

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Wednesday 12 November 2025

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Bacon, Baggaley, Blackham, Brent, A. Carter, Harper, Keenan, McKiernan, Tinsley and Yasseen.

Apologies were received from Councillors Allen and Monk.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

54. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 15 OCTOBER 2025

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 15 October 2025 be approved as a true record.

55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In relation to the Call-in - Selective Licensing Policy item on the agenda Councillor Tinsley declared that he had previously held a licence in Maltby. It was not a financial interest.

56. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

No questions were received.

57. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no reasons to exclude the press or public.

58. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

At the Chair's invitation, Councillor Alam, Cabinet Member for Finance & Community Safety introduced the report explaining that the reports was an update on the council's budget and the medium-term financial strategy to 2028-29. It included the standard technical base required, recognition of financial pressures impacting service delivery, and the ongoing effect of inflation on the council's base costs.

The technical adjustments also included the council's assessment of the potential impact of the government's fair funding review, which aimed to make significant changes to the way local authority funding was allocated. The review was expected to introduce major changes to the formulas used for funding distribution, and it appeared that more areas would require additional funding.

The medium-term financial strategy was scheduled for further revision ahead of the council's budget-setting in March 2026 to reflect the local

government settlement once issued, along with budget policy proposals on council tax levels, reserves, fees and charges, and any required budget savings.

The funding review represented the most significant change in local government funding approaches for many years and introduced a degree of uncertainty. The medium-term review sat alongside financial monitoring, which was presented to Cabinet and projected a financial overspend of £0.9 million.

Council tax collection rates remained strong despite cost-of-living challenges faced by residents and businesses. However, due to the impact of Speciality Steel, there was a potential effect on business rates. The Council expected to balance its budget to the outturn position before year-end, although risks remained, and the use of reserves might have been required.

Judith Badger, Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services followed on by explaining to members that this was a point in time based on the Council's best understanding of the situation, with some significant changes since the budget was set in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) back in March.

Members of Scrutiny were due to receive the presentation on the final MTFS near budget time in the usual way, but an update at this point in the year was provided to bring members up to date with how the position was looking. It was a plan based on planning assumptions, estimates, and available information, and the government's budget at the end of the month was expected to give some indications of new factors to consider and whether they aligned with the Council's expectations.

The Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services pointed out to members that this reflected only the national policy position and not the Council's settlement. The actual settlement, knowing how much money the Council would receive from government, was not expected until quite close to Christmas, likely late December. So, this was presented to bring members up to speed, but it was highly likely the position would change again later in the year when the Finance team took Members through the detail before budget setting.

The Chair asked Rob Mahon, Assistant Director, Financial Services to run through the key changes concentrating on the children's services aspect. The Assistant Director, Financial Services noted the easiest starting point was the table at 2.15, which set out the main changes to the MTFS at that point in time based on available information and a review of assumptions around inflation, key contracts, pressures, and opportunities.

The table at 2.15 began with the MTFS position approved at Cabinet and Council for 2025–26 to 2027–28. At that stage, the Council had a balanced budget for 2026–27 and a pressure of £3.2 million for 2027–28.

The MTFS had not been extended as far as 2028–29; however, had it been, it would have shown a pressure of £6.8 million.

As part of the MTFS review, assumptions and the budget position were monitored and reported to Cabinet throughout the year. A key challenge for 2028–29 was the impact of previous capital investment decisions, with borrowing costs carried forward. Treasury management savings of £3–4m had been secured for 2025–26 to 2027–28 but were expected to drop out in 2028–29, creating a £4m pressure. Further savings might be possible, but economic conditions were too uncertain to project at this stage.

Revised inflation assumptions were also highlighted. The local government pay award for 2025–26 was 3.2%, higher than the 2% anticipated in the budget, creating a £2.3 million impact year-on-year and compounding future pay award assumptions. Inflation assumptions for social care providers, particularly adults and Children and Young People's Service (CYPS), were increased to provide capacity to meet potential demand.

Members were informed that Speciality Steel had ceased to exist, leaving 22 months of unpaid debt covering the last quarter of 2023–24, the whole of 2024–25, and the first six months of 2025–26. The company was taken over by a government-appointed liquidator. While rates for the remainder of the financial year were expected from the liquidator, no payments would be received for the outstanding debt. This would be managed through the business rates collection fund.

It was explained that the structure of the national business rates collection fund meant that the Council did not take a single year “big bang” impact when losing a major business ratepayer, such as Speciality Steel. The collection fund allowed the deficit to be managed over time. This meant the Council would carry the deficit in its non-domestic rates (NDR) collection position but could gradually reduce NDR assumptions, as reflected in the relevant line, to account for a reduced level of income from business rates. This approach would bring the position back to balance or surplus over time.

The longer-term sustainability of the site remained uncertain, and it was too early to determine whether an equivalent business would occupy the site in the future. At present, the Council was dealing with a historical write-off position. Business rates growth had been low in 2024–25, concluding at the end of that financial year, after budget setting. A review was carried out in early 2025–26, which resulted in softened growth assumptions for business rates. A similar review would take place heading into 2026–27 as part of the budget-setting process. While some growth during 2025–26 might provide an additional benefit, the current position remained challenging.

It was noted that there were additional inflation impacts across the board. Inflation remained at 3.8%, which was still higher than the historical Bank

of England base rate target of 2% for CPI inflation. This continued to drive up some of the core costs funded through the MTFS.

Members were informed of a few simpler adjustments, including the PES Education System pressure. This related to new capital investment approved in the previous year's budget. As the project progressed, it became clear that there would be a greater level of dual running between the old system and the new system to ensure a smooth transition. This required additional system capacity and some extra resources to deliver the scheme. While not a significant adjustment, it was necessary.

CYPS placement pressures were also highlighted, as this had been a key issue raised by members over recent years. The challenge was twofold: a long-standing non-delivery of savings linked to placement pressures and an overspend in the CYPS budget year-on-year. However, it was noted that the budget had been reduced annually, and overall CYPS spend had been coming down. Compared to nearest neighbours, whose costs were increasing, the Council was now reaching a positive position.

Work on the MTFS was well advanced, and it was hoped that some of the savings could be reflected in monitoring reports for Cabinet between November and January. It was explained that a significant portion of the savings linked to placements had effectively been delivered. In 2019–20, the Council had 600 looked-after children, compared to 472 at the start of planning for 2025–26, with a rolling target of around 470. If the Council were still funding 600 placements at current prices, costs would be approximately £9.5 million higher. The reduction in looked-after children numbers and the move to more appropriate and affordable placements had significantly improved the CYPS budget position over the past five years.

However, the wider challenge remained market forces, with inflation on placement costs driven by both general inflation and high demand in the sector.

It was noted that demand had driven prices upward, resulting in significantly higher inflation levels. Benchmarking had been undertaken, and there was potential to set out clearly, either in the next monitoring report or the forthcoming budget report, that inflation for CYPS placements had likely been underestimated in recent years when compared to the wider national market.

This would support a case for declaring a substantial portion of savings as appropriately delivered and for uplifting the CYPS placement budget. At that point, the working draft of the MTFS included £2 million, although this was not expected to be the final position. As highlighted by the Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services, this represented a point in time, and work would continue. It was intended to increase CYPS budgets for 2026–27.

