

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Tuesday 3 February 2026

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Allen, Baggaley, Blackham, Brent, Keenan, McKiernan, Tinsley, Thorp (Substitute) and Harper (Substitute).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bacon (Vice Chair), A. Carter and Councillor Monk.

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

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

94. MINUTES OF MEETING TUESDAY 13 JANUARY 2026 OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board held on 13 January 2026 be approved as a true record.

95. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

96. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

No questions were received.

97. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no reasons to exclude the press or public.

98. ROTHERHAM BABY PACKS: OUTCOMES AND FUTURE COMMISSIONING

At the Chair's invitation, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor Cusworth, introduced the item on the Baby Packs Initiative, noting that she and Councillor Baker-Rogers, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, had worked closely on the programme due to the overlap in their portfolios. She explained that the initiative aimed to support new parents and aligned with the Council's commitment to giving every child in Rotherham the best start in life.

She stated that the scrutiny session provided an opportunity to review the programme's impact, its value to families and areas where delivery could be strengthened. The report outlined how effectively Baby Packs were reaching families, levels of take-up, early outcomes, alignment with wider early years and prevention priorities, and any risks or opportunities for improvement ahead of future commissioning.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reported that early indicators showed stronger engagement with services among families receiving the packs. Midwives and health visitors had noted increased attendance at follow-up appointments and greater involvement in family health conversations. Parents also reported increased confidence in the early days at home, particularly around safe sleep practices. Evaluation measures included practitioner feedback, behaviour-change indicators and engagement data, with plans to strengthen the framework as the programme matured.

The report also highlighted positive feedback from families on the value of the packs. Councillor Cusworth confirmed that Cabinet would be asked to note the high levels of satisfaction and to approve an open procurement exercise to ensure continuity in registering and delivering Baby Packs to Rotherham families.

The Service Director of Strategic Commissioning, Scott Matthewman, noted that Councillor Cusworth had already outlined the recommendations due to go to Cabinet the following week. He stated that the scheme had been highly successful over its first two years, both in terms of its universal approach and the positive impact reported by expectant mothers and newborn families in the borough.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health stated that she was extremely proud of the town for establishing the Baby Packs scheme, noting its success to date. Over 2,000 families had registered, and all had received their packs, with feedback consistently positive. She thanked Councillor Cusworth for her work on the initiative and said she looked forward to the item progressing to Cabinet the following week.

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

Councillor Blackham expressed concern that the scheme was not targeted, stating his view that this risked wasting money, as people would naturally take up a free offer regardless of need. He believed the initiative should be more focused on those who would benefit most. He queried the financial figures in the report, noting references to £410,000 per year and an additional £50,000 in the budget, and asked whether the total cost was £410,000 or £460,000 annually. He questioned whether the level of spend, approximately £1.5 million over four years, represented good value and stated that the universal approach may limit its effectiveness.

In response, Councillor Cusworth stated that the scheme was not a waste of money and reaffirmed the Council's commitment to giving every child in Rotherham the best start in life, rather than targeting only some families. She highlighted the success of the Family Hub model and noted that new DfE guidance on Best Start Family Hubs emphasised early years support, perinatal care and improving children's development from birth to age five. The Baby Packs formed part of this wider early-years strategy.

She confirmed that the annual cost was £410,000, which included the additional £50,000 uplift. The uplift was intended to maintain the quality and quantity of items in the packs rather than see them diminished over time, with the budget increasing in line with CPI each year.

In his supplementary point, Councillor Blackham reiterated that, in his view, the scheme's success related more to service engagement than to the universal distribution of Baby Packs. He acknowledged that the packs would help some families but maintained that a non-targeted approach did not necessarily benefit everyone and risked unnecessary expenditure. He emphasised that he was not suggesting reducing the quality of the packs but rather targeting them towards families most in need. He concluded that, while the intentions behind the initiative were laudable, he believed the universal model resulted in a degree of waste.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reiterated the Council's commitment to giving every child the best start in life. She emphasised that the scheme was not solely about financial need but also about supporting parents' preparedness for the significant life change of having a baby. She noted that the contents of the Baby Packs, together with the information provided, encouraged engagement with Family Hubs and other early-years services.

She highlighted the importance of universal messaging around safe sleep practices, stressing that ensuring every new family received this information was valuable in itself, particularly given the risks associated with unsafe sleep. She stated that, in her view, none of the investment in the scheme was wasted.

Councillor Baker-Rogers responded that 99% of parents who had received the Baby Pack reported it to be overwhelmingly positive and useful. She noted that targeting the scheme would be difficult in practice. Drawing on her own experience as a new parent, she highlighted that the packs provided essential items and guidance that many first-time parents would otherwise struggle to identify. She emphasised that offering the packs universally was inclusive practice and ensured that every child in the borough had the best possible start in life.

Alex Hawley, Public Health Consultant added that there were important practical considerations behind the universal approach. The scheme was administered by midwives at the 25-week check, which made universal distribution straightforward and efficient. A targeted model would have been significantly more complex to operate and would not have ensured that every child received support. Alex noted that, with high uptake, the scheme guaranteed a consistent minimum provision for all families, while those on lower incomes benefited proportionally more.

Councillor McKiernan commented that he had recently spoken to an NHS physiotherapist whose colleague in Barnsley had received a Baby Pack,

which highlighted how positively the scheme was viewed and how it reflected well on Rotherham, given that Barnsley did not offer a similar initiative.

