last decade since the 2011 census, when 93.5% of usual residents were born in the UK.

	<p>Having a greater proportion of people vulnerable to rising living costs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 57,560 Rotherham residents (22%) were living in the most deprived 10% of England. • Rotherham’s Food in Crisis Partnership, which supports people who are struggling financially, saw a more than four-fold increase in the number of food parcels provided between 2019/20 (4,357) and 2020/21 (19,466). <p>A productivity gap, mainly due to low skills and where too many people are employed in jobs with lower wages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment rate at 73.9% as of June 2022. This has been growing over the past decade, although is still slightly below the regional (74.7%) and national rate (75.5%). • Full-time weekly pay is £72 lower for Rotherham residents compared to the national average. Within the borough, it is £164.20 lower for women than men, much wider than the Yorkshire and Humber (Y&H) (£111.10) and Great Britain (GB) (£97.40) gaps. • 13,100 16-64s have no qualifications, equating to 8.3%, compared to 7.8% in Y&H and 6.6% for GB. • 32% of 16-64s have an NVQ4 or above qualification, compared to 38% in Y&H and 43.6% in GB (ONS data 2021). <p>Ensuring our young people have the best start in life:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34.6% of Rotherham children were living in poverty in 2020, based on research from End Child Poverty. • 64.5% of children under 5 achieving “good” level of development, compared to 65.2% nationally. <p>And where too many lives are impacted by poor health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13,300 16-64 year olds are economically inactive due to long-term sickness. This represents 36.3% of those economically inactive overall in Rotherham, compared to around 25% in Y&H and GB. • Life expectancy is lower than the national average in Rotherham, 77.5 for men (England average 79.4) and 81 for women (England 83.1). There is also variation within the borough. • Life expectancy is 9.1 years lower for men and 10.5 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Rotherham, compared to the least deprived.
2.	Key Issues – Budget Proposals

2.1	This section incorporates the financial matters related to the Budget and MTFS, which need to be considered by Cabinet for recommendation to Council.
2.2	In January 2022 the Council approved the new Council Plan for 2022-25 and this plan has driven the budget priorities for 2023/24. Its five themes (set out at paragraph 1.2.1) informing our way of working to achieve better outcomes.
2.3	The Council Plan provides a strong sense of the strategic direction for the budget and the associated investments to both deliver the Council's priorities and achieve a balanced budget, including delivering agreed and new proposals for savings that are a key part of the proposed balanced budget and MTFS for 2023/24 to 2025/26.
2.4	<p>The Budget outlined in this report will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • benefit all residents whilst ensuring those that need extra support receive it; • provide significant additional provision to address the inflationary and energy prices pressures that have impacted the Council's Budget in 2022/23 and will impact the Council's MTFS across 2023/24 to 2025/26; • revise the Council's assumptions around inflationary increases, energy prices projections, proposed fees and charges uplifts and pay assumptions across the MTFS to address the current economic uncertainty as far as is possible; • provide significant additional funding to ensure adult social care services are sustainable in the medium term through the provision of funding to support increasing demand and service pressures and support the stability and sustainability of vital provider services; • deliver significant investment in housing and regeneration across the borough, ensuring the continuation of the recent strong economic growth and enhancing employment opportunities and the local environment; • improve the customer experience of residents by continuing to focus on corporate and service transformation and efficiency, ensuring services continue to be equipped to deliver a high standard for citizens, businesses and stakeholders of the borough that is fully aligned to the borough's Community Strategy and Council Plan priorities; and