The Assistant Director for Financial Services reported that £4.3m was allocated for Home to School transport in the 2025–26 budget after strengthening policies and controls. Costs were contained, but rising demand from the September 2025 intake created minor pressure to be addressed in the MTFS. Delayed SEND reforms limited options to reduce overspend beyond current efficiencies. Some figures remained provisional as the MTFS was in draft, with updates due in January. Potential pressures included increasing complexity in adult care and higher baby pack costs if current investment continued.

It was agreed that Local Plan costs would be managed through a dedicated reserve rather than annual allocations, with funds drawn down as activities were confirmed. UKSPF ended at the close of the financial year. Several council-supported activities risked being unfunded in 2026–27, and discussions with South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) and on the integrated settlement were ongoing to identify future funding options.

The Council's local council tax support top-up scheme had reached the end of its current funding, as it was an annually agreed project. Members noted the need to decide whether to continue the scheme and how to fund it. A key cost pressure from the 2025–26 pay award was the removal of Spinal Column Point 2 from the NJC structure from April 2026. Options were being considered to adjust the staffing structure, likely requiring staff to move to higher grades, with cost impacts under review. The Household Support Fund ended, and government proposed a Crisis Resilience Fund using the same funding pot. The council was engaged in consultation on the scheme, but guidance had not yet been issued.

Funding for Extended Producer Responsibility in the MTFS was increased from £4m to £5.8m following greater certainty from government, representing a £1.8m uplift. The Fair Funding Review was highlighted as a major source of uncertainty, proposing significant changes to the local authority funding formula.

The Fair Funding Review aimed to redistribute local authority funding to areas of greatest need and deprivation. Under the current formula, the Council expected up to £20m additional funding by 2028–29, tapered over three years to avoid sudden impacts. Pensions revaluation was discussed, with the employer contribution rate currently at 17.3%. Following consultation and challenge, the Pensions Authority proposed a 5.2% reduction, with an 80% likelihood of remaining 120% funded in three years. This outcome was considered positive, reducing costs by approximately £6m annually over the MTFS period.

The impact of Consumer Price Index (CPI) was noted as significant, with September CPI being the key metric for inflating council funding and provider cost assumptions. The MTFS reflected a broadly balanced budget for the next two years, with a projected gap in the final year. This was not considered a major concern due to uncertainties around the Fair

Funding Review and potential changes over the next three years.

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

It was noted that CYPS were significantly behind on delivering £4.5m savings for 2025-26, with £2.3m savings built into 2026-27. Councillor Blackham sought clarification on whether the 2026-27 savings were dependent on achieving the 2025-26 target.

The Assistant Director, Financial Services noted that the 2025-26 pressure was mainly due to rising placement costs rather than non-delivery of savings. Two CYPS savings areas remained in progress: completion of the in-house residential placements programme and increasing fostering numbers. These were expected to reduce costs in future years. The £2m increase in the MTFS was a holding position, with further adjustments likely to address placement pressures. Some non-delivery of savings was expected to carry into 2026-27, linked to incomplete residential homes. However, the number of looked-after children had significantly reduced, supporting overall savings delivery.

It was assumed that these assumptions had been built into the upcoming budget round. Councillor Blackham sought clarification on the likelihood of receiving a reliable budget for 2026-27 from CYPS. In response the Assistant Director, Financial Services explained the draft MTFS incorporated all current information and would form the basis of the Budget and Council Tax Report, creating a more robust position for CYPS for 2026-27. It was noted that the CYPS budget remained vulnerable to high-cost placements, with single cases potentially exceeding £1.7m annually, making future budgets subject to significant volatility.

Councillor A Carter sought clarification on whether the short-term financial impact from the closure of Specialty Steel had been reflected in the medium-term position and what effect this might have on council tax increases. It was also noted that the MTFS assumed a 3% annual council tax rise, and clarification was requested on whether this included the 2% adult social care precept or was in addition to it.

The Assistant Director, Financial Services indicated the MTFS assumed a 3% annual council tax increase as a planning assumption, with the split between basic council tax and the adult social care precept to be determined during the budget process. The maximum increase without a referendum was noted as 5%. Regarding Specialty Steel, the unpaid bill would result in a business rates write-off, already reflected in MTFS assumptions. This would create a deficit in the Business Rates Collection Fund, requiring gradual adjustment of future assumptions. The future sustainability of the site remained uncertain.

In a supplementary question, Councillor A Carter sought clarification that the MTFS assumed no business rates from the Specialty Steel site and

asked about the financial impact on council taxpayers. He queried whether discussions had taken place with government to mitigate the impact of the closure of this nationally significant industry on the council and local taxpayers.

The Assistant Director, Financial Services said the MTFS accounted for the write-off of debt from Specialty Steel and assumed continued business rate income for the current year while the government remained in occupation. Future sustainability of the site was uncertain, with discussions ongoing. The risk would be carried in the MTFS, as loss of business rates would create additional budget pressure, though not directly linked to council tax increases, which were determined alongside all other pressures and opportunities.

Councillor Baggaley asked how confident the Council was that the TBC items listed in the table would not lead to an unbalanced position in future years. The Assistant Director, Financial Services noted that, while the Council had a strong track record of setting balanced budgets, the current position remained uncertain due to the Fair Funding Review. The outcome was expected in late December and could either improve or worsen the funding position. The MTFS process would continue to be closely monitored, with flexibility to adjust assumptions as needed. Work on the TBC items was progressing, but the Fair Funding Review was identified as the greater risk.

The Chair asked when the Council would need to start addressing the projected budget gap for 2028-29 and at what point action should be taken. The Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services noted that the upcoming settlement would provide a clearer three-year position. Future budget gaps would depend on factors such as capital investment decisions, the Fair Funding Review, council tax levels, and other uncertainties. The MTFS currently assumed a 3% annual council tax increase as a planning figure, with the final decision to be made during the budget process. Reserves remained strong and could be used strategically if required, though none were currently allocated for this purpose. Members were advised that figures could change significantly, and options would be considered once the settlement and other variables were confirmed.

Councillor Blackham asked whether the Council was a preferential creditor in relation to Specialty Steel. The Assistant Director, Financial Services confirmed there would be no recovery of the debt.

Councillor Bacon raised a question about the South Yorkshire Pensions Fund position, asking whether 120% funding was considered reasonable or if a lower level would be preferable. It was noted that the actuary determined the funding level, and the Council had challenged the previous overly prudent position. Following lobbying by South Yorkshire councils, the rate was reduced to 120%, which was considered reasonable, though still cautious. The outcome was viewed positively, as

it avoided future increases in employer contributions and delivered significant savings.

Councillor A Carter raised a concern about whether the MTFS assumption of future business rates from the Specialty Steel site was overly optimistic and the potential financial implications for the Council if this income did not materialise.

The Chair noted that any loss of business rates from the Specialty Steel site would be addressed through the annual budget-setting process. The Assistant Director, Financial Services confirmed the potential impact was £1.3m per year and would be managed within the MTFS if the site ceased to generate business rates, though this would not affect the 2026–27 position.

Cabinet Member for Finance & Community Safety noted that the main issue was the Fair Funding Review and advised waiting for the government's announcement before reviewing figures. He stated that the Council had managed its financial position prudently and would act accordingly once the settlement was confirmed.

