

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2022 / 2023



A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD, CLLR MAGGI CLARK

Scrutiny is an important non-political process carried out by Councillors on behalf of the people of Rotherham. Scrutiny raises standards by challenging the Council's performance and by checking whether policies and services meet people's needs. Scrutiny also considers the work of other organisations that partner with the Council to deliver services. Pre-decision scrutiny maintains strong ties to decision-making by examining the Council's Cabinet decisions and holding them to account.

This report presents a summary of scrutiny work by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) and the Select Commissions: Health (HSC), Improving Lives (ILSC) and Improving Places (IPSC). To showcase the impact of scrutiny in helping the Council achieve its goals, this report describes outcomes across all six Council Plan 2022-2025 themes:



- | | |
|---|---|
| 1: Every Neighbourhood Thriving | 4: Expanding Economic Opportunity |
| 2: People are Safe, Healthy and Live Well | 5: A Cleaner, Greener Local Environment |
| 3: Every Child Able to Fulfil Their Potential | 6: One Council |

Scrutiny considers and feeds into shaping direction for strategies and policies and delivers an annual work programme. An important example of this is pre-decision scrutiny, which examines Cabinet decisions before they are agreed. Last year, OSMB considered 24 pre-decision strategies and policies, keeping a close eye on the in-year budget position and service pressures among other issues. The work programme's main focus is on monitoring specific Council Plan performance objectives, key initiatives and partnership work while retaining an element of flexibility allowing it to respond to important issues as they arise. Scrutinising the Council's response to the cost-of-living crisis and pandemic recovery have been major themes this year, featuring in the work programmes of each of the Commissions and OSMB.

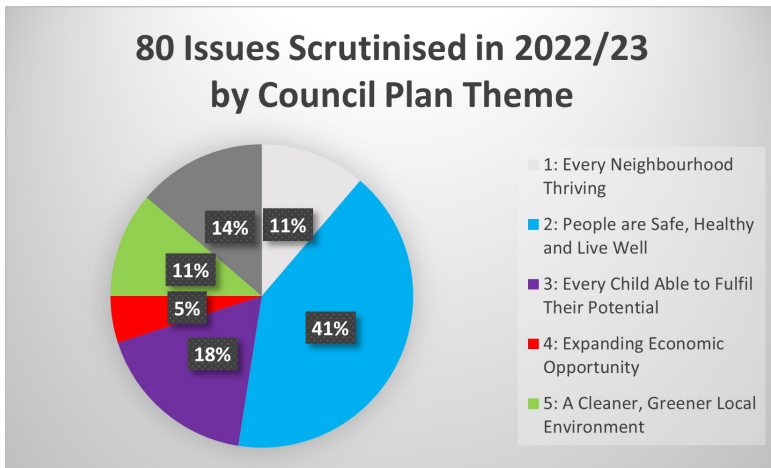
A substantial portion of the scrutiny work programme focusses on monitoring specific Council Plan performance objectives, key initiatives and partnership work. The work programme also retains an element of flexibility, to consider and respond to other important issues as they arise. 2022/23 was an important year for Rotherham's continued recovery from the pandemic and response to the cost of living crisis. One of the highlights of the year is the opportunity to work with Rotherham Youth Cabinet when they take over an OSMB meeting in the Children's Commissioner Takeover Challenge (CCTC). A further highlight was participating in the LGA pilot on Scrutiny of Children's Services.

I wish to thank all Scrutiny Members and co-opted members for their hard work and commitment to carrying out meaningful scrutiny in Rotherham. Together we have worked cross party to hold the executive to account, scrutinise key decisions and provide feedback to the cabinet before their decision making.

CLLR MAGGI CLARK,

CHAIR OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

2022-2023 SCRUTINY AT A GLANCE



Scrutiny examined 80 issues this year to monitor the Council's performance on its objectives within five Council Plan themes, delivery of key initiatives and partnerships, and future directions for policies and services including scrutiny of decisions before they are agreed. Scrutiny also examined the impact of local or national issues as they emerged.