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provide further support to help those households on the lowest incomes with their cost of living pressures over the next two coming years through the provision of further Additional Local Council Tax Support.
2.5	The key impact of the proposed budget on each Directorate is shown below:
2.5.1	Adult Care, Housing and Public Health
	Adult Care
2.5.1.1	<p>Adult Care is responsible for the provision of social care support and services for Care Act eligible groups of adults in the borough, including older people and adults with mental ill-health problems, learning disabilities, autism and physical and/or sensory impairments. The Directorate also supports people with housing and support requirements outside of the Care Act duties through housing related support and this includes, for example, people with complex lives and people who have experienced domestic abuse. The Directorate has been and continues to be at the forefront of the Councils response to the Covid-19 pandemic supporting hospital discharges, testing and vaccination programmes as well as ensuring continuation of service delivery. The Directorate also has a key role in supporting the wider health and care system and externally commissioned providers such as care homes, home care, supported living and voluntary sector partners including micro-enterprises to continue to deliver critical services to customers.</p>
2.5.1.2	<p>Adult Care has statutory responsibility under the Care Act 2014 for managing and delivering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information, advice and advocacy Prevention and recovery Safeguarding Assessment and care planning Care, at home and in residential settings including managing any provider failure Adult Care also has a statutory responsibility under the Mental Health Act 1983 for the 24 hour provision of the Approved Mental Health Professional
2.5.1.3	<p>In addition to the pressures and new demand created by the legacy impacts of Covid-19, and more recently the cost of living crisis, the Directorate continues to face a number of significant challenges as a result of changes in population demographics. There is a sustained budget pressure as a result of an aging population; a rising population of working age adults with long term health and care support needs; increasing acuity and complexity of need for those residents who need support; and increased cost pressures for</p>

	externally commissioned adult care providers driven by the pandemic. The associated costs and increased risk faced by externally commissioned providers as a result of Covid-19 and cost of living pressures has highlighted the need for the Directorate to respond with an aligned budget strategy to support sustainable fee increases.
2.5.1.4	The focus for 2023/24 is to continue address the need to reduce demand, working with health and social care partners in the borough, alongside making significant changes to the way care services are delivered to make care more personalised, responsive and cost effective.
2.5.1.5	Quality of care will continue to be developed and improved through further integration between health and care partners in the borough. Partnership working across the health and care system in the borough has always been strong but has been positively further driven by the collaborative spirit built up during the response to the pandemic. With the introduction of the new Health and Care Act 2022 and implementation of the South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board and Care Partnership, the Council will continue to have a key role in supporting this transition to a wider system integration and respond proactively to reforms of the NHS, to ensure place priorities, population health management and tackling health inequalities remain at the heart of the local offer.
2.5.1.6	Supporting people to live well at home, for as long as possible, remains a key focus, with home first principles at the core of the delivery model. This approach will improve quality of life for residents, while reducing cost. This will be achieved through continued investment in preventative care and increased use of emerging technology, to reduce acute and long-term interventions; access to appropriate, coordinated support including more effective support to carers; and personalised care delivered by skilled care workers, family and through new technology.
2.5.1.7	Despite the legacy impacts of Covid-19, the Adult Care Directorate remains committed to delivering long-standing transformation programmes. This includes a commitment to build and deliver a new day opportunities service for people with a learning disability, autism and high support needs. This involves key capital investment of £2.1m. Support for adults with high support needs will be transformed to enable people to access both high quality primary care and a broader range of care pathways, and stronger connections to family and community support. Similarly, with health partners, the Council will continue with the remodelling of mental health services, with a greater focus on early intervention, improved accessibility, and more responsive, personalised service.

2.5.1.8	The priorities, as outlined, can only be achieved if there is a high quality, motivated social care workforce in place. Further implementation of the operating model put in place during 2020/21 (but impacted by the pandemic in terms of the delay of the second phase roll out of strength-based working) will take place, applying the learning from the initial period of operation to refine the approach and engender continuous improvement. This was a whole system change in the way services and resources are organised and additional evidential changes will assist Adult Care to manage and deliver the services it provides. This continues to be assisted by a comprehensive workforce development plan, building skills and confidence in assessments and delivery of cost-effective strength-based outcomes.
2.5.1.9	Supporting the internal and external workforce will also be a key facet of 2023/24 with processes in place to support staff and to ensure that staff working remotely as well as those in front facing delivery roles have access to the resources, equipment and managerial support they need to effectively and safely discharge their duties.
2.5.1.10	Recruitment and retention of workers in the Adult Care Sector is presenting significant challenges for the borough, broadly in line with the national position. Actions to address this have been put in place during 2022/23 and will continue during 2023/24. This includes a targeted recruitment programme, promotion of the care sector as a career of choice and development of an achievable and supportive career progression pathway.
2.5.1.11	These priorities are designed to deliver a long term, sustainable reduction in demand pressures facing the directorate, and thus better able to manage to deliver services within budget.
Public Health	
2.5.1.12	Public health co-ordinated the Council's response to Covid-19 throughout 2021/22 from a health protection perspective and this has been and continues to be the primary focus of activity. Nevertheless, Public Health is an integral element of the borough's health and social care system, promoting wellbeing and independence. Tackling health inequalities resulting from the pandemic will be a key aspect of activity during 2023/24 alongside the statutory functions that Public Health is responsible for. These include the commissioning of public health services, including: sexual health; drug and alcohol; 0-19; and a holistic wellbeing service which encompasses NHS Health Checks, weight management, alcohol brief interventions and stop smoking treatment.
2.5.1.13	Alongside commissioning services, Public Health has a pivotal role in providing intelligence, evidence-based advice, advocacy and challenge to ensure that the health of residents is safeguarded. This