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

1. That Cabinet note the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 to 2028/29 update.

59. GENERAL ENFORCEMENT POLICY

At the Chair's invitation, Councillor Alam, Cabinet Member for Finance & Community Safety introduced the report noting that the Council adopted the General Enforcement Policy in May 2023, as required by statutory guidance to ensure engagement with regulators, residents, businesses, and other stakeholders in policy development. The review aimed to confirm stakeholder consultation and identify any necessary amendments. Consultation was scheduled from 1 December 2025 to 27 February 2026, involving council colleagues, elected members, partners, stakeholders, and the public. The adopted review policies were set out in Appendix 1, and the consultation plan in Appendix 2. Following consultation and analysis, a refreshed policy was planned for presentation to Cabinet in May 2026 for consideration.

The Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment said the Council last reviewed its enforcement policy in 2023. Cabinet was asked to approve consultation on proposed changes, scheduled for December and January, with a further report planned for spring to adopt a revised policy.

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

Councillor Yasseen provided feedback prior to consultation, recommending a relationship-based approach to enforcement focused on education and support rather than punitive measures. It was suggested that the consultation team work with the corporate community engagement team to strengthen engagement. The need for Equality Impact Assessments to address impacts on protected groups rather than only reporting respondent demographics was highlighted.

In response Sam Barstow, the Assistant Director for Community Safety and Street Scene welcomed members' comments and agreed that the core aim of the enforcement policy remained achieving compliance. It was noted that most issues were resolved early without formal enforcement, though the Council would act robustly where necessary. The Assistant Director, Community Safety and Street Scene confirmed that feedback on consultation and equality duties would be taken forward, with officers working closely with other departments and ensuring a strong focus on equality in decision-making.

Councillor A Carter raised concerns about the Equality Impact Assessment, noting it stated no impact on protected characteristics. It was suggested that enforcement could disproportionately affect these groups and that the consultation plan lacked measures to engage hard-to-reach groups, such as those with disabilities or limited literacy. Councillor A Carter did not support recommending the consultation to Cabinet in its current form.

The Chair asked how the authority would ensure engagement with hard-to-reach groups, including those for whom English is not a first language.

The Assistant Director for Community Safety and Street Scene clarified that Cabinet was being asked to approve consultation, not the enforcement policy itself. A full Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment would be completed when the revised policy was considered post-consultation. Members were assured that consultation would aim to reach all parts of the community, including internal stakeholders, councillors, partners, businesses, and community groups. Methods included online surveys, printed copies in libraries and community venues, social media promotion, direct notifications to councillors and businesses, and public events in accessible locations. Key stakeholders such as South Yorkshire Police, Chamber of Commerce, Fire and Rescue Services, and other council services would also be engaged.

The Cabinet Member for Finance & Community Safety confirmed that consultation aimed to be accessible and inclusive, engaging a community reference group representing protected characteristics, including people with learning disabilities, autism, BME groups, and faith communities. A standard checklist and specialist organisations, such as businesses, were used to ensure outreach to seldom-heard groups. It was noted that while responses could not be guaranteed, efforts were made through varied mechanisms to promote co-ownership of the policy.

The Chair moved to a vote with the majority of members being in favour of supporting with recommendations to Cabinet and one being against.

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

1. Approve a consultation with stakeholders to be undertaken in respect of the General Enforcement Policy to inform a review.
2. Note that a refreshed Policy will then be presented to Cabinet in May 2026 following the consultation.

60. ANNUAL COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS REPORT 2024/25

At the Chair's invitation, Councillor Alam, Cabinet Member for Finance & Community Safety introduced the report noting this was the annual report covering formal compliments and complaints for the 2024-25 financial year. Overall complaints received by the Council decreased by 1%. Complaints remained an important tool for learning and improving services.

The report included performance data broken down by Council directorates, enabling assessment at both Council and team levels. Complaints were noted as valuable for identifying issues, checking processes, and making necessary apologies and corrections. The Council had continued to make it easier for people to complain through multiple channels, including writing, email, and text.

Headline figures showed compliments increased from 902 to 1,309 (a 45% rise), continuing the year-on-year upward trend. Social Care recorded the largest increase, followed by Environment Services and Housing. Most complaints were resolved at Stage One, with only four reaching Stage Three for Member Review Panel consideration.

The Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services gave a presentation on the annual compliments and complaints report for the period up to March 2025, highlighting key points. It was reported that previous recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) had been addressed, including an all-member session in March covering complaint management procedures and member roles.

Headline figures showed complaints decreased slightly by 1%, from 1,212 to 1,198. This was still the third-highest total in the past five years, indicating further work was needed.

The graph in the presentation showed complaints (red line) rising over previous years, followed by a slight drop and levelling off last year. It was noted that further reduction was needed. Compliments (green line) continued to rise steadily over five years, increasing from 902 to 1,309 last year, largely driven by Adult Care.

Of the 1,198 complaints received, 369 (31%) were upheld, an increase from 294 the previous year, though the proportion remained consistent at around one-third. The largest category was quality of service, followed by lack of service and staff conduct/attitude, which decreased compared to the previous year. Most complaints (93.5%) were resolved at Stage One; 42 progressed to Stage Two and only four reached Stage Three.

By directorate, Housing and Regeneration & Environment recorded the highest complaint volumes. Regeneration & Environment saw the largest absolute increase, rising from 373 to 468 (25%), followed by Children and Young People's Services.

Housing complaints decreased from 615 to 471, and the Assistant Chief Executive's directorate reduced from five to three. Public Health remained at zero complaints.

The increase in Regeneration & Environment was mainly due to waste management issues from the previous year, rising from 165 to 267. Children and Young People's Services also saw an increase in EHCP-related complaints, from 14 to 24, reflecting a national challenge. Despite the higher volume of complaints, Regeneration & Environment achieved the largest improvement in timeliness, increasing from 79% to 85%, meeting the Council's target. Overall, 81% of complaints were responded to within timescales, compared to 82% the previous year, still below the 85% target. Finance and Customer Services recorded the highest performance at 88%. Adult Care improved slightly from 75% to 77%.

It was noted that work would continue with service managers to improve timeliness. The matter would be discussed further with the Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence and Complaints Manager to review processes. Reference was made to previous improvements achieved on Freedom of Information requests, and it was emphasised that responsibility for timely responses rests with management, not solely the complaints team.

Compliments increased by 45%, from 902 to 1,309, mainly driven by Adult Social Care, which doubled its numbers. Regeneration & Environment also saw a 40% rise (85 more), and Housing increased by 38% (77 more). While this may suggest improved customer satisfaction, further analysis was needed to confirm.

The Next steps included:

- Continuing training for frontline staff to reinforce their role in shaping customer experience.
- Improving timeliness of complaint responses.
- Rolling out reporting dashboards for managers to access complaint data more easily.
- Enhancing processes for recording and sharing compliments.
- Completing the annual self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

- Streamlining complaint handling with Customer Services through system automation to reduce delays in directing complaints to the appropriate officers.