SUGGEST A TOPIC FOR SCRUTINY

Suggest a Topic for Scrutiny - we want your views

If you have an issue or a topic of concern for Scrutiny to consider, please fill in the form below. Make sure to click 'submit' at the bottom of the page once completed.

Hi, I would like you to fill in this form, for your own use and email address.

1. What is the problem or nature of your concern?
Enter your answer
2. Who does this affect?
Enter your answer
3. What would help solve the problem?
Enter your answer
4. What have you done to try and resolve this (if anything)?
Enter your answer
5. Which Council Plan theme does it relate to?
 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
 The Council

Send me an email receipt of my responses

To suggest a potential topic, Councillors can now use an online form through the Members' Portal to show how scrutiny of the topic could make a difference, or how it would help the Council achieve objectives in the Council Plan 2022-2025.

FAQ:

WHAT IS SCRUTINY?

Scrutiny aims to ensure that public services and policies best meet the needs of Rotherham Residents. Scrutiny acts as the check and balance to the Council's Executive decision makers, the Cabinet, by contributing to policy review and development; holding the Council's Cabinet and partners to account for decisions and performance; investigating issues that matter to residents; working with Council officers and partners to improve services.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

Any Councillor who is not a member of the Cabinet can participate. Committees also have co-opted members and dedicated officer support. Cabinet Members, Strategic Directors, and representatives of partner organisations are invited to attend meetings to discuss issues.

WHAT KINDS OF THINGS CAN SCRUTINY LOOK AT?

Councillors and Co-opted Members prioritise issues. Because of the time commitment and effort required. It is not possible to look at every issue. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board manages the overall Work Programme, considering whether scrutiny can make a real difference by looking at an issue.

IS THERE ANYTHING SCRUTINY CAN'T EXAMINE?

Individual complaints or regulatory decisions are not appropriate topics for scrutiny.

IS SCRUTINY POLITICAL?

Councillors across all political groups participate, setting aside party politics to look objectively at issue, basing findings on evidence.

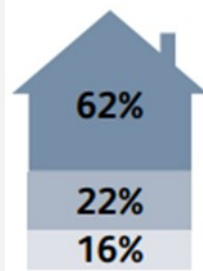
CAN I SUGGEST A TOPIC?

Yes, contact your ward Councillor to suggest a topic.

THEME 1: EVERY NEIGHBOURHOOD THRIVING

REVIEW OF IMPACT OF SELECTIVE LICENSING

An IPSC spotlight review of the Impact of Selective Licensing was undertaken to provide feedback on the implementation of the scheme at its halfway point. The Scheme seeks to raise standards by inspecting homes in Private Rented Sector Housing, and asking landlords to address any health and safety hazards. Private Rented Sector plays an increasing role in Rotherham, having trebled since 2001 and currently making up 16 percent of the housing accommodation in Rotherham.



% tenure split

62% owner occupied

22% social housing

16% privately rented



Rotherham's Selective Licensing scheme aims

to address areas where there are high levels of relative deprivation or housing that is below decent standards. This requires inspectors who have knowledge of how structures are built, how structures fall apart, how defects link to health or safety risks, what specific repairs are needed, enforcement and Council powers, and effective communication.

Several recommendations emerged from the review:

- Prioritising reinspection for landlords whose properties required action previously.
- Due to the shortage of experienced inspectors, considering how the Council can recruit and develop trainee inspectors and retain experienced inspectors.
- Finding ways to reward responsible landlords, and, where there is a proven track record, empowering landlords to self-assess, provided that the Service can still obtain assurances that decent standards are maintained.
- Being clear around messaging that selective licensing is a measure focused on the health of residents rather than beautification or regeneration.
- Further promoting cost-of-living support with a view to identifying gaps and promoting financial inclusion.
- Given the complexity of measuring impact on deprivation and difficulty in improving relative levels of deprivation, considering how internal metrics may better reflect the real impact of the scheme.
- Joining up Selective Licensing with relevant Council strategies and services, with partner and voluntary sector organisations and with resident led initiatives prior to any future selective licensing declaration.
- Emphasising the need for engagement with landlords and with tenants to be considered alongside any response to Scrutiny recommendations, and making sure responses to the recommendations line up with the learning from engagement.