He then asked whether more detailed data were available on the distribution of Baby Packs per household, for example, whether twins received two packs, and whether the information captured distinguished between first-time parents and those with subsequent births, noting that several comments in the report referred specifically to first-time mothers.

Councillor Cusworth added that Councillor McKiernan had raised a useful point and welcomed the positive feedback circulating about the scheme. She noted that, as the programme moved into its third year, more data might emerge on households receiving a Baby Pack for a second child, although this would depend on the timing of births. She explained that the Baby Packs were delivered directly to families by the provider rather than through the Council but confirmed that discussions could take place about what additional data the provider might be able to share while maintaining GDPR requirements. She anticipated that more mature datasets would become available as the scheme progressed.

Councillor Allen referred to paragraph 2.6 of the report, which highlighted that while most families gained new knowledge from the Baby Pack, parents with previous children reported less benefit, suggesting a need for more tailored content. It was also noted that leaflet impact had been rated at 75% positive. She asked whether there were plans to review the contents of the pack and consider tailoring materials for families having their second, third or subsequent children.

The Public Health Consultant confirmed that the contents of the Baby Pack would be reviewed as part of the recommissioning process. Explaining that tailoring packs for different groups, for example, for families with second or subsequent children, or for parents of extremely preterm babies, had been considered, but would significantly increase logistical complexity and costs. For this reason, the intention was to retain a universal, consistent pack, while ensuring the overall content was reviewed and updated during recommissioning.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Allen suggested that, for families who already had children, some items in the Baby Pack might be unnecessary and could therefore be viewed as waste. She asked how the Council might address or mitigate this in future.

In response, the Public Health Consultant noted that this issue would be considered during the contract review. He emphasised the need to maintain value for money and keep costs manageable but confirmed that the point would be taken forward for discussion as part of the recommissioning process.

Councillor Baker-Rogers added that, as a twin herself, she believed it was

important that each twin received their own Baby Pack. She noted that twins were two individual babies with separate needs and should not be expected to share items that were intended for individual use. Providing separate packs also supported the recognition of their individual identities.

Regarding second and subsequent children, she commented that items from earlier packs might have worn out, broken or been fully used, meaning families could still benefit from receiving a new pack. While acknowledging the discussion about tailoring, she emphasised the importance of focusing on the overall success of the scheme and the consistently positive feedback received from residents.

Councillor Cusworth acknowledged the points raised. She explained that, due to the way the packs were procured and delivered directly from the provider to households, it was difficult to add or remove items from individual boxes. She noted that any change, such as tailoring packs for subsequent children, would need to be weighed against the additional logistical costs, especially as most feedback related only to the usefulness of the leaflet.

She added that previous discussions had shown how even small additions, such as including a leaflet linked to the Children's Capital of Culture, would significantly increase logistical complexity, as materials would need to be produced, transported to the provider and included in the packing process. She confirmed that officers would reflect further on the issue, but highlighted the practical constraints involved.

Councillor Baggaley emphasised the importance of parents receiving Baby Packs as early as possible, noting from personal experience that babies do not always arrive on schedule and that having essentials ready in advance could be vital for families. He supported efforts to address this issue going forward.

He then asked two questions:

1. Whether data were available on the geographical spread of take-up and whether any areas showed lower uptake.
2. Whether the pack included content relating to parental support, particularly around fathers' mental health.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People acknowledged the importance of ensuring Baby Packs were delivered to families as early as possible, noting that some had arrived very close to, or even after, the birth. She confirmed that this issue would be taken away for further consideration.

She agreed that analysing the geographical spread of take-up would be useful and invited Alex Hawley to provide further detail, noting that such data might also highlight whether uptake was higher in more deprived areas.

In response to the question on parental support, she explained that the information within the packs encouraged families to register with their

local Family Hub. She noted that parental mental health, including support for fathers, was a core and prescriptive element of the Family Hubs model, with support beginning from the 25-week midwife appointment onwards.

Alex Hawley reported that the consistently high take-up rate, well into the high 90% range, indicated that the scheme was achieving a broad, universal reach, with very few families missing out. He noted that it remained difficult to break down uptake by area without breaching data-protection requirements, but the overall level of registrations suggested strong coverage across the borough.

In relation to parental support content, it was explained that the information leaflet included in every Baby Pack had been co-designed with parents. The leaflet was updated regularly and contained guidance relevant to all caregivers, including material specifically for fathers. It was designed to fit within the child's Red Book and to be durable and reusable, ensuring that families could refer to it repeatedly rather than it being discarded.

Councillor Tinsley BEM commented from a scrutiny perspective that the report could have included more information to support wider consideration of options. He noted that the recommendations presented only two choices, either to continue the scheme or discontinue it, and that no "midway" or alternative models were outlined. He suggested that scrutiny would have benefited from analysis of the potential impact of a targeted approach, benchmarking against other local authorities, and consideration of partnership opportunities with voluntary organisations that might already be delivering similar support. He felt that including this information would have strengthened the review process.

In response, the Chair explained that reports brought to Cabinet were prepared specifically for Cabinet decision-making, which was why the recommendations were framed as they were. He noted that scrutiny's role was to consider the proposals and make comments or recommendations, rather than redesign the policy at this stage. He added that a broader review exploring alternative models would need to be commissioned separately and at an earlier point in the process.