The Chair invited members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) to raise questions and queries on the points raised and began by noting that 31% of complaints were upheld. What lessons were learned from these cases? The Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services noted that complaints varied widely, and feedback was always provided to managers. Responsibility for addressing issues lay with service areas. Examples included benefit entitlement complaints, where outcomes could not be changed, and complaints about staff attitude or handling of service issues, which were addressed through training and discussions with officers. The importance of tone and customer interaction was emphasised. Complaints were not lost in the corporate process but dealt with by management. Capturing learning consistently across all areas remained a challenge.

The Complaints Manager explained that learning from complaints fell into two categories: capturing and applying lessons. Managers investigating complaints were required to identify learning, which was recorded and reported at management meetings monthly, quarterly, and annually. Some findings were included in the annual report. Common themes included:

- Staff performance issues addressed through supervision and training.
- Communication gaps where clearer updates to customers could have prevented complaints.
- Strategic process improvements to close service gaps.

It was noted that Housing had embedded a Tenants Learning from Complaints Panel, working with Rotherfed to review complaints and associated learning. Feedback from tenants was fed into housing management meetings to support service improvements, providing valuable resident insight beyond internal review.

Councillor McKiernan noted the absence of other strategic directors, given that many topics discussed fell under their portfolios. The use of the term “customers” in the report was queried, suggesting most were residents rather than business customers. Councillor McKiernan confirmed his first question on trends in upheld complaints had been answered and asked why compliments had increased, particularly in Adult Social Care. It was queried whether this was due to proactive requests for feedback or surveys.

The Complaints Manager explained that compliments were largely unsolicited feedback from residents, not actively requested by the Council. However, managers were encouraged to forward compliments for logging rather than leaving them informal. This approach helped ensure compliments were recorded alongside complaints. Some services,

such as Community Occupational Therapy, routinely surveyed customers after visits and efficiently submitted positive feedback, resulting in higher recorded compliments.

Councillor Yasseen noted that compliments had increased significantly in some areas, notably Adult Social Care and Regeneration. How could members be assured that learning from these positive outcomes was shared across other directorates where complaints remained high? Members had not seen any evidence of other directorates adopting the practices that worked well in Adult Social Care. In response the Complaints Manager noted there was a competitive element in collecting compliments, with Adult Social Care and Housing encouraged to compare results. Services were reminded to capture compliments during resident engagement and forward them to the complaints team for logging. Techniques such as surveys and follow-up work were highlighted as effective in increasing recorded compliments.

The Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services acknowledged that compliments were harder to encourage compared to complaints, which were usually driven by service failures. Compliments were generally unsolicited, though residents could submit them via the website. The point was raised about asking for feedback at the point of service or resolution, which could involve Customer Services and frontline staff. This would be explored further to improve how compliments are captured and used for learning.

On terminology, it was noted that most interactions were with residents, though “customers” was sometimes used where services were purchased. Feedback on this point was accepted. The absence of other directors was also noted, and this would be fed back as their input was important for answering service-specific questions.

Councillor Yasseen suggested utilising positive feedback more effectively, noting the Council’s role as the largest employer in Rotherham. A suggestion was proposed regarding sharing compliments, with resident consent, through newsletters and local communications to highlight good work and reflect the efforts of staff, many of whom are local.

Councillor Brent noted that while many directorates, such as Housing and Regeneration & Environment, were obvious points for complaints and compliments, some areas like Children and Young People’s Services (CYPS) might not be. It was queried how complaints or compliments received by schools, which delivered education on behalf of the Council, were captured, as these did not appear to be included in the report.

The Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services agreed that the point was valid and needed consideration. Current reporting covered complaints in line with the Ombudsman’s Code, but wider feedback from commissioned services or schools was not routinely captured. The challenge of collecting broader data without disrupting service delivery

was acknowledged, and the matter would be reviewed to explore possible solutions. Similar gaps were noted in areas such as Public Health and housing providers, where complaints and compliments often sit with commissioned services. The aim would be to find ways to capture this information to support improvement and recognition.

Councillor A Carter reflected on terminology, noting that “customer” was an improvement compared to the previous use of “complainant,” though views differed on whether “resident” or “customer” was preferable. It was acknowledged that cultural change in how the organisation responded to complaints was still needed, but progress had been made.

Councillor Tinsley asked whether the complaints reported followed the formal procedure and raised the issue of defining what constituted a complaint. It was suggested that lower-level issues reported via the Council website, which residents may consider complaints, could be collated as separate data. Capturing this could provide earlier opportunities for service improvement and potentially generate compliments when issues are resolved promptly.

The Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services agreed that while formal complaints must follow Ombudsman processes, the purpose of collecting data was to use it meaningfully. The point was made that many contacts from residents are not formal complaints but service requests or queries, and these interactions could provide valuable insight. Capturing all types of contact, whether formal or informal, could help identify trends and improve services. The challenge of integrating this broader data into reporting was acknowledged, and the suggestion would be considered further.

In a further response the Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence confirmed that service requests, such as missed bin collections or pothole reports, were recorded and fed into the relevant services for monitoring and management. This data was reviewed through management and directorate meetings to ensure a complete picture of service performance. Councillor Tinsley noted that the lack of follow-up after service requests was a missed opportunity. It was suggested that an easier process for confirming satisfaction could be considered, rather than requiring residents to search online for the formal complaints’ procedure. Many residents might assume they had already complained, leaving issues unresolved and feedback uncollected.

In a further question, Councillor Yasseen noted that while complaints had fallen by 1%, this offered limited assurance given that totals remained the third highest in five years. The need to view data over a longer period for better perspective was stressed. The 25% rise in complaints within Regeneration & Environment, particularly waste management, which had increased by 62%, excluding recent disruptions was highlighted.

Councillor Yasseen went on to express concern that key drivers of

resident satisfaction, such as waste collection, street cleanliness, and green spaces, were not being prioritised, despite their significant impact on public perception.

It was asked how the Council could place greater emphasis on these universal services and respond more effectively when issues arise.

In response to these points the Strategic Director for Finance and Customer Services acknowledged that the statistics confirmed public dissatisfaction with certain services, but the underlying reasons were already known and taken seriously. Complaints data was valuable for showing the scale and impact on residents rather than identifying unknown issues. The Council used this information corporately to inform improvements and ensure feedback loops were strengthened, including better communication with residents about progress.

Work was underway with Customer Services to create an end-to-end feedback process to reduce repeat contacts. Broader service demand data was also monitored. Examples included housing complaints related to damp and mould, which prompted increased Council activity to address the issue. All complaints data was reviewed at senior levels to ensure action on key service concerns.

The Assistant Director, Community Safety and Street Scene noted that services such as waste management involved millions of interactions annually, so any increase in complaints was taken seriously and reviewed alongside wider data sources, including crew feedback and operational systems. Complaints were one of many measures used to inform decisions on service improvements and investment. An example was given where missed collections were often due to large refuse vehicles accessing narrow streets. In response, Cabinet approved investment in narrow-access vehicles, which were now in operation and reducing related complaints. This illustrated how complaint data, combined with other insights, informed practical service improvements.

Councillor Yasseen asked whether the Council used national comparators, such as the LGA satisfaction survey, to benchmark performance. It was noted that previous national surveys, like the former Place Survey, had not been replaced and queried if metrics such as the LGA's 76% satisfaction rate for waste collection were used to assess improvement needs against national averages. The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence confirmed that benchmarking was undertaken using national and local surveys. The Council continued to run its own resident satisfaction survey, which provided useful feedback on key issues and informed core metrics within the Council Plan. Comparisons with national data were possible but limited, as not all areas conducted similar surveys and statistical differences made direct comparisons challenging. Work was ongoing to align the next local survey with the national survey and to obtain Yorkshire and Humber data for broader context.