	has been crucial in supporting activity to understand the impacts and trends of the Covid-19 pandemic. Public health advice has been provided not just to the NHS and across the Council Directorates, but across the whole borough to include schools, workplaces and social care providers to support continuation of critical activity and responses to emerging infection control and public health requirements.
2.5.1.14	Life expectancy at birth in Rotherham for males is 1.9 years below the England average and for females is 2.1 years below the England average, which is indicative of a range of health inequalities in the borough. This is further demonstrated by a difference in life expectancy of over nine years for males and over ten years for females between the borough's most and least deprived communities. The borough has higher smoking prevalence at 16.9% in adults, and lower levels of physical activity in adults at 62%, compared to the national average (13.0% and 65.9% respectively) which also correspond with local patterns of deprivation. These along with the associated health gap contribute to lower levels of economic productivity in the borough demonstrating the strong links between prosperity and health.
2.5.1.15	Public Health is working with colleagues across the Council and with partners, to ensure that health is considered in all policies, contributing to a wider impact on health, wellbeing and prosperity for residents. Public Health have continued to lead the implementation of the Better Mental Health for All strategy. Public Health have also continued delivery of the Be the One campaign and to focus on needs during the pandemic including through the loneliness plan for the borough.
	Housing Services
2.5.1.16	Housing Services hold overall landlord responsibility for the management and maintenance of the borough's 20,000 council homes. They provide information, advice and guidance on the housing options available to residents and oversee any adaptation to homes required by residents, e.g. for accessibility/health reasons. Housing Services are also responsible for delivering the programme of new, affordable, high quality Council homes in the borough. In addition, the service works with housing associations and housing developers to deliver a range of new homes to meet the Borough's housing needs and delivery targets.
2.5.1.17	The service will continue to ensure that a robust, sustainable Housing Revenue Account 30-year Business Plan is in place. The effective delivery of this plan will ensure that the borough's 20,000 council homes are maintained effectively, meet the decent homes standard and continue to develop an ambitious programme of new homes in the Borough to meet future demands and replace those lost through

	the right to buy scheme. This will be achieved by building on council owned sites and acquiring new homes from private developers through Section 106 agreements.
2.5.1.18	The General Fund budget will continue to be used to address homelessness and deliver aids and adaptations to homes.
2.5.1.19	Efficiencies will continue to be delivered by sustaining tenancies and supporting tenants in financial difficulties, high performance on void turnaround times; rent recovery and leasehold income collection. Alongside this, savings continue to be made in the repairs and maintenance service via the new contract that started in April 2020. These measures will both increase income and deliver efficiencies, with no detrimental impact on residents in the borough.
2.5.1.20	The homelessness service has seen demand increased significantly due to Covid-19, however successful grant funding applications have enabled a new rough sleeper team to be established and further resources deployed to meet local housing needs.
2.5.2	Children and Young People’s Services
2.5.2.1	The Directorate for Children and Young People’s Services (CYPS) is responsible for early help and family engagement, the youth justice service, social care services, education and inclusion. It has a statutory responsibility for the safeguarding of children and young people and is supported by a dedicated performance, quality, commissioning and business support team.
2.5.2.2	Nationally, children’s social care services are operating in a challenging budget and demand context. There has been an unprecedented surge in demand for children’s social care support in recent years - a trend that shows no signs of abating and continues to see a rise in children in care across the region.
2.5.2.3	Against the national trend, Rotherham’s improvements have positively impacted on reducing the number of children in care. The reduced demand has been supported through ongoing improvements to Early Help, Family Group Conferencing and in partnership working via the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub. There continues to be a significant increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), with a higher percentage accepted via the Governments National Transfer Scheme, this has resulted in the highest UASC numbers recorded. From 8 UASC as at the end of November 2021 to the current figure of 45 as at the end of November 2022.
2.5.2.4	Rotherham is one of 75 Local Authorities with identified earmarked Family Hub and Start for Life funding. The bid for this funding was submitted in October 2022. This will bring in additional resource and