THEME 1: EVERY NEIGHBOURHOOD THRIVING (CONTINUED)

RESPONSE TO PETITION: ROAD SAFETY CUMWELL LANE

As part of the 'Every Neighbourhood Thriving' Council Plan Theme, the Council works with communities on the issues that are important to them.

For example, OSMB responded to a petition for Improved Road Safety on Cumwell Lane which had been referred to scrutiny at a meeting of the full Council. Scrutiny endorsed action proposed by the service in response. Scrutiny also asked that following the conclusion of legal processes a review of learning takes place. This review of learning will receive further scrutiny during consideration of Road Safety at IPSC in 2023-2024.

BEREAVEMENT SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

Since 2016, IPSC has closely monitored the delivery of bereavement services through the contract with Dignity plc. This service has elicited strong representations from the community since that time and Scrutiny again heard local people articulate their disappointment and frustrations at the contractor's performance over a number of years. In reviewing the performance of the contractor, Scrutiny identified that equalities obligations remained a weakness in this service and the contractor needed to double down on efforts to better meet the needs of the diverse community it served.

The Council's role in managing the contract includes being assured that equalities requirements are met by Dignity, and Scrutiny reiterated the need for officers overseeing the contract to provide challenge on this to ensure that legal obligations are met. Recognising the ongoing concerns from the community in respect of this contract, Scrutiny recommended that all Members be invited to a session to facilitate further dialogue aimed at improving service delivery through the five-year service development plan for Rotherham Crematorium and Municipal Cemeteries.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING ANNUAL REPORT

Delivery against the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy is a key measure of success for the Council and the fifth annual report to IPSC detailed the progress made to the Improving Places Select Commission in September 2022. As an initiative that puts Members at the very heart of the communities that they represent and serve, Scrutiny was keen to see greater participation from parish councils in ward meetings in recognition of the key role these bodies can play in building and creating capacity.

One of the main recommendations emerging from Scrutiny was to ensure that there was greater awareness and oversight of the use of Community Infrastructure Levy monies. This was in response to queries that Members had received locally and was considered to be the kind of information that can help address myths amongst the local community on the use of funding from developments. Leading from this, Scrutiny felt that the continued devolution of budgets to ward level to address deprivation was consistent with the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and should be pursued further to enable Members to directly lead the response to pockets of deprivation in their wards.

THEME 2: PEOPLE ARE SAFE, HEALTHY AND LIVE WELL

PEOPLE ARE SAFE

- Recommendations from a recent OSMB review into Modern Slavery asked the Safer Rotherham Partnership (SRP) to offer targeted learning and development to raise awareness of modern slavery, how to spot the signs and risks, and how to raise concerns and make referrals. To accomplish this, the SRP was asked identify industries of higher risk and work with Council services which may encounter modern slavery in their day-to-day work. Scrutiny also asked the SRP to consider how best to safeguard young people during the transition from children to adult services and to develop referral pathways that provide the appropriate support on a timely basis.

To help agencies work better together, Scrutiny suggested re-launching the Strategic Partnership information sharing group. Scrutiny also asked that sub-contractors be included in contract and supply chain audits, and that the SRP collaborate with the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Supply Chain Advisor. Scrutiny also recommended that the voices of advocates be included by inviting representations to be made to Housing Assessment Panels on behalf of victims of modern slavery. Response from SRP is forthcoming.

- In response to an HSC review of Covid-19 Care Home Safety, the Council has continued to provide significant investment into the independent care and support sector. Fee rates were set following the Fair Cost of Care exercise and Market Sustainability Plan to support providers to be able to attract and retain care staff within Rotherham. Health Protection practice in Rotherham, particularly with relation to outbreaks and ongoing Covid-19 management continues to maintain some of the practices developed through the pandemic, with close working with UKHSA, SY ICB and Rotherham schools continuing.