Councillor Thorp queried the accuracy of the take-up figures presented in the report. He noted that the data showed 1,587 registrations and 1,587 deliveries within the same nine-month period and expressed concern that this appeared unlikely, for example, a parent registering on the final day of September could not reasonably have received a pack within the same reporting window. He questioned whether the figures could realistically match so precisely and suggested that this indicated a potential inaccuracy in the data.

The Public Health Consultant responded that while he could not confirm whether the reported number of deliveries exactly matched the number of

registrations for that specific period, the service was confident that every parent who registered for a Baby Pack had received one. He noted that, for that reason, it was not unexpected that the totals appeared as 100% in the report.

Councillor Thorp reiterated concerns about the accuracy of the take-up figures. He noted that the quarterly numbers appeared inconsistent, for example, 320 registrations but only 82 deliveries between January and March, yet identical registration and delivery figures appeared in later months. He suggested that the data looked artificially aligned rather than accurately reported and stated that he would prefer to see precise, verifiable figures.

In response, Councillor Cusworth reaffirmed that all parents who registered for a Baby Pack and subsequently had a healthy live birth had received one. She noted that discrepancies in the reported figures were likely due to data-lag issues rather than inaccuracies and confirmed her confidence in the reliability of the data overall. She added that the only circumstance in which a pack would not be delivered after registration was where a pregnancy sadly did not result in a healthy birth.

In relation to the scrutiny process, she stated that the Council was committed to delivering Baby Packs and that parents had given very positive feedback. The service continued to monitor and review the contents of the packs to ensure they met families' needs. She highlighted that the "Best Start in Life" booklet included in each pack had been co-designed with the Parent Carer Panel, made up of pregnant women and parents of children aged 0–2, as part of the Family Hubs model. She suggested providing copies of the booklet to members for reference.

She concluded that the role of scrutiny was to consider the effectiveness of the scheme and offer any further recommendations for Cabinet and advised members not to focus too heavily on the reporting cut-off points given the assurance that every eligible family had received a pack.

The Chair noted that the Cabinet Member had stated her confidence in the accuracy of the data within the report. The Public Health Consultant added that a new print run of the *Best Start in Life* leaflet was due, and they would arrange a small overprint so that copies could be placed in members' pigeonholes.

The Public Health Consultant also provided clarification from the report's author regarding the figures. The registration data covered all sign-ups between January and the end of September, and the delivery numbers corresponded directly to those same registrations. For that reason, the totals matched: every person who registered for a Baby Pack within that period had received one.

Councillor Keenan asked a question regarding areas for improvement, specifically around communication. She noted that enhanced information

was included in registration emails and queried what alternative communication methods were available for families who did not use email, asking how harder-to-reach families were being informed about the Baby Pack.

The Public Health Consultant explained that registration for the Baby Pack was completed by the midwife at the 25-week appointment, meaning parents were not required to initiate the process themselves. Midwives informed expectant parents about the availability of the packs and completed the registration on their behalf, ensuring the process was universal and accessible.

It was noted that while a small number of families received midwifery care outside Rotherham, a pathway was in place to ensure these families were also captured, and this was being used effectively. Given the uptake rate remained very close to the overall birth rate, there was confidence that families without email access or those harder to reach were not being missed.

Councillor Harper sought clarification on the data included in the report. He understood that the demographic information, such as maternal age and deprivation, was captured at the point of booking, around 25 weeks, and related to the 1,587 registrations referenced earlier. However, only 28% (279 responses) had completed the follow-up survey. He asked whether the characteristics of respondents mirrored the wider registration cohort, particularly in terms of deprivation and age, and whether survey responses might be skewed towards better-off families who were more likely to complete online surveys. He also queried the delivery process for packs sent to Family Hubs, asking whether each pack was delivered individually and addressed to the specific parent, rather than stored in bulk at hubs.

In response it was confirmed that the scheme primarily operated via home delivery, which aligned with parents' preferences and worked well operationally. It was added that a pilot was being developed to hold some packs in the hospital for very premature babies who might arrive before the 25-week appointment.

Regarding survey responses, it was noted that analysis used a 95% confidence approach to infer findings from the respondent group to the wider parent population. The Public Health Consultant did not have, at the meeting, a breakdown of respondents by socioeconomic status and age, and would check whether this could be provided, noting that the survey was anonymous.

Councillor Blackham noted that, as packs were delivered to home addresses, postcode data should allow anonymised analysis of geographical distribution across the borough. He suggested that either the Council or the provider could produce this breakdown to address earlier questions on uptake by area.

Councillor Cusworth explained that data-protection arrangements between the provider and the Council had limited access to detailed delivery information, as GDPR required a clear purpose for holding personal data. She noted that if the Council were packing and delivering the boxes directly, it would be easier to collect demographic and cohort data. Given that take-up closely matched the borough's birth rate, she was not concerned about coverage; she added that limited access to granular data would be more problematic if uptake were low.

The Chair acknowledged Councillor Blackham's point and noted that anonymised, area-based delivery data (e.g., by ward and deprivation profile) should be explored to improve monitoring. He agreed that ward-level reporting would be useful and indicated he would consider a recommendation to include this in future monitoring arrangements.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health stated that she was extremely proud of the Baby Packs scheme, noting that it supported all parents regardless of income or where they lived. She thanked members for the thoughtful questions raised and confirmed that these would be taken into account going forward. She reiterated her pride in the initiative and its value in giving every baby in the borough the best possible start in life.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People thanked the Chair and the committee for the thoughtful and constructive questions raised, noting that several points would be taken away for further consideration. She agreed that ward-level analysis would provide a sufficient level of anonymity and confirmed this would be explored, adding that a scrutiny recommendation on this would be helpful.