The Vice-Chair noted that residents expected basic services to be delivered correctly and expressed frustration when simple issues were not addressed proactively. Examples included pothole repairs and pavement moss clearance, where additional visible issues were left unresolved, requiring separate reports.

It was suggested that some complaints could be avoided through more proactive processes and asked how member casework was utilised within the compliance process, noting its potential value in identifying trends and informing improvements. The Chair added that casework often involved complaints about council services and queried its role in the complaints procedure.

The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence confirmed that when casework was clearly flagged as a formal complaint, it was logged in the system, passed to the complaints team, and managed through the standard process, with responses provided to both the resident and the member. Broader casework trends were reviewed by the Customer Experience Board, alongside other metrics such as call volumes and web demand. Those datasets were triangulated to identify recurring issues, trends, and areas requiring further investigation or action.

The Assistant Director, Community Safety and Street Scene confirmed that member casework was reviewed both individually and cumulatively. Individual issues were addressed by service managers, while aggregated casework data was included in regular performance reports to identify trends and inform service improvements.

In response to concerns about proactive behaviours, it was noted that expectations for officers to assess the wider environment during tasks were set by Cabinet and senior management. While these behaviours were encouraged, operational constraints sometimes required prioritisation based on the Highway Management Code, which defined repair urgency. Nonetheless, managers committed to reviewing individual cases and learning from them to improve services.

A question was raised by the Vice-Chair regarding complaints about street bins not being emptied, as the data primarily focused on household waste. It was noted that during the latter part of the reporting period, there were numerous complaints, including observations within wards of overflowing street bins. Clarification was sought on the process for ensuring bins were emptied properly and how operatives reported issues to improve scheduling. The query also asked whether there had been an increase in complaints about street bins during that time. At this point the Chair reminded members that the discussion should relate to the previous year and not the current year.

The Assistant Director, Community Safety and Street Scene noted that a recent workshop held with members of OSMB had reviewed the data, which showed a spike in complaints during an unseasonably hot bank

holiday weekend, leading to increased bin usage. More broadly, the council had invested in additional operatives and a new IT system to replace outdated processes. This system enabled operatives to record bin fullness and report overflows, allowing data-driven adjustments to collection schedules. These measures aimed to proactively manage demand and prevent issues.

A query was raised by Councillor Baggley, about how complaints were managed within required timeframes and how delays were avoided when progressing from Stage 1 to Stage 3. Clarification was also sought on how complaints were classified in reports, particularly when they spanned an annual period, whether by the date received or the date closed. The Complaint Manager confirmed that all formal complaints were performance-managed through weekly dashboards, showing in-time and out-of-time cases to managers at all levels. Monthly and quarterly reports were also provided, and the complaints team chased managers individually to ensure timely handling. Where possible, complaints were resolved quickly to avoid lengthy Stage 2 investigations, though this could occasionally delay escalation. Escalation times were governed by the Housing Ombudsman's code and, from April 2026, by the new Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman code. Data reported included all complaints received and resolved within the period.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:

1. Noted the Annual Compliments and Complaints Report for 2024/25.
2. Agreed that future reports included data to demonstrate that complaints raised through the member casework system were dealt with through the Complaints process.
3. Agreed that detail should be provided, in future reports, of improvements put in place arising from the learning of complaints, including how this is applied across the Council and not just in the particular Department or Directorate affected.

61. CALL-IN - SELECTIVE LICENSING POLICY (LISTED AS ITEM 8 ON THE 20 OCTOBER 2025 CABINET AGENDA)

In relation to this item, Councillor Tinsley declared that he had previously held a licence in Maltby. It was not a financial interest.

Councillor Yasseen expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to present the call-in, noting that raising housing standards across Rotherham was a shared priority. It was stated that while the principle was supported and had been backed over the past 10 years, Councillor Yasseen did not support the current proposal. Concerns were raised that the model would not deliver lasting change, as similar issues persisted in the same streets after a decade. The procedural, legal, and policy concerns were highlighted, including flaws in the consultation process, inadequate responses during engagement events, and anomalies such as reopening the consultation and rebranding it as "landlord licensing," which it was

believed was inconsistent with the Housing Act. Evidence-based feedback had previously been submitted, including examples of inaccuracies on the council's website and maps.

Councillor Yasseen stated that the consultation process had undermined trust and integrity, describing aspects as misleading. Concerns were reiterated about the equality analysis, noting that it lacked evidence of mitigating measures for disproportionate impacts on protected groups. Reference was made to central Rotherham areas, Boston Castle, Wath East, and Wath West, where engagement events were held and which have high ethnic diversity. Additional concerns included inadequate data on mobility and immigration markers under the Housing Act, particularly the mobility index, and a lack of transparency regarding alternative schemes submitted during consultation.

In continuation Councillor Yasseen cited Little London in Maltby as an example, noting it had previously been identified for improvement, fined, and featured on a national programme for poor housing conditions, yet was removed from the proposed selective licensing scope. Questions were raised about the basis for accepting or rejecting schemes and concerns expressed about transparency, as residents perceived possible preferential treatment of landlords. It was emphasised that the call-in focused on tenants' rights to safe, secure, and decent homes, which they felt had not been achieved over the past decade. They argued that the proposed model risked duplicating regulation given the forthcoming Renters Reform Bill and Awaab's Law and suggested waiting for these measures to be implemented. A borough-wide scheme, similar to Barnsley's approach, was strongly supported as an alternative to selective licensing.

Councillor Yasseen went on to raise concerns about the financial model, noting that over 300 properties had been removed from the selective licensing scope without clear rationale and questioning how this affected projected income from licence fees. Clarification was sought on whether any deficit had been accounted for and whether funding was ring-fenced for the dedicated team. It was queried how tenant involvement would be strengthened, expressing doubt based on previous poor engagement outcomes and a lack of significant changes in approach. Finally, concerns were reiterated about transparency in property removals, with assurances requested that decisions were not influenced by lobbying.

Councillor A Carter confirmed agreement with previously stated reasons for the call-in and requested either a revision of the decision or, at minimum, a pause for Cabinet to reconsider pending the impact of the Renters Reform Bill and Awaab's Law. Councillor A Carter highlighted that Brinsworth was newly included in the scheme and reiterated long-standing opposition to selective licensing due to perceived lack of effectiveness. Additional points included:

- Consultation results: 80% of tenants said they would not support the scheme if it led to rent increases, and 59% of overall

respondents opposed the scheme.

- Evidence of success: The report cited Maltby as proof of concept, but this was questioned, noting repeated cycles of licensing and continued issues.
- Impact on rents: Concern was expressed that selective licensing could raise rents in lower socio-economic areas, making housing unaffordable for local residents.

It was argued that selective licensing was punitive yet ineffective, citing national examples, and suggested that forthcoming legislation, including a national landlord registry, would provide stronger enforcement and broader improvements. A borough-wide approach was supported rather than selective licensing.

