

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 24 October 2023

Report Title

Thriving Neighbourhoods Annual Report 2022/23

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Jo Brown, Assistant Chief Executive

Report Author(s)

Martin Hughes, Head of Neighbourhoods

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

Progress on the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and the Neighbourhood Working model

Recommendations

Note the progress of the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and the Neighbourhood Working model

List of Appendices Included

None

Background Papers

- Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy 2018-2025
- Rotherham Council Plan 2022-25
- Rotherham Council Year Ahead Delivery Plan 2023/24
- Refresh of Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy cabinet report – 21 November 2022

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Thriving Neighbourhoods Annual Report 2022/23

1. Background

- 1.1 This annual report primarily focuses on the municipal year May 2022 to May 2023 but also covers activity up to and including September 2023.
- 1.2 Cabinet approved the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy (2018-2025) in November 2018 following the introduction of the new neighbourhood working model in May 2017. The Strategy was refreshed and agreed by Cabinet in November 2022 (see Appendix 1). Cabinet also agreed for a Delivery Plan and a Full Equality Analysis to be presented to Improving Places Select Commission. These are attached as Appendix 2 and 4 respectively.
- 1.3 This Strategy helps to deliver the Council's vision under the 'Every Neighbourhood Thriving' theme within the Council Plan (2022-25) - *'Our vision for Rotherham is for every neighbourhood to be a thriving neighbourhood, where people are able to work together to achieve a good quality of life. We want to work with local people to find solutions to local issues and to build on our heritage and assets. We will help create vibrant communities in which people feel happy, safe and proud. To do this, we will make it easier to get involved in the local community, work closely with our partners and local voluntary and community groups, enhance our town and village centres, green spaces and libraries, and effectively tackle community issues'*.
- 1.4 The Strategy aims to achieve –
 - Neighbourhoods that are safe and welcoming with good community spirit.
 - Residents are happy, healthy and loving where they live.
 - Residents have the opportunity to use their strengths, knowledge and skills to achieve what is important to them.
- 1.5 The 'Every Neighbourhood Thriving' theme within the Council's Year Ahead Delivery Plan includes the following outcomes that the Council aims to achieve in 2023/24 –
 - Work with communities on the things that matter to them.
 - Residents, organisations and businesses use their skills and resources to help others.
 - Neighbourhoods that are welcoming and safe
 - Local people have access to libraries, cultural activities, parks and green spaces.
 - Local towns and villages are improved.
- 1.6 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report, which was presented to cabinet in September 2023, provided positive feedback on the Council's neighbourhood working model stating – *'The Council's Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy aspires to strengthen the role of ward members as community leaders who can work with their communities, their partners and those delivering service in communities to bring about the changes that communities want to see. The peer team was impressed by the exemplary approach to community engagement at ward level, where dedicated and well-supported Ward Members take the lead.'*

2. Key Issues

Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and Delivery Plan

- 2.1 A refreshed version of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy (2018-2025) was approved by Cabinet in November 2022 (see Appendix 1). The main differences from the original strategy were –
- Reference to the Council’s ‘Place-Based’ and ‘Strengths-Based’ approaches
 - Greater emphasis on the role of the Councillor, referencing Birmingham University’s 21st Century Councillor Model
 - Removal of case studies – as there are now better avenues to promote these such as ward e-bulletins, ward webpages and Elected Members’ ward reports to Council.
- 2.2 Cabinet agreed that the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy Delivery Plan and Full Equality Analysis were to be developed by April 2023 and presented to the Improving Places Select Commission in Spring 2023. Due to unforeseen circumstances the agreed dates had to be pushed back to later in the year.
- 2.3 The Delivery Plan (Appendix 2) is deliberately high level and combines the Council Plan’s Outcomes and Commitments along with the common themes coming out of the ward priorities. It also references existing relevant council strategies, programmes and plans. The detailed delivery of activity is captured within the 25 Ward Plans which Elected Members and the Neighbourhoods Teams review and update on a regular basis.
- 2.4 The Delivery Plan and Full Equality Analysis have been informed by consultation that also promoted the Strategy and helped inform the setting of the 2023/24 ward priorities. This took place between March and May 2023 and involved a range of community-based meetings, presentations and drop-ins across all 25 wards as well as an online questionnaire. A summary of the consultation findings is attached as Appendix 3.
- 2.5 This consultation exercise supported the ongoing day-to-day Elected Member led community engagement taking place within the ward which regularly identifies local issues and trends.