She restated the recommendations that would be presented to Cabinet the following week, which were:

- to note the high level of satisfaction with the Baby Packs, particularly the quality and usefulness of the items provided (with reference to comments about leaflet usefulness for non-first-time mothers); and
- to approve an open procurement exercise to ensure continuity of registration and delivery for Rotherham families.

Councillor Cusworth emphasised the importance of maintaining the quality of the Baby Packs over time. She noted that parents frequently compared experiences across areas and that diminishing the contents could undermine the scheme's credibility. She stressed that, although the scheme represented a significant investment, evidence showed it was money well spent. Supporting babies and families in the early years prevented more costly problems later in life. She concluded by expressing her appreciation that the scheme had been brought to scrutiny.

The Chair moved to a vote for those in favour of supporting the

recommendations within the report, this was carried by a majority.

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

1. Note the high level of satisfaction with the baby packs, particularly in relation to the quality and usefulness of the items provided.
2. Approve an open procurement exercise to ensure continuity of registering and delivery of baby packs to Rotherham families.

Further actions that arose from discussions were that:

- OSMB receive an update in twelve months, via a method of delivery to be determined, detailing the number of Baby Packs issued, broken down by ward, to enable effective monitoring of geographical take-up and to support efforts to improve engagement in areas of higher deprivation across the borough.

99. INCLUSION STRATEGY AND ANNUAL REPORT

The Chair invited The Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety, Councillor Alam OBE, to introduce the report. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety explained that the new statutory plan replaced the Council's 2022–2025 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy. Although the title had been simplified, the strategy still covered a wide range of equality, diversity, inclusion and Public Sector Equality Duty responsibilities.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety reported that the plan set out how the Council would continue to listen to local people, understand their priorities, ensure services were accessible, and address disadvantage. The plan aligned with the Council's vision of valuing decency and dignity, creating opportunity for all, and ensuring no one was left behind. It also linked strongly to the Council's inclusive economy work, including supporting people into employment and maximising the positive impact of local spending.

Consultation had been carried out online and through 12 focus groups with external organisations representing a range of protected groups, as well as internal staff networks. Feedback indicated that while people sometimes felt listened to, they wanted more engagement and were positive about co-production. Concerns about feeling unsafe were frequently raised, consistent with feedback from the 2024 Council Plan consultation. Experiences of accessing services were inconsistent, and many participants preferred face-to-face interaction rather than digital engagement. A full consultation report was provided in Appendix 4.

It was noted that the themes emerging from the consultation reflected those identified during Doncaster Council's informal peer review, such as the need to further embed equality, diversity and inclusion across all service areas. Consultation findings had shaped the strategy's themes: Working Together, Responsive Services, Welcoming Places and

Employer of Choice.

The introduction highlighted that extensive good work was already taking place across the Council to support people at risk of exclusion. The plan also described what excellent practice would look like, based on the Local Government Equality Framework. Examples were given of current activity, including strong Ofsted feedback on work with young people, engagement with older residents and with communities from Black and minority ethnic and faith backgrounds. A key area for improvement was demonstrating how services were reshaped in response to resident feedback, including closing the feedback loop.

Under the *Welcoming Places* theme, the Council aimed to ensure communities felt safe and supported. Under *Employer of Choice*, the focus was on ensuring the workforce reflected the borough's diverse communities and that employment opportunities were accessible to people with disabilities and those less likely to access Council roles.

An action plan was included to support delivery through the Council's governance arrangements. The annual report was also provided for information.

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

Councillor McKiernan asked about the section on page 99 relating to consultations. He noted that the report suggested there was fragmentation across Council services in how public consultations were carried out. He queried whether there were plans to establish a central consultation resource or system that all services could use to ensure a more consistent and effective approach.

The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence, Fiona Boden explained that work was already underway to develop a new consultation system. Actions within the Council Plan supported this, and a new online platform, *Citizen Space*, had been procured following an appropriate selection process. This platform was chosen because it could meet the varying needs of services across the Council and support more consistent digital engagement with residents.

It was noted that, while consultation should not rely solely on digital methods, online engagement was increasingly important for creating effective feedback loops. The new system would strengthen the Council's ability to report back to residents on the "you said, we did" outcomes of consultations. The platform was scheduled to go live in April 2026.

Councillor Allen referred to page 101, specifically the section on *Welcoming Places* and the bullet point describing "a sophisticated approach to fostering good relations." It was asked what this "sophisticated approach" was intended to involve, and what measurable

improvements the Council expected to achieve. It was also queried how the Council planned to measure something as intangible as relationships between diverse communities.

The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence explained that the bullet point referenced came directly from the Local Government Association's *Equality Framework for Local Government*, which set out the national standards for what "excellent" looked like in delivering equality, diversity and inclusion.

The challenge raised was acknowledged, agreeing that measuring relationships between communities was difficult and inherently intangible. It was noted that, at an individual project level, the Council already used qualitative methods, for example, through the Community Recovery Fund, supported by MHCLG funding received around 18 months earlier. As part of that programme, participants were asked qualitative questions before and after taking part to understand how they felt at the beginning and end of the activity. However, such measures were based on personal perceptions rather than specific quantifiable indicators.