	add value across a number of key themes including infant feeding and parent/infant mental health. It will also develop closer collaboration and co-location across the public, community and voluntary sector in Rotherham to enable easier and swifter access to services for children and families.
2.5.2.5	The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has confirmed continued investment in the Supporting Families Programme and has launched a revised outcomes framework to help families combat problems such as financial insecurity, unemployment, risk of homelessness and educational inequality.
2.5.2.6	In 2023/24 the Directorate priorities are to continue to sustain improvements across Children's Services, through ongoing development and implementation of the early help and social care pathway; to continue building in-borough capacity for both Looked After Children through the ongoing Residential Care Home programme and Foster Care offer; additional provision for children with learning difficulties and disabilities; and to continue to further develop interventions and services designed to better support children and families earlier.
2.5.2.7	The new education and inclusion skills service operating model is now embedded which incorporates key strategic education forums including Schools Forums, School Leaders Forums and the Rotherham Education Strategic Partnership. School facing services will be reviewed to ensure that they are efficient and effective, whilst continuing to improve educational outcomes, particularly at Key Stage 4 and for children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities SEND.
2.5.2.8	Following on from the SEND inspection in 2021, additional investment has been provided to support demand management, ensure timeliness in assessing for and developing good quality EHCPs and additional resource to support the promotion and upkeep of the Local Offer. In terms of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS) additional funding has been received from the Clinical Commission Group (CCG) to support service delivery.
2.5.2.9	Significant work to support movement to a sufficient position with the Dedicated Schools Grant High Needs budget has supported Rotherham to become a Safety Valve Agreement Area. This has supported the continued investment in SEND Sufficiency to enhance SEND education provision in the borough, and support continued SEND transformation across the borough. This includes continued focused investments, creating additional SEND places in Rotherham that enhance education outcomes for this cohort.

2.5.2.10	Actions to deliver 2022/23 second phase of the Early Help & Social Care (EH & SC) pathway savings are complete with transformation plans now focusing on the Front Door. The implementation is linked to a reduction of overall caseloads (CIN/CP/LAC) with LAC numbers reducing from a high of 654 in August 2018 to 554 at the end of October 2022. This number incorporates the UASC of which there were 34. The financial forecast projects a continued reduction in 2023/24.
2.5.2.11	The continued downward trajectory in the number of LAC is linked to the impact of the Demand and Market Management Strategies.
2.5.3	Regeneration and Environment
2.5.3.1	The Regeneration and Environment Directorate's focus is to develop and promote Rotherham as a good place to live, work and visit; with emphasis on delivering against the Council Plan priorities and the Year Ahead commitments. The Directorate has been successful in securing significant external funding, linked to the priorities and building on the Council's own investments. A key part of the work for 2023/24 and into future years is to deliver these projects and programmes.
2.5.3.2	<p>The Directorate has a broad portfolio of responsibilities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community safety • Environmental protection • Licensing • Schools' catering and cleaning • Waste collection, management and disposal • Street cleaning and grounds maintenance • Parks, countryside and green spaces • Leisure, sport and physical activity • Tourism and events • Heritage, museums and archives • Libraries and neighbourhood Hubs • Planning and Building Control • Regeneration and Economic Development • Transport and highways • Asset Management and Property • Emergency Planning, Business Continuity • Council-wide Health and Safety • Passenger Transport and Fleet Services
2.5.3.3	The Directorate's budget is focussed on the delivery of frontline services to ensure the borough's neighbourhoods are clean, safe and inclusive, to create an environment where people want to live, work and play. In addition, the Directorate has a significant Capital