Elected Members as Community Leaders

- 2.6 Elected Members are at the centre of Rotherham’s neighbourhood working model, which provides them the opportunity to maximise their role as community leaders.

Member Development and Support

- 2.7 Between February and May 2023 Members who were elected for the first time in 2021 were offered the opportunity to have a mid-term review to discuss their community leadership role with managers from the Neighbourhoods Team. Eight Elected Members took up this opportunity. The common learning and

development requests were subsequently shared with the Member Democratic Panel in July 2023. These included -

- Feedback on the 2021 Member induction programme
- Time commitment needed to be a councillor
- Communication and engagement methods / use of social media
- Planning regulations and enforcement
- Understanding and knowledge of Directorates and Council committees / commissions
- Health and safety of Councillors
- Managing difficult relationships / conflict

Ward issues and any additional specific support required were picked up by the Neighbourhoods Team.

- 2.8 A 'Be A Councillor' campaign took place in May and June 2023. This provided prospective councillors the chance to find out more about the role and responsibilities. Two sessions took place at the end of June, one in the Council chamber and one via Teams. Approximately 20 individuals took part in the sessions and the information provided remains on the Council's website. This includes a series of videos of current Elected Members explaining their role.
- 2.9 Elected Members are supported on a day-to-day basis by the Neighbourhoods Team. During 2022/23 the Neighbourhoods Team facilitated 294 ward Member briefings. These ward briefings are fundamental to the neighbourhood working model as they provide Members with the opportunity to review their ward priorities, plans and budgets, engage with various partners and services, consider any emerging issues, take a lead on any projects or initiatives, and discuss how to involve the local community.

Ward Priorities and Plans

- 2.10 Elected Members were given the opportunity to refresh their ward priorities and plans in May/June 2023. Members were provided with new ward data, input and advice from council services and partners and local community intelligence, including the results from the Thriving Neighbourhoods consultation exercise that took place between March and May 2023 (see Appendix 3). The refreshed ward priorities were published on the Council's website in June 2023.
- 2.11 Elected Members have continued to work with the Neighbourhoods Team, the local community and a range of partners to develop projects and improve local services to tackle their ward priorities. Details of these initiatives are captured in the individual ward plans, are included in the monthly ward e-bulletins and summarised in Ward Members' reports to full Council.
- 2.12 The Elected Members' reports to Council include numerous stories and case studies illustrating the impact of neighbourhood working, their role as community leaders and progress on ward priorities. The reports started in May 2022 and will continue up to January 2024. They are published on the ward webpages once presented.

- 2.13 As well as forming the basis for local action, the ward plans, and the priorities identified within them, are used to inform Council decision making, policies, strategies, service plans and resource allocation.

Devolved Ward Budgets

- 2.14 In 2022/23 the devolved budgets for Elected Members were as follows -
- Each Elected Member received £1,584 Community Leadership Fund (revenue)
 - Two member wards received £7,120 Capital Budget
 - Three member wards received £10,680 Capital Budget
- These figures are the same for the 2023/24 financial year.
- 2.15 Any underspend in both CLF and Capital budgets has previously been carried over to the following financial year. However, any underspend at the end of 2023/24 financial year will not carry over to 2024/25 due to the pending elections.
- 2.16 In 2022/23 Elected Members allocated £259,747 to projects, services and activities tackling their ward priorities. £110,820 came from their CLF and £148,927 came from the ward Capital budget. Summaries of the allocations made in each ward in 2022/23 have been published on the Council website.
- 2.17 Approximately £95,411 was invested directly into the Voluntary and Community Sector, supporting a total of 267 community organisations. The number of groups supported is similar to the previous year. £139,348 went into the public sector for additional activities, services or equipment. The remaining £24,988 was used to purchase items/equipment from the private sector for community activities.
- 2.18 Elected Members also have access to –
- Ward Housing Hub monies - a revenue budget from the Housing Revenue Account that can be spent on environmental improvements which benefits council tenants and are in line with ward priorities. There is a base budget for each ward of £4,000 along with an enhancement dependent upon the number of Council homes in the ward. In 2022/23 Members allocated a total of £117,761 Ward Housing Hub monies on projects. Any underspend at the end of this financial year will not carry over to 2024/25.
 - Community Infrastructure Levy - a charge that Councils can apply to new developments to raise funds for local infrastructure. Wards that are not covered by a Parish Council retain the CIL 'Neighbourhood Portion'. This equates to 15% of the total CIL. This has been made available to Elected Members in non-parished wards since April 2022. In 2022/23 Elected Members did not allocate any CIL money on projects. There is no deadline to spend the CIL money.