Some areas of practice have not been maintained as resource levels have returned to pre-pandemic levels, with a significant local gap identified for Rotherham in respect of Community Infection, Prevention and Control. This gap has been discussed at Rotherham's Place Leadership Team with all Health and Social Care Partners, but funding has yet to be identified to change the current position. Further reporting on the impacts of the Pandemic is forthcoming to the June meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board, which will be received for Overview, and the next update to scrutiny will be considered on 25 January 2024.

- In response to an HSC review of the Community Hub Befriending Programme, a new model for the programme has been continued by Rotherham Federation of Communities. In a report to the Health and Wellbeing Board, Rotherfed Representatives showed the continued impact of the programme and peer support in breaking down barriers to access.
- Following recommendations from IPSC on the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, the Council designated sustained funding for permanent staff. Previously, time-limited funding meant the Service had continually trained new staff, who were excellent but impossible to keep without the job security of sustained funding. The team had a full permanent staff prior to the increasing number of clients following the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.
- Implementation of the Safer Rotherham Partnership Plan, establishment of a Financial Abuse and Exploitation Service, maintenance of Council-owned lifesaving equipment, adult safeguarding, and Operation Linden were also monitored.

THEME 2: PEOPLE ARE SAFE, HEALTHY AND LIVE WELL

PEOPLE ARE HEALTHY

TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

- Overview of the Health and Wellbeing Board Annual Report by HSC demonstrated the continued commitment of the Council to tackle health inequalities with the goal of extending the healthy lifespan of local people. This involves preventing the onset of chronic conditions and promoting equal access to care.
- Monitoring of Maternity Services by HSC included considering a new survey study by Healthwatch Rotherham. Recommendations affirmed the Service goal that a woman would receive care from a maximum of two midwives throughout her maternity experience.
- Scrutiny of Intermediate Care and Reablement Services by HSC showed innovative processes had been implemented to meet changing Government requirements and ensure service continuity during Ambulance Service industrial action. Collaboration is underway with Rotherham Speak Up for Autism to inform support to people who are preparing to go into hospital or needing to activate the service when they leave hospital.

PROMOTING EQUAL ACCESS TO CARE

- An HSC review into Access to Primary Care was undertaken in response to a study by Healthwatch Rotherham which raised concerns about access to GP appointments during the pandemic. Scrutiny found that the number of GP appointments in Rotherham had rebounded the fastest in South Yorkshire, with approximately five thousand appointments available across the Borough each day. The quality contract requires urgent appointments to take place within 48 hours, and approximately half of all NHS appointments were scheduled within a day. Recommendations were made to help promote awareness of the right place to seek medical help and to promote greater transparency around waiting times.
- HSC found that mental health services achieved significant progress this year in clearing backlogs in the memory clinic and the acute assessment clinic amid significant workforce challenges.

THEME 2: PEOPLE ARE SAFE, HEALTHY AND LIVE WELL

PEOPLE ARE HEALTHY (CONTINUED)

- Discussions of access to dental care by HSC assessed the impact of the pandemic and a shrinking skilled worker pool that have resulted in pressures on local NHS dentists and in new Government reforms to the commissioning of dentistry services.
- The Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust (TRFT) Annual Report; Urgent and Emergency Care Centre Services; Medicine Management; Place Partners Winter Planning; and Quality Accounts for TRFT, Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Foundation Trust (RDaSH), and Yorkshire Ambulance Service (YAS) were also scrutinised.

PREVENTION

- An HSC review aimed at identifying ways to improve oral health among children and adults in the Borough is currently ongoing with outcomes forthcoming.
- An HSC discussion of diagnostic screenings yielded assurances that screenings for breast, cervical and colon cancers that temporarily paused or lagged in take-up rates during the pandemic were getting caught up. To help avoid later stage diagnosis, everyone is encouraged to take up their screenings when invited.
- Discussions of suicide prevention by HSC showed Rotherham's strong offer for post-bereavement support and identified a need for more focus on early intervention. In response, Rotherham along with South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw Partners have co-produced with young people the 'Walk with Me' Suicide Prevention Toolkit which has garnered a Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Public Partnership Award.