	budget consisting of Council funding and funding from external sources.
2.5.3.4	The adopted Town Centre Masterplan is being implemented, with streetscene (Public Realm) improvements now visible in new town centre zones including Bridgegate, College Street and Frederick Street. Housing developments are reaching final completion (both public and private led schemes). The towns landscape is gradually changing, it features the newly built flood alleviation works including the Canal Barrier and the Goit pumping station with both now complete. The Forge Island Leisure Development with Arc Cinema, Travelodge and a portfolio of restaurants and cafés is now into the construction phase.
2.5.3.5	Nearly £31.6m was secured from the Towns Fund to carry out ambitious regeneration projects across the town centre, Parkgate/Eastwood and Templeborough and two Levelling Up Fund (LUF) bids have been approved bringing in a further £39.41m. The LUF programmes are aimed at further bolstering the town centre regeneration programme as well as developing the leisure economy and skills. These include investments at Wentworth Woodhouse, Magna Science Centre, Maltby Academy and Gulliver’s Valley resort in addition to the Council facilities at Rother Valley and Thrybergh Country Parks. Integrated into plans is the Council’s social value policy helping to ensure opportunities for local people, particularly those hardest hit, are maximised as part of these and other significant local investments.
2.5.3.6	The in-house Highways Service has made huge progress in improving the roads via the “£24 million to 2024” roads programme, this will continue into 2023/24. 2022/23 saw the completion of the £44m Parkway widening and road improvement scheme, along with numerous other transport schemes with more to come in 2023/34.
2.5.3.7	This year saw the visit to Rotherham of a major European sporting competition when the Women’s Euro’s came to the Borough. The Town Centre hosted 4 Fan Parties and the inaugural WOW (Women of the World) Festival took place at Clifton Park. The Council was successful in delivering the annual Rotherham Show over two days in September and other cultural and artistic activities for residents were delivered.
2.5.4	Corporate Support Services
2.5.4.1	Two directorates make up the Council’s corporate services - Finance & Customer Services and Assistant Chief Executives. Their role is to support the delivery of front-line Council services by promoting the most effective use of resources whilst ensuring services are compliant with council regulation and national legislation. These services provide leadership, influence, advice and a cross-cutting

	perspective to enable the Council to operate effectively. They are responsible for providing effective support and advice to all Council services to help ensure they function efficiently; and to support elected members in making informed and lawful decisions.
	Finance and Customer Services
2.5.4.2	<p>The Directorate provides services in the following four areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Services <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Finance, Accounting, Insurance 2. Local Taxation, Housing Benefit, Income Collection and Financial Assessments for care services 3. Procurement • Legal Services <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Legal 2. Elections 3. Registration and Bereavement • Customer, Information and Digital Services <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ICT 2. Customer Services 3. Information Management • Internal Audit
2.5.4.3	The Directorate is committed to providing outstanding, high quality professional support services that are valued by its customers, both internal and external. The directorate has a key role in ensuring effective governance arrangements are in place across the Council and encompasses a number of key statutory roles (Chief Finance Officer [S151 Officer], Monitoring Officer [MO] and Senior Information Reporting Officer [SIRO]).
2.5.4.4	The work of the Directorate was critical to supporting the Council in service continuity during the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring remote access to Council systems for staff and elected members. This technology continues to enable efficient and flexible working across council services.
2.5.4.5	The changes that were implemented during the pandemic have been embedded where they continue to be beneficial and this includes the faster payment arrangements that were put in place for local businesses, ensuring their cash flows continue to be supported during the current difficult economic times. This will remain in place to support businesses whilst the volatility in the economy remains.
2.5.4.6	Following on from the many online processes developed in recent years, improving Customer access to services continues to be a priority. The face to face customer service model and booking system