Community Engagement

- 2.19 How both Elected Members and the Neighbourhoods Team communicate and engage with residents, stakeholders and partners is fundamental to Rotherham's neighbourhood working model. The Neighbourhoods Team have ward focused Communication & Engagement Plans which are developed and monitored in consultation with Elected Members.
- 2.20 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report (September '23) stated that – *'The peer team was impressed by the exemplary approach to community engagement at ward level, where dedicated and well-supported Ward Members take the lead'*.

Website

- 2.21 The Neighbourhoods home webpage includes information on the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy, an interactive map of all the wards, details on how to apply for devolved ward budgets, links to the Parish Councils section of the Council website and links to all 25 ward pages. In 2022/23 there were 6,618 unique views of this webpage. This is a reduction 2,171 views in comparison to 2021/22.
- 2.22 The 25 ward webpages include Elected Members details, a latest news feed, and useful links to other websites. They also allow people to access the ward priorities, ward data profile, annual ward budget statements and the Elected Members' report to Council. There were very few articles posted on the newsfeed in 2022/23. This is primarily down to a software issues, which the Communications Team are looking to resolve.

Ward E-bulletins

- 2.23 Each ward produces and circulates a monthly e-bulletin. These are written in consultation with Elected Members and provide local information and numerous stories illustrating the progress made in tackling ward priorities and the impact of neighbourhood working within the ward.
- 2.24 Subscriptions increased from 7,860 to 10,590 in 2022/23, an increase of 2,730. The engagement rate (which indicates whether the bulletin has been read) remains at 80%, which is significantly higher than most other Council e-bulletins.

Supporting Community Organisations

- 2.25 Supporting local community groups who provide activities that help tackle ward priorities is a core function of the Neighbourhoods Team.
- 2.26 In 2022/23 the team supported 682 community organisations with general advice, legal status, funding, volunteer recruitment and linking them into various partnerships and services. This figure includes the establishment of 19 new community organisations. This is almost double the number of groups that were

supported in 2021/22. This work was alongside, and in addition to, the ward budget funding which was awarded to 267 community organisations.

Community Events

2.27 The Neighbourhoods Team continue to work alongside Elected Members to bring communities together through a range of enjoyable, cultural and social activities and events, which will inspire hope and pride in local communities across the Borough. 395 community events were arranged or supported by the team in 2022/23.

Consultation

2.28 As stated in paragraph 2.4, the production of the Delivery Plan and Full Equality Analysis was informed by a consultation exercise that took place in Spring '23. It was led by the Neighbourhoods Team and Elected Members. It also promoted the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and helped inform the setting of the 2023/24 ward priorities.

2.29 The Neighbourhoods Team and Elected Members have led on the consultation for the Towns and Villages projects within their wards. This has provided the local community the opportunity to inform the design of the various schemes. Seven Towns and Villages schemes have been completed to date, with the remainder due to be completed by the end of March 2024.

2.30 The Neighbourhoods Team continue to advise and support council services and partners who wish to consult within wards and neighbourhoods. This is in accordance with the Council's Consultation and Engagement Framework.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

2.31 The Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy has further emphasised the need to promote and provide opportunities for all communities within the Borough. In 2022/23 the Neighbourhoods Team supported 200 activities, projects or initiatives that have targeted communities with protected characteristics. These include consultation exercises, support/funding for community groups and support for community events.