The LGC judges said of the Toolkit:

Outstanding project around adaptive leadership on a challenging area of suicide prevention. Excellent design delivery and evaluation. Collaboration with a range of public partners including the police, transport, coroners and health. Clearly scalable and exciting innovation around a mobile app and also the real time data recording and analysis to target suicide risk.

- The Carers Programme and Young Carers and Strategic Physical Activity were also scrutinised.

THEME 2: PEOPLE ARE SAFE, HEALTHY AND LIVE WELL

PEOPLE LIVE WELL

- Learning Disability transformation, scrutinised at HSC, affirmed the Council's commitment to co-production and resulted in the request for collaboration with Speak Up for Autism to ensure people with disabilities are taken into account in the development of the flexible purchasing system model for adult social care.
- Proposals for day opportunities for people with high support needs had been subject to lengthy consultation prior to consideration by OSMB and decision by Cabinet. The modernisation of the service to adapt to the needs of service users to incorporate education, job and volunteering activities and independent living skills. In supporting the proposals, Scrutiny ensured that decision makers took account of the differing needs of current prospective service users across the range of protected characteristics, as well as the carbon impact of disposing of or demolishing assets connected to the scheme.
- IPSC found that the draft Tenant Engagement Framework demonstrated the very real value of the tenant engagement panels which provided insights, but it also pointed to the need to better publicise consultations as the feedback provided suggested that tenants wanted greater flexibility without having to engage with formal structures for engagement. That said, Scrutiny welcomed the reduced call-back times which suggested that there was greater responsiveness from the service and that was resulting in reduced waiting times for appointments.
- IPSC discussed the Council's response to a tenant scrutiny review of communications by the Tenant Scrutiny Panel of RotherFed. It was really pleasing to see the use of plain language being prioritised within the action plan arising from the review. Scrutiny also used the opportunity to challenge performance on customer experience where the six-minute target to take calls from tenants was considered to be too long.
- Scrutiny of housing repairs and maintenance at IPSC again demonstrated the value of tenant scrutiny and highlighted the importance of meeting the expectations of customers in a timely way. Getting the basics right continues to be a key line of enquiry and evidencing the impact of tenant engagement through "You Said We Did" was considered to be an effective tool of demonstrating impact and improvement.
- Scrutiny of Housing aids and adaptations by IPSC reaffirmed the need for the next iteration of the Housing Strategy to include a principle for those in greatest need to be served first.
- Scrutiny of the Housing Development Strategy at IPSC provided assurance on the delivery of the priorities previously endorsed but with the service now operating in a vastly more challenging environment. Recognising the disruption associated with interventions that saw people moving onto the housing register, Scrutiny felt greater thought was needed to enable and support those individuals to continue with existing tenancies.

THEME 3: EVERY CHILD ABLE TO FULFIL THEIR POTENTIAL

LGA – EFFECTIVE SCRUTINY OF CHILDREN’S SERVICES

ILSC was asked to be considered as part of a LGA learning and development programme. The LGA sessions were part of a wider national pilot to strengthen scrutiny of children’s services (Rotherham is one of a few authorities participating) and the LGA has received funding from the Department for Education to support this work.



The first workshop took place on 4 October. It was an interactive session and focussing on different approaches to scrutiny of children services and how to make it more effective. The second session took place on 25 October starting using practical examples to plan and scope scrutiny activity. The outcomes of the workshops are being built into the scrutiny work programme.

SPOTLIGHT REVIEWS

OSMB invited ILSC members to join them to scrutinise the outcomes of the independent report into Child Sexual Exploitation undertaken by a team commissioned by the Rotherham Safeguarding Children’s Partnership. Members were able to question the report authors’ findings in-depth to establish how they had arrived at their conclusions and what evidence had been considered. The Review Team found no evidence that CSE was occurring on the same scale as it had in the past. The Review Team provided assurance that robust partnership processes in place to address concerns when they came in. Evidence had been provided to support that conclusion.