	is now embedded, supporting those customers who aren't able to access digital solutions. The previous short term investment made in customer services telephone staffing has assisted in managing demand and will be continued within this budget for a further year whilst further digital solutions are being developed and implemented. A key focus for the year ahead remains to improve telephone wait times.
2.5.4.7	The Revenues and Benefits service have once again maintained strong performance despite the challenges facing many Rotherham residents whose household finances have been stretched and this supports the Councils budget overall given the significant inflationary impact on budgets. The delivery of Council funded support schemes and the careful and strategic use of various Government Grants including the Household Support Fund will enable over 14,000 households to receive additional Local Council Tax Support as the proposed budget continues this, providing much needed financial support to those households on the lowest incomes.
	Assistant Chief Executive's Directorate
2.5.4.8	The Directorate has six distinct areas of responsibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Resources & Organisational Development • Neighbourhoods • Communications & Marketing • Democratic Services • Policy, Performance and Intelligence • Change and Innovation
2.5.4.9	The Directorate has continued to provide support to services across Council directorates, including facilitating the delivery and monitoring of Council priorities as set out in the Year Ahead Plan, as well as the development of the priorities set out in the Council Plan.
2.5.4.10	During 2022/23, the directorate has continued to play a pivotal role in the Council. Key deliverables include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a reliable source of information to the public and the workforce in different formats, including regular neighbourhood e-bulletins. • Supporting the development and implementation of key strategic documents including the Council Plan and Year Ahead Delivery Plan, Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and Rotherham Together Partnership Plan. • Supporting the delivery of the Council Plan's priorities through an internal, cross-council delivery programme.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustaining high quality data reporting on a daily and weekly basis, providing essential information to inform decision making throughout the pandemic. • Continuation of effective and accountable democratic decision making. • Supporting members to act as community leaders so they can initiate and fund activity to support local vulnerable people and deliver ward priorities. • Development and implementation of a new Workforce Plan that aims to position the Council as an ‘employer of choice’, improving our attraction, retention and engagement methods.
2.5.4.11	<p>The directorate has also continued to deliver its core provisions including internal and external communications and HR support functions. Work has continued as part of the now refreshed Thriving Neighbourhoods strategy to support our communities and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), including developing ward plans. The Directorate has also continued to facilitate partnership working and development of key policy areas including social value, climate change and equalities. This has included the continuation of Real Living Wage Accreditation for the Council, supporting the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme and the Homes for Ukraine Scheme as well supporting the development of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.</p>
2.5.4.12	<p>The directorate has also worked closely with all directorates to monitor and deliver the new Council Plan for 2022-25, including delivery of the Council’s priorities. This has included developing a new Year Ahead Delivery Plan to support these objectives, detailing the key milestones to be achieved for 2023/24.</p>
2.5.4.13	<p>In the coming 12 months, the directorate aims to continue to provide excellent support services across the Council. Key areas of focus will be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain high quality communication and information to residents, partners and the workforce. • Provide oversight and quality assurance on progress against the Council Plan priorities through effective reporting and monitoring of the Year Ahead Delivery Plan. • Secure further commitments through our social value policy and work with partners to maximise the impact of our collective spending power. • Strive to embed equalities, diversity and inclusion commitments into Council activity on the journey to ‘excellent’ against the Equalities Framework for Local Government. • Continue to work with members to deliver the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy, developing the action plan that underpins the strategy and building on the strengths and assets in communities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance partnership working to achieve better outcomes across the borough through the delivery of the recently approved Rotherham Together Plan. • Continue to develop and support the workforce, enhancing skills and knowledge across the organisation. • Refresh the member development programme, supporting members to provide effective leadership. • Continue to support Members in delivering the expectations of the electorate’s community priorities, ensuring the robust and efficient management of Council business and maintaining an open and transparent scrutiny function. • Develop a strengthened approach to our development and use of business intelligence to build a clearer picture of the borough and its residents as well as informing decision-making. • Implementing our new workforce plan to ensure that we attract, recruit and retain talented individuals into key roles becoming an employer of choice, and also strengthen our engagement and development of our existing workforce.
2.5.4.14	<p>In the coming 12 months, the Directorate will continue to challenge itself and review its practices and develop and modernise its service offer. Continuous improvement will be founded on the principles of best value and sustainable change.</p>