The Vice-Chair expressed initial concerns about potential rent increases but acknowledged that officers had referenced a report suggesting otherwise. It was asked whether any supplementary evidence could be provided to address those concerns and queried whether the issue related to supply, such as landlords leaving the market and reducing availability, or whether it was an external factor that would inevitably increase rents.

In response Councillor Yasseen noted that while some landlords had sent letters, they were not lobbying on behalf of landlords but advocating for a better approach. They shared recent examples, including a tenant who reported a rent increase after years of stability and expressed concerns that selective licensing would not address wider community issues. Councillor Yasseen also cited feedback from a landlord in Clifton who was selling a property due to opposition to the policy. It was argued that national reports did not reflect local realities and reiterated concerns that rents would rise and that the proposed scheme lacked a broader strategy to tackle underlying problems.

As a sponsor of the call-in request, Councillor A Carter noted evidence from landlords indicating rents could rise and agreed multiple factors were involved. It was highlighted that the borough relied heavily on the private sector to meet housing needs due to limited council housing. Concern was expressed that landlords selling properties could reduce rental stock, limiting options for residents wishing to remain in their communities. Councillor A Carter warned that this could harm social housing provision and lead to poorer landlords entering the market, ultimately lowering standards.

In a follow up question, the Vice-Chair noted that officers might argue the scheme provided powers to inspect properties and address faults, and asked whether any aspects of the Renters Reform Bill could mitigate this.

In response to the question, Councillor Yasseen reflected on lessons from the first decade of the scheme, citing inefficiencies such as properties registered but not inspected despite fees being paid. It was argued that

selective licensing had not delivered its intended outcomes and highlighted the benefits of the forthcoming Renters Reform Bill, which would require landlords to register properties and strengthen tenant rights. Councillor Yasseen suggested this national approach would be more effective and efficient than current practices and recommended pausing the scheme until these changes were implemented.

Councillor Blackham referred to legal grounds in the report, noting a statement that the designation could risk being deemed ultra vires. It was asked whether this was a genuine risk and if the council might be acting beyond its powers, stressing the seriousness of the issue and questioning whether such a risk was acceptable.

In response Councillor Yasseen stated they believed several council policies had been breached, as detailed in their call-in request. They emphasised that their role was to present a case based on resident engagement and improving housing standards, not to provide legal expertise. They warned of potential legal challenges, citing past cases where landlords had taken the council to court, which, although successful, were costly and time-consuming. Concerns were raised that the current scheme could expose the council to similar risks, particularly given growing dissatisfaction. Councillor Yasseen also questioned the effectiveness of the scheme, noting issues such as cannabis cultivation increasing in Eastwood during its implementation and failure to meet inspection targets.

Councillor A Carter added that, even if the council successfully defended any legal challenge, exposing itself to such risk was not a prudent use of public funds. They argued that resources should be directed toward core services, especially given the potential duplication with the forthcoming Renters Reform Bill, which is expected to take effect in 2026. They recommended pausing the selective licensing scheme for 12 months to assess the impact of national legislation before proceeding, noting that circumstances had changed since the original decision and that a review was now appropriate.

In a supplementary question Councillor Blackham asked whether, given the potential risk of acting ultra vires, the council should pause the scheme and seek legal advice to confirm its position. Councillor A Carter agreed, stating that a pause was appropriate and added that, regardless of legal opinion, proceeding would not represent good value for money.

The Chair invited the Monitoring Officer to address concerns regarding legal risk. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that while the report acknowledged a potential risk of challenge, such risks exist for many council decisions, particularly controversial ones. Previous challenges to selective licensing had been successfully defended. Legal advice had been sought throughout the process, and external counsel retained to ensure decisions were lawful and defensible. The Monitoring Officer stated that the decision-making process had been appropriate and that,

should the Cabinet decision stand, the council would be able to robustly defend any legal challenge.

Councillor McKiernan expressed concern that the call-in did not present new evidence, noting that many of the questions raised had already been addressed during previous scrutiny, including consideration of the Renters Reform Bill before it became law. They asked what was new in the call-in that justified Cabinet revisiting the decision, given the extensive pre-decision scrutiny already undertaken.

Councillor Yasseen disagreed with the suggestion that the call-in lacked new points, stating that previous responses had been inadequate. They highlighted equality concerns as an example, noting that earlier replies focused on commitment rather than concrete actions or mitigation measures. Councillor Yasseen stressed that tenants deserved better outcomes, citing persistent deprivation in areas like Eastwood despite 10 years of selective licensing. It was explained that issues had been raised repeatedly over several months with little response, which was why they continued to press for improvements.

Councillor A Carter added that, while scrutiny had taken place previously, the situation had changed since the Cabinet decision because the Renters Reform Bill had now passed, and its provisions were clear. It was argued that this represented a significant development and justified reconsideration of the scheme.

At the Chairs invitation, the Cabinet Member for Housing began by thanking colleagues for agreeing on the aims of selective licensing, safe communities, decent homes, and healthy living, and acknowledged the robust scrutiny previously undertaken.

The Cabinet Member for Housing stated they did not believe the consultation was flawed, asserting that proper process had been followed. The extensive engagement undertaken was outlined, including notifications to 16,000 addresses, emails to residents and agents, landlord newsletters, social media, press releases, paid adverts, ward newsletters, public meetings, town council forums, door-knocking, posters, and targeted engagement with minority groups. Paper surveys were also provided on request, and feedback led to updates in consultation materials, removal of a potentially biased question, extended consultation, and revised boundaries. In conclusion it was felt that the consultation was adequate and inclusive.

The Assistant Director, Community Safety and Street Scene thanked members for their questions and provided clarification. They noted that while only 20% of councils operated selective licensing in August 2024, 25 new schemes were launched during 2024 and 37 were under consideration by January 2025, indicating growing adoption nationally. On procedural concerns, it was confirmed the consultation was robust and adaptable, with Cabinet fully aware of the majority opposition when

making its decision. The decision was based on statutory guidelines and a strong evidence base.

It was stated there was no rebranding and that the equality impact analysis complied with the Equality Act and council frameworks, drawing on consultation data, ward demographics, deprivation indices, and census information. Risks and mitigations were identified, and the policy aimed to advance equality by removing barriers to reporting and ensuring proactive inspections.

On migration and mobility indices, it was clarified these were referenced for context but not used as grounds for designation. All alternative schemes submitted were assessed and documented in the report. Regarding Little London, it was explained its exclusion was due to historic circumstances involving two major landlords, making a different approach viable.

The Assistant Director outlined legislative changes during the process, noting that the removal of the 20% threshold requirement allowed councils greater flexibility to consider additional areas for future selective licensing.

Finally, the Assistant Director clarified that while the Renters Reform Bill had now become law, there had been no substantive changes since previous discussions. They noted that implementation would take time, with measures such as the national landlord database not expected until winter 2026. It was explained that selective licensing still offered unique benefits, including the ability to set local conditions tailored to Rotherham's needs, which the national legislation could not provide.

The Cabinet Member for Housing addressed legal and procedural points, confirming that areas were designated based on meeting at least one of five statutory criteria, poor housing conditions, antisocial behaviour, high deprivation, high crime, or low housing demand. They emphasised the scheme's purpose of professionalising the private rented sector and protecting tenants. The Cabinet Member noted that while the Renters Reform Act was now law, full implementation would take time, and selective licensing remained essential for setting local conditions.