2.32 Over the next 12 months the Neighbourhoods Team will continue to work with Elected Members to provide more opportunities for communities with protected characteristics so that they can get involved in local consultation, activities and community action (see Appendix 4 - Equality Analysis).

Integrated Locality and Partnership Working

Ward Priorities

2.33 The priorities within ward plans form the basis of local projects, partnerships and networks which are supported by the Neighbourhoods Team and Elected Members. These priorities are shared across all Council services and partner

agencies to help inform strategies, service plans, the allocation of resources and the delivery of services.

- 2.34 Work continues to increase the visibility of the ward priorities to all staff across the council. This includes ward priorities being considered during service planning and strategy development, ongoing discussions with various management teams and neighbourhood tours for staff.

Neighbourhood Partnerships and Networks

- 2.35 A range of neighbourhood-based partnerships and networks have continued or been established in order to tackle the priorities within the ward plans. This includes the Community Action Partnerships (CAPs) which operate in all 25 wards and provide a vehicle to tackle community safety related issues.
- 2.36 Work is currently ongoing to improve how community safety issues are tackled within localities, including the function and effectiveness of the CAPs and their relationship with the North, Central or South Joint Tasking Groups.
- 2.37 In 2022/23 the Neighbourhoods Team co-ordinated 867 neighbourhood partnership and network meetings. This is a similar figure to 2021/22. These have been a mix of in-person and online Teams meetings.

Parish and Town Councils

- 2.38 Parish and Town Councils are key to local partnership working. Over the last year the Parish Council Liaison Officer who has supported the Parish Councils to –
- Develop a Joint Working Agreement with the Council – refreshed in July 2023
 - Meet with each other, council services and partners on a regular basis.
 - Link into Elected Members and key council services to address local issues.
 - Develop their response to potential future flood or emergency incidents.
 - Hold events and celebrations.
 - Access learning and development opportunities.
- 2.39 The Parish Council Liaison Officer co-ordinates the Parish Council and RMBC Joint Working Group, Parish Council Network events, Clerks meetings and joint learning and development sessions. During 2022/23 24 of the 31 Parish and Town Councils in Rotherham were involved in one or more of these meetings and events.
- 2.40 The Parish Council Liaison Officer also engages with those that have chosen not to get involved in any of the joint meetings or events, via the Parish Councils e-bulletin, attending their meetings or individual discussions with the clerk.

Town Centre

- 2.41 In Summer 2022 the Neighbourhoods Team took the lead to promote a placemaking approach within the Town Centre by bringing all key stakeholders

together to achieve common goals and ensure the Town Centre becomes a desirable place to live, work and visit.

2.42 The Town Centre Community Co-ordinator started in post in October 2022 and has established himself as the link between those involved in the economic regeneration of the town centre, various council services, local businesses, the VCS, residents and visitors.

2.43 A Town Centre Operational Group was established in January 2023 which has improved the co-ordination of services and partners in the town centre. There have been particular improvements around the appearance of the town centre and making it feel a safer.

North, Central and South Locality Areas

2.44 A number of services and partners operate their services on a North, Central and South Locality Area basis. These include Neighbourhoods, Housing, Environmental Enforcement / CPU, Streetscene and SY Police.

2.45 Senior managers from these services and others meet on a regular basis to exchange information and discuss the area wide delivery of services in response to ward plan priorities and issues raise by CAPs or other neighbourhood partnerships. They are also in a position to advise and lead on translating borough-wide strategies into local action.

LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report

2.46 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report includes a recommendation to *'Develop a clearer and shared understanding of integrated locality working'*. They further suggested that *'Integrated locality working through increased co-design and co-production of solutions and services alongside partner organisations can deliver enhanced outcomes for residents through improved services and solutions which are tailored to their needs.'*

2.47 Over the next 12 months the Council will develop a clear vision and work programme for integrated locality working in line with the ambitions set out in the Council Plan and Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 The report presented is for information.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 The report presented is for information.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 The report presented is for information.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)

6.1 There are no financial and procurement implications, other than those relating to the Neighbourhoods core management budget and the Elected Members' ward budgets.

7. Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)

7.1 There are no direct legal implications.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no direct staffing implications other than the recruitment and deployment of Neighbourhoods staff.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 The outcomes within the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy supports the delivery of the Council Plan themes 'Every Child Able to Fulfil Their Potential' and 'People Are Safe, Healthy and Live Well'.