Further to this, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety noted that fostering good relations was already a statutory duty under the Public Sector Equality Duty. He provided examples of how this work took place in practice, such as interfaith activity involving churches, mosques and synagogues working together. Recent events included Holocaust Memorial Day, where different faith communities participated jointly, as well as collaborative initiatives such as mutual visits between churches and mosques and community litter-picks.

Councillor Alam OBE explained that these practical, community-based activities helped build trust and confidence between different groups over the long term. Work was also underway to strengthen dialogue between different areas of the borough, recognising that diversity and challenges varied across communities. This included exploring how local communities and elected members could work more closely with parish and town councils.

It was acknowledged that while there were clear examples of relationship-building in action, measuring progress in this area was inherently long-term and difficult to quantify. Interfaith work remained a particularly strong example of positive partnership across different faith communities.

Councillor Allen stated that, while she appreciated the examples provided, she would be interested in revisiting this aspect of the strategy in a year's time. It was requested that, when the strategy returned for review, further examples of work to foster good relations be included.

Councillor Thorp referred to page 91 and the reference to British Sign Language (BSL) being recognised as a language across England,

Scotland and Wales. He asked whether, if a resident who used BSL attended the Council's front-facing reception, the Council had someone available on site who could communicate with them, or whether staff would need to locate support elsewhere. He stressed that, to be inclusive, appropriate support should be immediately accessible.

The Chief Executive stated that he did not know the definitive answer regarding whether a BSL-capable staff member was always available at the Council's front-facing reception. He agreed that it was reasonable for residents to have a range of ways to access information about Council services and confirmed that the Council was committed to providing appropriate access routes for all residents. He noted that while the Council would always seek to provide support, he could not confirm whether this could be arranged at very short notice. He undertook to follow up the query and provide clarification.

The Chair asked whether the strategy directly drove specific Council Plan outcomes and KPIs. The Service Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development, Lynsey Linton explained that the Inclusion Strategy aimed to ensure that everyone, particularly those facing barriers and disadvantage, was able to influence, access and benefit from Council services. The strategy sat at the heart of the Council Plan's vision and would drive its cross-cutting focus on expanding opportunities for all. It also aligned directly with the *One Council* theme.

The Service Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development noted that, within this theme, the Council was committed to providing a better customer experience, delivering high-quality and accessible services informed by customer feedback, and working in partnership with local communities. This included co-designing services, taking a strengths-based approach, making consultation and engagement processes more inclusive, and ensuring the workforce became more representative of the borough's communities.

Success measures included having a workforce more reflective of the borough's population and increasing the proportion of residents who felt the Council acted on their concerns.

The Chair raised a further question about how the Council would remain flexible to respond to emerging issues, engage effectively with communities, and address pressures such as the cost-of-living crisis and poverty. In response, Councillor Alam OBE explained that the strategy was an evolving document and that the Council would remain flexible in order to respond to emerging issues within communities. He emphasised the importance of horizon scanning and working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector, as well as embedding equalities considerations across the whole Council.

He stated that all service areas needed to identify vulnerable or excluded groups and ensure they were included in planning and co-production. As

an example, he referred to previous issues in Manvers which had led to community disorder; the Council had since worked with voluntary and community organisations to strengthen engagement and improve relationships. He confirmed that the Council would continue to adapt its approach to address emerging challenges as they arose.

The Chair asked how the Council worked with the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in delivering the strategy and how reliant was the Council on the sector to achieve its aims. The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence stated that the VCS was a crucial partner for the Council in delivering core services and supporting communities across the borough. She noted that while the Council relied on the VCS for significant elements of service delivery, services were also working to ensure that residents' voices were captured directly through appropriate engagement forums. Examples included the *Rascals* group in Adult Services, which provided lived-experience input from service users, and the *Four Cornerstones* co-production model used in Children and Young People's Services. These mechanisms ensured that partnership working involved both voluntary sector organisations and residents themselves.

The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence emphasised that, although the VCS was central to the Council's partnership work, the aim was to bring a wide range of people together in the right forums to gather diverse views and help shape services effectively. Further to this, Councillor Alam OBE stated that the voluntary sector already played a highly productive role in working alongside the Council. He noted that the Council had a strong relationship with community organisations, and that in some cases, where the Council could not deliver certain activities, voluntary groups were able to step in due to their close links with local communities and networks.

He highlighted that Rotherham had over 6,000 voluntary and community organisations, representing a significant local asset, with many volunteers being residents of the borough. He emphasised that the Council had always maintained good relationships with the sector, particularly around community cohesion and equalities work. Voluntary organisations also sat on the Community Reference Group, ensuring ongoing engagement and a complementary partnership between the Council and the sector.

Councillor Baggaley referred to Appendix 2, the action plan, and noted that a large number of actions were scheduled for completion in Q4 2025/26. He asked how assurance would be provided that the action plan was being monitored and maintained. He also queried whether there had been an action plan for the previous 12 months and suggested that, when the strategy returned in a year's time, a comparable update should be provided showing progress against each action, including a rating or assessment of delivery.