A series of recommendations emerged from the meeting which included the following areas:

- Training and awareness raising for elected members;
- Maintaining partnership engagement with scrutiny activity;
- Communications;
- Clarity about how concerns are escalated;
- Ensuring that the voice of survivor is heard;
- Performance monitoring.

Cabinet’s response to ILSC’s review of the draft Child Exploitation Strategy included the addition of an ‘Our Journey’ section within the strategy to acknowledge the progress that has been made through multi-agency partnership to address child criminal exploitation and child sexual exploitation. The organisation roles and responsibilities were also clarified, and information regarding how survivor voices and perspectives inform the Strategy.

THEME 3: EVERY CHILD ABLE TO FULFIL THEIR POTENTIAL

Cabinet's response to an ILSC Review of Early Help refined the core principles of the offer as well as performance objectives and links to neighbourhood working and learning and development.

In response to a joint IPSC/ILSC Review of the Cultural Strategy, Cabinet worked with leisure centres to expand access to swimming lessons, and water safety, further diversified the venues hosting events for children and young people, and began the groundwork for expanded access to leisure and recreation respite for young carers.

ILSC MONITORING:

- Monitoring of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services showed that there had been no change in the waitlists for neurodevelopmental assessments because of the increase in referral rates in 2022-23.
- Discussion of implementation of the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy refined performance objectives and cascaded the offer of foster carer opportunities more widely into communities to encourage greater take-up and retention of Rotherham's valued and dedicated foster carers.
- Consideration of counter-extremism in schools confirmed that agencies were working together effectively with robust referral processes and good oversight.
- Children and Young People's Services Performance, Rotherham Youth Justice Service Progress Report, Ofsted Action Plan and One Adoption South Yorkshire were also monitored.

Scrutiny Councillors prioritise potential topics for the work programme of Improving Lives Select Commission.



THEME 4: EXPANDING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

RESPONSE TO MARKETS ENGAGEMENT AND RECOVERY

- A large amount of face to face and group consultation has taken place in response to this review by IPSC. Face to face consultation continues to take place with market tenants regarding the redevelopment of the Markets, how it will affect them and what mitigating actions are taking place. Visits have been made to a number of other markets which have been given as examples of good practice in delivering redevelopments. These include Barnsley, Sheffield, Doncaster and Leicester.
- Plans to move to cashless as soon as possible were made difficult by poor Wi-Fi connectivity, which will be rectified during the redevelopment. Ways to improve are still on-going, and a new chip and pin device has just been tested by Markets staff. This proved more efficient than previous kit and is being adopted on a long-term basis.
- A review of staffing requirements for sustainability and success of the markets is being undertaken as part of the redevelopment project.
- Take up of the introductory offer by vendors was good, although a high proportion did not continue trading after the initial 6 months, probably due in a large part to the challenging trading conditions in the retail sector. The offer is currently paused and will be reviewed and restarted once the redevelopment is complete.
- Retaining of traders during the redevelopment is a top priority. A reduction in rents for the period of the redevelopment has been agreed. All traders have been kept informed of proposed timescales for work and how this will impact on their business

TOWN DEAL AND LEVELLING UP FUND

The Council has successfully bid for funding from the Towns Fund to deliver regeneration projects for the leisure economy and Rotherham Town Centre. In the summer of 2022 the Council submitted additional bids for regeneration projects in Dinnington and Wath, and has sought additional monies through the Government's Levelling-Up Fund. Whilst Scrutiny has wholeheartedly supported the Council's endeavours, assurances were sought in respect of the democratic oversight of project governance. In response to IPSC's previous review of External Funding, IPSC later contributed to Rotherham's successful £20 million Levelling Up Bid by strengthening the markets angle.