The achievements of previous schemes were highlighted, including addressing over 8,000 hazards, inspecting 2,300 properties, tackling 2,000 antisocial behaviour cases, and securing 15 successful prosecutions with 23 pending. One in seven inspected properties had serious Category 1 hazards. The Cabinet Member rejected claims of landlord self-regulation, stating that some landlords with convictions had opposed the scheme. It was argued that rent increases were landlord decisions, not a direct result of licensing, and fees equated to less than £1 per week. Evidence showed no strong link between licensing and rent rises.

The Cabinet Member concluded that selective licensing had delivered

improvements, citing Maltby as an example, and reiterated its role in reaching vulnerable tenants who might otherwise face barriers to reporting issues.

Councillor Yasseen noted there was no mention of finance regarding the 319 properties that had been removed. The documentation did not account for this, even though they had already been excluded before the cabinet paper. It was felt this was a poor financial response, given that many of the arguments were strongly based on financial considerations.

The Assistant Director, Community Safety and Street Scene explained that finances were recalculated for the final cabinet report. The team had responded to consultation feedback, which included requests to penalise bad landlords and support good landlords, leading to a review of the fee structure. The removal of properties also prompted a review of the scheme's expenses, and budgeted costs were reduced to reflect the lower income.

The second finance question from Councillor Yasseen concerned legal counsel. It was noted that legal advice had been sought throughout the process, and clarification was requested on how much of this cost came from the council's general fund. The Assistant Director reiterated that as the Monitoring Officer had noted, counsel's advice had been taken. These costs were not linked to selective licensing and were funded from the council's general fund. The exact cost was not available at the time, but the officer agreed to discuss with legal colleagues and provide details if appropriate.

Councillor Yasseen noted that, based on the latest figures, 15 of the 16 areas selected for selective licensing had become more deprived over the past 10 years. Concern was raised that the proposed approach appeared to replicate a scheme that had not delivered improvement, with deprivation worsening in most areas, including Eastwood, which ranked among the top 2% most deprived nationally. The question asked was how the new scheme would address issues that had not been resolved in the last decade.

The Assistant Director acknowledged that there was a fundamental difference of opinion on the success of previous schemes. The factual point that deprivation had increased in the designated areas was accepted, though the national context was unclear. The Assistant Director stated that the scheme had been successful in improving housing conditions for tenants in selective licensing areas, delivering positive outcomes. Scrutiny had reviewed the scheme several times and recommended closer alignment with wider council policies and strategies. The proposed scheme was described as different, with a critical change being the introduction of area plans based on available data, consultation feedback, and using selective licensing as one tool within a broader approach to improve wider outcomes. In summary, the Assistant Director believed selective licensing had significantly improved individual

properties and tenants' conditions, and the new model reflected scrutiny recommendations and public consultation, aiming to deliver better results for residents.

Councillor Yasseen acknowledged the level of consultation but expressed concern that the consultation document was biased, as highlighted in their submitted analysis. They noted that only one question had been changed, whereas their review suggested around 60% of the content was biased. They asked whether more could have been done to make the process fairer and more accessible. The Cabinet Member for Housing stated that, in her opinion, no further changes were necessary.

The Vice-Chair noted the justification for selective licensing as a local response to national issues but questioned how this aligned with studies suggesting rents do not increase as a result. Concern was raised about the potential for rising rents due to basic economic principles and the risk of council policies contributing to this. It was asked how confident officers were that rents would not rise, given that decision ultimately rested with landlords.

In response the Cabinet Member stated they could not be fully confident that landlords would avoid rent increases, acknowledging that some might use the scheme as justification. An example was cited where a landlord planned a rent rise after five years without an increase. However, it was noted that rules governing rent increases in the private sector remained in place and must be followed. The Cabinet Member emphasised that good landlords had been recognised through reduced fees, amounting to less than £1 per week, and argued that any significant rent increase would likely be for reasons unrelated to selective licensing.

Councillor Tinsley noted that the Rental Rights Bill was not yet fully implemented and asked whether, once the housing order and related measures such as the landlord register were in place, the council would review how these interact with selective licensing and consider whether the scheme should continue. In response the Assistant Director confirmed that the scheme would be reviewed annually. If conditions changed to the point where selective licensing was no longer considered necessary or proportionate in specific areas, a recommendation could be made to Cabinet to consider withdrawal.

In a supplementary, Councillor Tinsley asked whether the Rental Rights Bill's decent homes standard would operate in the same way as selective licensing, using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System for monitoring. The Assistant Director explained that some aspects would be similar, but others would differ. Selective licensing was highlighted as a local tool that allows tailored conditions, such as stricter overcrowding thresholds based on usable living space rather than total square meterage, which includes kitchens and bathrooms. This flexibility enables the council to address specific local issues. While some elements will be covered nationally under the Rental Rights Bill, others will not, which

underpins the council's approach.

The Vice-Chair raised concerns about situations where landlords with problematic tenants might be disproportionately affected. They asked what would happen if a tenant caused damage or issues, making it harder for the landlord under the Renter's Rights Bill to evict them, while also facing council inspections identifying hazards. The Cabinet Member clarified that landlords remained responsible for ensuring properties were free from hazards, even if tenants caused damage. Regarding antisocial behaviour, it was noted that under the Renter's Rights Bill, landlords could still evict tenants for a valid reason, but no-fault evictions were no longer permitted. Eviction for antisocial behaviour remained possible, subject to following the correct process.

The Assistant Director highlighted differences between selective licensing and the Renter's Rights Bill. The Bill focused on tenants' rights and offered little on managing antisocial behaviour, whereas selective licensing allowed local requirements for landlords to address such issues. It was noted that selective licensing provided additional levers beyond ensuring homes were decent and fit for habitation, by elevating expectations for landlords to manage tenants effectively for the benefit of the wider community.

The Vice-Chair asked what safeguards were in place for landlords dealing with tenants who caused property damage, particularly if issues arose immediately before an inspection. They queried how landlords could report such situations to the council and ensure their concerns were taken into account. The Assistant Director stated that enforcement was evidence-based. Landlords could demonstrate compliance by showing regular property inspections and that hazards had not previously been identified. It was acknowledged that tenants might cause damage or create issues, but officers were experienced in assessing housing conditions and determining causes. The general enforcement policy applied to selective licensing, with the focus on compliance and achieving positive outcomes for both landlords and tenants.

At the Chair's invitation the Cabinet Member for Housing concluded that the call-in should not be accepted for several reasons. On procedural grounds, they stated the consultation was not flawed in design or execution; it was extensive, inclusive, and transparent. Proper processes had been followed, and the consultation was considered adequate. On legal grounds, they believed the criteria for designating selective licensing were clear and had been met, with no breach of equality duty. On impact grounds, they stated the scheme did not disproportionately affect Roma or other ethnic minority tenants, as ward inclusion was evidence-based and clearly set out in the submitted papers. Finally, on reasonableness, they believed the Cabinet decision to approve six further designations was reasonable and evidence based. They reiterated that the purpose was to ensure safe living conditions and create safer, healthier communities for a better Rotherham.

The Assistant Director agreed with the Cabinet Member's summary and added that no new information had been presented for scrutiny to consider. They noted that the same conclusion had applied at the end of the previous scrutiny session.