The Head of Policy, Performance and Intelligence confirmed that the suggestion was reasonable and that a revised approach could be

considered for future reporting. It was explained that an annual report was already produced, but it presented progress in a more narrative format. She agreed to look at the format for next year so that more direct feedback could be provided against each action in the plan, including clearer reporting on progress over the previous 12 months and how this would inform the action plan for the following year.

Councillor Allen referred to the creation of two posts within CYPS aimed at supporting people from under-represented communities, noting that these roles had a clear career pathway. She also referenced the national leadership development initiative for staff of colour and asked whether participation in that programme similarly included a defined career pathway or progression route. She acknowledged that there could be no guarantees around appointments but sought clarification on whether the initiative was intended to support staff toward future career advancement.

The Service Director, Human Resources and Organisational Development explained that the Council was aware that the demographic profile of its leadership workforce did not fully reflect the borough's population. As a result, the Council was committed to encouraging applications from leaders of colour, particularly within Children's Services, where national evidence showed progression barriers for Black, Asian and minority ethnic staff.

It was noted that the national leadership programme was designed specifically to support staff of colour, and Rotherham CYPS had been able to enable staff to participate. Alongside this, the Council was refreshing its workforce plan to ensure strong alignment with the Inclusion Strategy and the Council Plan, with a clear focus on workforce development.

It was highlighted that Adults and Children's Services had local workforce boards and that employee development was a key pillar of the wider workforce plan. The aim was to create clear movement and progression opportunities within the workforce, aligning inclusion ambitions with workforce priorities.

She added that the Inclusion Strategy's 12-month delivery plan allowed the Council to regularly review progress against the workforce plan, including the development and progression of staff into leadership roles across the organisation.

During his conclusion the Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety thanked the committee for its comments and confirmed that these would be taken back for consideration. He agreed that the point raised by Councillor Baggaley regarding action plan delivery was important, noting that the plan included clear details and lead officers, providing an accountability mechanism and clarity on who was responsible for each action. Quarterly meetings were in place to monitor progress and ensure delivery.

He emphasised that, despite financial challenges, equality remained a key priority for the Council. Reflecting on his ten years as a Cabinet Member, he noted that the Council had made a positive start but that the work was ongoing. The Council would continue to focus on being inclusive, providing accessible services, and maintaining meaningful engagement with residents. He added that where the Council was unable to deliver something, it was important to return to residents to explain the reasons. He concluded that the action plan was critical and represented a positive way forward.

Before the Chair proposed the recommendations, Councillor Thorp referred back to the earlier discussion regarding British Sign Language (BSL) support at Council reception points. He suggested that a recommendation be made for the Council to have a clear procedure in place to ensure BSL support was immediately available when needed, noting that senior officers had been unsure of the current arrangements. In response, the Chief Executive apologised for not being able to provide the information during the meeting but confirmed that he had since checked. He reported that the Council used a language support app at its service centres and front-facing reception points, including Riverside House. The app provided video-based BSL interpretation at the point of contact, enabling staff to support residents who used BSL without delay. He thanked his colleague for confirming this information during the meeting and reassured members that BSL was included within the Council's language support package.

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

1. Approve the Inclusion Strategy 2026-30.
2. Approve the action plan for February 2026 to March 2027.
3. Note the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2024-2025.

Further actions that arose from discussions were that:

- That OSMB receive a follow-up report in twelve months, via a method of delivery to be determined, which clearly demonstrates how the strategy and its associated actions have been embedded and provides direct reporting against each individual action.

100. ACCESS TO CONTRACEPTION REVIEW REPORT

At the Chair's invitation the Chair of the Health Select Commission, Councillor Keenan, reported that her first role in health had been in sexual health and that she had long championed good sexual health. She presented the Health Select Commission's Scrutiny Review report on Access To Contraception.

The review had been prioritised due to concerns about inconsistent availability of long-acting reversible contraception in GP practices,

alongside wider issues around access to contraceptive advice and sexual health services.

Throughout 2025, a cross-party working group gathered evidence from GP surgeries, Public Health, Adult Strategic Commissioning, Rotherham NHS Foundation Trust, the Integrated Care Board, HealthWatch, MESMAC and others. The group carried out a site visit, undertook online research, analysed local data and reviewed practice in neighbouring areas and elsewhere in the UK.

The Chair thanked officers, particularly Kerry Grinsill-Clinton, and members for their active contribution. The review recognised that improving access to contraception required more than service availability; it was fundamental to informed choice, improved sexual health outcomes, reduced unplanned pregnancies and equitable, stigma-free access for residents of all ages.

Findings indicated that, although provision was generally strong, significant barriers remained, including variation in GP cover, limited male contraception options, stigma, difficulties accessing the hospital-based clinic, a fragmented digital offer and the impact of online misinformation. These issues affected residents' ability to make informed choices and reflected wider trends such as rising termination rates and inequalities in sexual health outcomes.

The Commission proposed targeted recommendations, including exploring mobile outreach clinics, integrating contraception within the town centre health hub, improving digital information, strengthening public health messaging and enhancing support for young people through clearer confidentiality guidance and more consistent education. Longer-term ambitions included stronger collaboration across primary care networks, appointing sexual health champions in every GP practice, expanding free condom access in community settings and improving data use for commissioning and prevention.

The Health Select Commission endorsed the report on 22 January 2026 and invited OSMB to support its submission to Cabinet for consideration and response. The Chair thanked all contributors and noted that the officer, Kerry Grinsill-Clinton, was available to answer questions.