TOWN CENTRE / FORGE ISLAND IMPLEMENTATION

Detailed consideration was given to a key stage in the delivery of the flagship regeneration project for the Council in October 2022. OSMB/IPSC considered the proposals to move to the construction stage which included the Council acting as the funder of the scheme and contracting the delivery of the scheme by Muse Development Ltd. This continues to be an area of interest for Scrutiny in order to provide constructive challenge and give assurance to the public that the project will be delivered according to planned timeframes and agreed budgets. Scrutiny focused on ensuring value for money in a challenging financial environment.

THEME 5: A CLEANER GREENER LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

ROTHERHAM YOUTH CABINET TAKEOVER CHALLENGE ON CLIMATE CHANGE



In response to the Rotherham Youth Cabinet (RYC) Takeover Challenge on Climate Change, the Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment met with members of RYC to discuss potential action to minimise single-use plastics and pollution. The RYC also visited Renewi anaerobic treatment facility.

The Assistant Director for Education worked with the RYC to develop an

environmental awards scheme for schools, which has been piloted in Wickersley and is posed for wider rollout this year. Carbon literacy training is also being piloted by the RYC with the aim of further developing the training for wider delivery. Next, the Climate Change Team will work with RYC to create a version of the course that is young people friendly.

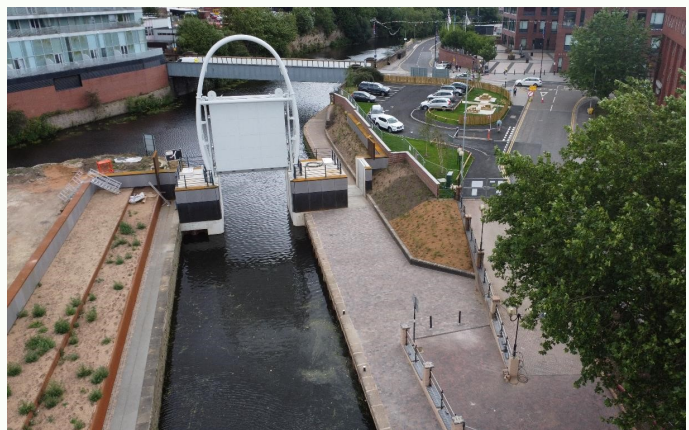
ENVIRONMENT ACT 2021 AND THE FUTURE OF HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRES

Discussion of the Council's responsiveness to changing legislation is an important part of the scrutiny process of IPSC around the future of household waste recycling centres. The Environment Act 2021 includes a new requirement for many authorities to collect food waste separately. Doing this would mean high costs for Rotherham, Barnsley, and Doncaster because our state-of-the-art treatment facility, Renewi, incorporates food waste in its anaerobic process. Together with our regional partners, Rotherham persistently lobbied DEFRA for an exception to this requirement and recently received a decision.

MONITORING

Also monitored were:-

- Draft Enviro-crime Strategy,
- Fly tipping,
- Tree Programme,
- Flood Alleviation, and
- Allotments Self-Management



Canal barrier, July 2022

THEME 6: ONE COUNCIL

FINANCIAL MONITORING

OSMB maintained a 'big picture' view of the financial pressures affecting the Council and provided challenge to how these might impact on existing budgets and budget setting for future years as well as understanding the proposals about prudent levels of reserves. The Board challenged the assumptions underpinning the budget, their alignment to Council Plan themes and proposals for the level of council tax. In particular, Members probed the thinking that lay behind the main savings proposals to establish if these would be of detriment to existing services. For example, during the discussion on Early Help savings, assurances were given that one-off savings could be made without significant impact on the service, with a further commitment given that this would be subject to review.

BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX REPORT

OSMB undertook detailed scrutiny of budget proposals in February 2023 ahead of the formal budget and council tax setting by the Council in March 2023. In reviewing the Cabinet's proposals, Members were mindful of the impact of inflationary pressures which were driving the cost of living crisis, as well as creating new challenges for the authority. Scrutiny Members endorsed the budget proposals whilst seeking reassurance in respect of the deliverability of savings proposals and recognised that uncertainty of the public finances nationally and the ongoing inflationary pressures would provide challenges for the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2025/26. The MTFS was subject to scrutiny earlier in the year when the financial position was less certain.