At the Chair's invitation, Councillor Yasseen thanked everyone for their contributions. They stated that while everyone agreed on the desired outcomes, they believed selective licensing had not achieved improvements in housing standards or quality of life over the past ten years. National IMD data showed that 15 of the 16 designated areas had become more deprived during this period. Councillor Yasseen advocated for an alternative, borough-wide approach to improving housing standards, noting that most councils without selective licensing had found other methods. Councillor Yasseen also suggested pausing the scheme in light of upcoming national changes, such as the Renters' Rights Bill, and recommended revisiting the policy next year.

At the Chair's invitation Councillor A Carter clarified that the OSMB's decision was whether to accept the Cabinet's decision or request reconsideration. They confirmed that the call-in proposal sought Cabinet's agreement to a 12-month pause, as outlined in the call-in document. They noted that the Cabinet Member believed the consultation was robust but had personally observed very low tenant engagement in Brinsworth. They highlighted that most residents did not support selective licensing and expressed concern that the council was proceeding with an unpopular scheme. They argued that decisions should reflect tenants' wishes rather than assumptions about their best interests. Councillor A Carter questioned the adequacy of criteria used for designation, noting reliance on deprivation rather than evidence of poor housing standards. They also raised concerns about rent increases, citing contradictions in the Cabinet Member's statements. They reiterated that deprivation had worsened in previous selective licensing areas and warned that continuing the scheme could exacerbate this trend. In conclusion, they recommended pausing the decision and revisiting the policy after 12 months.

The Chair invited members of OSMB to make comments with the Vice-Chair stating that he would vote to refer the decision back to Cabinet. They explained that, regardless of personal views, Cabinet ultimately makes the decision, but it was felt the reasons for the call-in should be reviewed again at Cabinet level. The Vice-Chair expressed concerns about the consultation process, including the removal of a question due to potential bias, and noted uncertainty around the issue of rising rents. They concluded that Cabinet should revisit the matter and review it properly and confirmed his support for referral.

The Chair noted three options available were that OSMB could decide not to support the call-in, allowing the original decision to be implemented. Alternatively, OSMB could refer the matter back to Cabinet for reconsideration, setting out its concerns in writing. In exceptional

circumstances, OSMB could refer the decision to full Council. If Council supported the call-in, the matter would be referred back to Cabinet for reconsideration; if not, the original decision would stand.

The Chair moved to a vote for those in favour of supporting option one, to not to support the call-in, allowing the original decision to be implemented. Six members of the Board voted in favour of supporting option one. Five members of the Board voted against supporting option one, therefore it option one was carried, and the original decision could be implemented.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:

1. Did not support the request for call-in, therefore the original decision could be implemented with immediate effect.

62. WORK PROGRAMME

The Governance Manager noted that work programme was presented in the report. She highlighted that follow-up on life-saving equipment and related by-laws remained a priority. She also confirmed that discussions were ongoing with the Rotherham Youth Cabinet regarding topics and timing for the Children's Commissioners Takeover Challenge, which would be scheduled into the work programme.

Councillor Yasseen recalled that, following a recommendation from the Youth Cabinet a few years ago, the plastic cups were replaced with paper cups at the Town Hall. They advised ensuring this commitment was upheld, as the Youth Cabinet might comment on it during their visit.

Resolved: - That the Work Programme be approved.

63. WORK IN PROGRESS - SELECT COMMISSIONS

Improving Places Select Commission Update:

Councillor McKiernan, Chair of Improving Places Select Commission reported that the previous meeting on 21 October covered the Housing Strategy 2025–2030 and its Draft Action Plan, which will monitor progress under four key priorities. Performance would be measured annually (April–March), with progress reports presented each July. Members also received information on the Pride in Place programme for central Rotherham (2025–2035), formerly the Neighbourhood Plan, and on the council's regeneration strategy and funding approach. The council prioritises projects first and then seeks funding, rather than waiting for government funds.

Updates were provided on the Neighbourhood Board, due at Cabinet on 17 November, and on future plans for the East area.

Additional work programme items included the School Road Safety

Review, with follow-up meetings arranged; an antisocial behaviour workshop scheduled for 4 December at the Town Hall; and plans for a market library redevelopment site visit.

The next meeting on 16 December would consider the Bereavement Services Annual Report and the Thriving Neighbourhoods Annual Report.

Health Select Commission Update:

Councillor Keenen, Chair of Health Select Commission noted that the next meeting on 20 November would scrutinise the Mental Health Strategy (pre-decision), Place Partners winter planning, and the Health and Wellbeing annual report.

An unpaid carers' strategy workshop was scheduled for 28 November in conjunction with Improving Lives. Feedback was provided on the Access to Contraception review, which was thorough and aimed for Cabinet consideration before the end of the municipal year. Findings from the Menopause Workshop would be reported after the contraception review, with both pieces of work showing complementary themes. Plans were underway for a site visit to the Same Day Emergency Care facility at Rotherham Hospital, alongside potential visits to the lung clinic in early 2026, ahead of items coming to Health Select in March.

Attendance at the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 October was reported, where views were shared on consultation findings regarding proposed commissioning changes for gluten-free prescribing and IVF. High engagement from Rotherham residents provided reassurance their views were considered. Additionally, with Barnsley Council's support, stroke emergency care and aftercare pathways were successfully added to the work programme following residents' concerns.

Improving Lives Select Commission:

Councillor Brent, Acting Chair of Improving Lives Select Commission noted that Members had received updates on the Home to Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy (2023–2028) and the draft SEND Sufficiency Strategy, both of which were positively received.

The December meeting would include updates on responses to Prevention of Future Deaths reports and the Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Assurance Report.

Members of ILSC were invited to a November workshop on the Child and Unpaid Carers' Strategy for pre-decision scrutiny ahead of Cabinet consideration.

64. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Board considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions November 2025 to January 2026.

The Governance Manager noted that the December meeting would include the HRA Business Plan and rent setting for 2026–2027, the Rotherham Employment and Skills Strategy (pre-decision), and the Safer Rotherham Partnership Annual Report.

Items on the forward plan included the Unpaid Carers Strategy (2026–2031), Adult Social Care Charging Policy, Housing First Recommissioning, Care Leaver Offer and Charter, Inclusion Strategy Annual Report (formerly Equalities and Diversity Inclusion Strategy), the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Fund, and the Library Strategy. Non-key decisions included updates on the Adult Social Care Mental Health Strategy and Housing Repairs and Maintenance.

Suggested items for consideration by OSMB were the Adult Social Care Charging Policy, Inclusion Strategy, and Library Strategy. Members agreed to review and provide feedback following further discussion.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:

1. Agreed that the following items would be added to the December agenda as part of OSMB's pre-decision scrutiny work:
 - Rotherham Employment & Skills Strategy - Pre-decision scrutiny.
 - Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Plan, Rent Setting and Service Charges 2026- 27 – Pre-decision scrutiny.
 - Inclusion Strategy and Annual Report – Pre-decision scrutiny.
 - Library Strategy – Pre-decision scrutiny.

65. SOUTH YORKSHIRE MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair reported that there was nothing to update from the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, as no formal meeting had taken place. An informal update on bus services had been received.

66. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items.