The Governance Advisor, Kerry Grinsill-Clinton, seconded Councillor Keenan's remarks and to offered sincere thanks for the significant engagement and participation from internal and external partners in supporting the review.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, Councillor Baker-Rogers, thanked Councillor Keenan for the work undertaken and confirmed her support for the report's progression to Cabinet for consideration. She added that she looked forward to supporting the work further once the outcome was known.

Councillor Cuworth, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, placed on record her thanks to Councillor Keenan, the Commission and the working group for what she described as an excellent piece of scrutiny. She noted the importance of the work and expressed her appreciation for the effort that had gone into the review.

The Chair, Councillor Steele, noted that the report had reached this stage as part of the normal scrutiny review process. It would now be forwarded to Cabinet, which would have eight weeks to provide a response. Members approved the report by a show of hands.

The Chair thanked Councillor Keenan and the Working Group for their work on behalf of the Authority, noting the number of recommendations and acknowledging the substantial effort behind the review.

Resolved:

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) note the report.
2. That the recommendations listed below and the wider ambitions as listed in Paragraph 5 of the report, as approved by Health Select Commission, be submitted to Cabinet for consideration and response:
 - a. Commissioning and Service Delivery
 - i. That the relevant Council Services consider and review the feasibility of mobile outreach clinics or rotating sexual health outreach services where contraception, including LARC can be accessed in rural and underserved areas.
 - ii. That the relevant Council Services and relevant partners consider Including sexual health services, specifically including contraceptive advice guidance and provision, in the new town centre health hub, ensuring flexible, reliable and discreet 'drop-in' access and reduced stigma.
 - b. Education, Public Awareness and Messaging
 - i. That the relevant Council Services work in collaboration with appropriate partners to strengthen and extend the reach of a borough-wide, sex-positive public health campaign promoting safe, consensual, and informed sexual activity that makes effective use of the contraceptive and sexual health services available in Rotherham. The Commission particularly

advocates the use of modern messaging strategies that harness the power of local 'influencers' via social media platforms (e.g. TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram) wherever possible to reach younger demographics with engaging, accurate contraception and sexual health messaging that reaches them directly in places they naturally frequent and counteracts disinformation.

- ii. That the relevant Council Services encourage schools to deliver consistent, comprehensive PSHE, including ongoing practical contraceptive education and awareness of confidentiality rights and works with them to improve parental engagement and understanding of the benefits of making informed contraceptive and sexual health choices.

c. Digital Access and Information

- i. That the relevant Council Services work to improve Council public health websites to deliver youth-friendly information on contraception and sexual health services and providing/signposting to relevant sources of information, advice and guidance aimed at assisting that demographic to make informed choices.
- ii. That the relevant Council Services work to develop a centralised digital resource or landing page consolidating sexual health information, service locations, and confidentiality guidance, with links to age group/demographic specific issues and information.

d. Youth Access and Confidentiality

- i. That the relevant Council Services consider how, ideally in collaboration with relevant partners such as schools and NHS services, to raise awareness of Fraser guidelines and NHS app privacy settings to reassure young people about confidentiality when accessing contraception.
- ii. That the relevant Council Services work with MESMAC and other relevant youth services to expand outreach and ensure visibility and borough wide accessibility of services, particularly for LGBTQ+ and vulnerable groups.

e. Data, Monitoring and Strategic Alignment

- i. That the relevant Council Services include the location of sexual health clinics, drop-in centres, and pharmacies providing emergency contraception on the Rotherham mapping system (where grit salt bin locations, planning applications etc. can be found), or create a standalone map resource to allow Rotherham residents to easily identify all locations in the borough where they can access contraception.
 - ii. That relevant Council Services review local data on terminations and teenage pregnancies to assess emerging trends, identify the root causes and facilitate the formulation and implementation targeted interventions that address their drivers.
 - iii. That relevant Council Services ensure that the recommendations, observations and broad ambitions from this review are considered in the next commissioning cycle in 2027, and in the development/revision of the borough's sexual health strategy and action plan.
3. Following submission to Cabinet, that those recommendations within the control and influence of external bodies, are shared with relevant health partners and commissioners for consideration and response.

101. WORK PROGRAMME

The Governance Manager provided a brief update in addition to the information contained in the report pack. Members were informed that the OSMB Bye-laws and Life-Saving Equipment Review Group meeting had been scheduled for 24 February at 2.00 pm, and details had been circulated to all members of the review group. She explained that the session would allow for further discussion on the information and comments raised to date.

Resolved: That the Work Programme be approved.

102. WORK IN PROGRESS - SELECT COMMISSIONS

Update from Health Select Commission:

This update was noted as presented within the agenda pack.

Update from Improving Lives Select Commission:

Councillor Harper reported on activity since the previous meeting. The Commission met on 2 December and considered the *Fostering*

Transformation Programme, including work within Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) and the *Prevention of Future Deaths* processes. This included discussion of the tragic death of Marcia Grant and the Council's response.

Members had also received the *Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Assurance Report 2024–25*, which outlined key partnership activity during the year.

Regarding the 2025–26 work programme, updates included:

- An item on the *Threshold of Need*, forming part of the *Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy*.
- A workshop and visit to the Rotherham Parent Carers Forum at the Eric Manns Building had been scheduled for 29 January. Councillor Harper was unable to attend due to commitments at a Police and Crime Panel meeting.
- The *PAUSE Project* session, focusing on support for women who have experienced multiple child removals, was scheduled for 2 March.
- A *Children's Capital of Culture* workshop was scheduled for 21 April, considering legacy impacts.
- On the *Trauma and Children Missing Education* scrutiny review, a questionnaire had been issued to all secondary schools to gather feedback on the impact of trauma on children missing education.