9.2 The ward priorities published in June 2023 illustrate where Elected Members are targeting resources towards Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults. This includes new or additional activities, improved facilities or improved access to services. The majority of the wards also have priorities which try to mitigate against the 'Cost-of-Living' crisis.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 The neighbourhood working model enables the Council to respond to the specific needs of Rotherham's increasingly diverse communities. Engagement with residents takes into account the strengths, assets and needs of different communities of interest, which differ in each neighbourhood and ward. Neighbourhood working allows the flexibility to respond to these needs.

10.2 The ward priorities and ward budget statements published on the website illustrate how Elected Members have targeted activity and resources toward communities with protected characteristics. The ward Communication & Engagement Plans along with case studies and stories on ward webpages, e-bulletins and the Ward Members' reports to Council illustrate the impact being made.

10.3 Over the next 12 months the Neighbourhoods Team will continue to work with Elected Members to provide more opportunities for communities with protected characteristics so that they can get involved in local consultation, activities and community action (see Appendix 4 - Equality Analysis).

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 A number of ward priorities and plans have specific references to green initiatives, such as tree planting, wildflower meadows, recycling and active travel, that would positively contribute to tackling this agenda within these wards. The development of projects and awareness raising through e-bulletins and other engagement methods will encourage resident participation.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 Multi-agency working is covered in paragraphs 2.32 to 2.46 of this report. This illustrates the importance of partners (from the public, voluntary and private sector) and Parish Councils in the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy. The ward priorities and plans are informed by the experience and intelligence from these partners, which encourages the establishment of shared priorities and goals.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 Risks relating to the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy are captured in the Assistant Chief Executive Directorate Risk Register.

13.2 Risk - failure to enhance community cohesion throughout the borough
Mitigation -

- Neighbourhoods team providing opportunities for people from different backgrounds to interact by supporting community organisations and community events which bring together residents from all background.
- Ward e-bulletins and social media platforms being utilised to promote cohesion including postcode targeted promotion.
- Community Action Partnerships and other ward-based partnerships/networks in place (which involve local VCS sector) to ensure early identification of community issues and a local co-ordinated response.

13.3 Risk - Lack of development or support for Elected Members preventing them maximising their role as community leaders.

Mitigation -

- Role of Councillors as Community Leaders emphasised in the refreshed Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy
- Ward priorities / plans informed by local data, information and intelligence
- Regular Ward Member Briefings, Community Action Partnerships and neighbourhood partnership meetings
- Advice and guidance provided around investment of ward budgets and other resources.
- Good Practice Guide to be published in Autumn 2023
- E-Casework system supporting members to log casework direct with specific Directorates.
- Results of members survey and Mid-term reviews have informed future member development and induction.

- Member Development Annual development plan in place informed by Member Democratic Panel
- Be A Councillor sessions delivered in June 2023 to promote the opportunity to be a councillor and prepare potential candidates.

13.4 Risk - Capacity of council services and partners to respond to local priorities and issues

Mitigation –

- Ward plans in place capturing projects, initiatives and any enhanced service delivery.
- Ward priorities circulated to all services and partners and taken into account in service plans and cabinet reports.
- Front line council services have aligned staff to new wards and locality areas.
- South Yorkshire Police boundaries coterminous with ward and locality boundaries and Crime & ASB data aligned to wards.

13.5 Risk - Parish Councils not actively involved in neighbourhood working.

Mitigation -

- Joint Working Agreement refreshed and reviewed annually.
- Joint Working Group and Network events established and meeting regularly.
- Development sessions and seminars put on for Parish Councils
- Opportunity to inform and delivery on ward priorities and be involved in local ward/neighbourhood partnerships.
- Parish Council invited to ward CAP meetings.

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Martin Hughes, Head of Neighbourhoods

Approvals obtained on behalf of:-

	Named Officer	Date
Assistant Chief Executive	Jo Brown	12 th October 2023
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)		Click here to enter a date.
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	N/A	N/A
Assistant Director of Human Resources (if appropriate)	N/A	N/A
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)	N/A	N/A

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