Areas for additional investment such as Household Waste Recycling Sites, Markets and Customer Services had been considered previously by OSMB as part of pre-decision activity and also subject to in-depth scrutiny work. These contributed to the themes of a cleaner, greener environment, expanding economic opportunity, and one Council approach.

Mindful of pressures on household budgets, in respect of the proposals for housing rent and charges, OSMB asked that additional measures, such as tenancy advice and support, could be introduced to mitigate the impact of rent increases for residents who are particularly vulnerable to changes in rent levels (for example recipients of Personal Independence Payments and Disability Living Allowance for children). The Board also asked that consideration is given to developing a communication strategy, including drop-in sessions, to raise awareness of changes to the district heating charges and support available to households.

COUNCIL PLAN AND YEAR AHEAD PROGRESS REPORT

Throughout the year, OSMB has held Cabinet Members and Senior Leadership Team to account for performance against the Council Plan and the Year Ahead Delivery Plan. With 88% of measures being on target, the focus of Scrutiny has been on those areas that were not achieving the expected levels or where feedback from residents to Members had prompted specific queries. One of the outcomes from this activity has been to inform the work programme for the 2023-24 municipal year with a review planned on the effectiveness of the Consultation and Engagement Framework.

THEME 6: ONE COUNCIL

LGA CUSTOMER SERVICES PEER CHALLENGE

OSMB reviewed the recommendations and action plan arising from the peer challenge of Customer Services and sought reassurances around the adoption of a One Council approach to handling customers and staff were encouraged to put themselves in the place of a customer to appreciate the importance of resolving queries promptly. Progress against the action plan will continue to be of interest to Scrutiny.

In addition to this, OSMB scrutinised the proposals for Rothercard and recommended closer alignment with the cost-of-living work streams to ensure that low-income households have wider access to services and discounts. This has been actioned with all residents who receive council tax support being written to with details of Cost of Living advice, how to apply for a Rother card and tell them about where to go for more help/support. Its recommendation to extend the eligibility criteria for the card to young adults with education, health and care plans and care leavers will be considered as part of its annual review.

COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT

Each year OSMB has the opportunity to review annual complaints data and performance in respect of complaints referred to the Local Government Ombudsman. The focus in considering the report in 2022 was to identify improvements in the recording of compliments, as well as making more effective use of complaints data to inform service improvements. Given the concerns expressed by the LGO, Scrutiny also wanted to understand the proposals for improvement to address those issues.

SOCIAL VALUE MID-YEAR REPORT

Recommendations from OSMB's previous scrutiny of social value activity had also been implemented, with a focus on providing case studies to communicate successes. The Council is the country's lead authority for social value and it is incredible to be party to this success. Earlier in the year, Scrutiny had identified opportunities for the Council to better promote its social value commitments through briefings for Ward Members and social media, such as LinkedIn.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION ANNUAL REPORT

In recognition of the importance of this to all aspects of policy and service delivery, OSMB received an annual report on the Council's performance in respect of equality, diversity and inclusion. Members continue to challenge the organisation to improve the way it undertakes equality impact assessments which contribute to decision making. It was recommended that officers consider how best to present equalities considerations within reports.

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board 2022-23



Cllr Maggi Clark, Chair,
Overview and Scrutiny
Management Board



Cllr Tom Collingham,
Vice-Chair, OSMB
May 2022 to March 2023



Cllr Joshua Bacon,
Vice-Chair, OSMB
March 2023—May 2023



Cllr Taiba Yasseen,
Chair, Health Select
Commission



Cllr Tim Baum-Dixon,
Vice-Chair, Health
Select Commission



Cllr Lyndsay Pitchley,
Chair, Improving Lives
Select Commission



Cllr Wendy Cooksey,
Vice-Chair, Improving
Lives Select
Commission



Cllr Ken Wyatt,
Chair, Improving
Places Select
Commission



Cllr Adam Tinsley, Vice-
Chair, Improving Places
Select Commission