Items scheduled for future meetings included:

- Ofsted inspection outcomes,
- Educational attainment update,
- Corporate Parenting Partnership Board updates,
- Community cohesion projects,
- *Together for Tomorrow* project updates,
- Children not in education,
- The SACRE annual report,
- Safeguarding children from radicalisation,
- Keeping children safe in education, and
- A child exploitation strategy update.

No questions were raised for Cllr Harper.

Update from Improving Places Select Commission:

Councillor McKiernan provided an update on recent meetings reporting that the Commission had considered the Annual Bereavement Services Report, noting subsequent news of significant price increases which had caused concern among members, although this was outside the Council's control.

At the most recent meeting, members received a Flood Alleviation Update, which outlined proposed interventions in areas at risk. Some schemes remained unfunded, which was disappointing. The Commission

also considered updates on Thriving Neighbourhoods, and members hoped to contribute to the development of the refreshed strategy, including through pre-policy workshops.

The School Road Safety Review remained ongoing, with further workshops planned ahead of finalising the review.

The Anti-Social Behaviour workshop, held with Housing Services, had been productive, though attendance was lower than expected. The Commission felt the content should be shared more widely with all councillors due to its relevance.

A Markets and Libraries site visit was scheduled for the following week.

At the next meeting, the Commission would receive an overview of borough-wide events delivered over the past 12 months, including, but not limited to, Children's Capital of Culture activity.

No further questions were raised for Cllr McKiernan.

103. FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Board considered the Forward Plan of Key Decisions February 2026 to April 2026.

The Chair noted that two items currently appeared on the work programme schedule: the *Climate Engagement Annual Report* and the *Modern Slavery Transparency Statement* annual refresh. He questioned whether both items needed to return to scrutiny every year and invited views from the committee. He commented that, in his personal view, an annual scrutiny cycle for these items might not be necessary.

The Governance Manager outlined the forward plan items scheduled for March across service areas:

- **Adult Care, Housing and Public Health**
 - *Housing Capital Programme 2026–27 to 2029–30*
 - *Public Health Grant 2026–27*

- **Children's Services**
 - *Best Start Plan 2026–29*
 - *Family Hubs Progress Update and Extension*
 - *South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency* – seeking approval to enter a new regional agreement with Barnsley, Doncaster and Sheffield to deliver adoption services.

- **Corporate Services**
 - *Community Governance Review*

- **Policy, Strategy and Engagement**

- *Local Growth Fund 2026–27 allocation*
- *Crisis and Resilience Fund*

- **Regeneration and Environment**
 - *Transport Capital Programme 2026–27*
 - *Climate Emergency Annual Report*

She also highlighted the non-key decisions scheduled for March:

- **Children's Services**
 - *Family First Partnership Programme* (recently referred to Cabinet)
 - *Scrutiny review findings and recommendations – Access to Contraception Review*

- **Regeneration and Environment**
 - *Modern Slavery Transparency Statement Annual Refresh*

These items were presented for members' consideration as part of the forward plan.

Councillor Allen noted that the *Climate Emergency Annual Report* had been scheduled for the meeting but had been withdrawn. She asked for reassurance that it would be available for consideration in March. She also commented that she would welcome scrutiny of the *Transport Capital Programme*, as it would be a substantial item of interest for the Commission.

In response, the Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Climate Emergency report was almost fully drafted and required only minor adjustments; he expected it to be ready for the March meeting.

The Chair then requested further detail on the *Community Governance Review*. The Monitoring Officer explained that best practice recommended that an authority conduct such a review every 10 - 15 years. The review covered the boundaries and governance arrangements of parish and town councils across the borough. The Chair confirmed that the Community Governance Review could be added to the agenda.

He asked members whether they wished to include the *Modern Slavery Transparency Statement Refresh*. Members indicated they were willing to remove it from the work programme on the understanding it would be scrutinised upon any significant changes.

Councillor Baggaley queried whether the *Best Start Plan 2026–29* should come to this Commission for scrutiny before being approved, given its long-term scope. It was suggested that the Improving Lives Select Commission might be more appropriate to consider the item, but if that was not possible, it could be brought to this Commission instead. Governance agreed to liaise with the Improving Lives Commission to determine the best route.

Resolved: That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:

1. Agreed that the following items would be added to the March agenda as part of OSMB's pre-decision scrutiny work:
 - Climate Emergency Annual Report – Pre-decision Scrutiny
 - Transport Capital Programme 2026/27 – Pre-decision Scrutiny
 - Community Governance Review – Pre-decision Scrutiny
 - Best Start Plan 2026- 2029 – Pre-decision Scrutiny

2. Agreed that the Modern Slavery Transparency Statement – Annual Refresh would cease to be presented on an annual basis and would instead be brought forward only when significant changes to the Statement occur.

104. SOUTH YORKSHIRE MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Chair reported that there was no substantial update from the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The main item considered at the previous month's meeting had been the specification for the new buses as part of the franchise arrangements. This was well received by the Committee.

105. CALL-IN ISSUES

There were no call-in issues.

106. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no urgent items.