

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD**  
**Wednesday 4 February 2026**

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bacon (Vice-Chair), and Keenan.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-  
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

**107.       DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

**108.       QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS**

A member of the public, Mr Ashraf, asked for an itemised breakdown of all financial contributions including investments, subsidies, loans, core subscriptions, specific levies for functions like transport, and any match funding, contributions etc, as well as funds that Rotherham Borough received a share of from national sources, did Rotherham Borough use to fund South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority, as well as projected costs for commitments made and what financial or other returns per year for the financial years 2021 onwards had it received in return? They stated they would submit the questions by email and were content to receive a written response.

In his supplementary question Mr Ashraf noted that Doncaster Airport for example while a nice idea in theory, did not seem commercially, to be financially viable. The Sheffield tram system was nice for Sheffield, but why did Rotherham residents have to pay for it? As the politicians of Rotherham were primarily responsible to Rotherham Borough residents just as Doncaster and Sheffield politicians were responsible to their residents what give and take had there been. What quid pro quo deals had been made for the benefit of Rotherham Borough residents to justify such expenditure?

The Chair noted that no verbal response could be provided at that time and confirmed that a written response would be provided by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority once the questions were received by email.

**109.       EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

There were no reasons to exclude the press or public.

**110. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION, MAYOR COPPARD, SOUTH YORKSHIRE COMBINED MAYORAL AUTHORITY.**

The Chair welcomed Mayor Coppard of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority to the meeting. The Mayor began by thanking Members for the opportunity to attend and noted the positive activity in the town centre.

The Mayor explained that questions had been received in advance and would be responded to, and that he did not intend to make a long statement about the work of the Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA), preferring to allow more time for discussion.

In response to a question regarding the Integrated Settlement and fair funding across South Yorkshire, the Mayor outlined that the Integrated Settlement was a mechanism introduced by the previous government and continued by the current one. It enabled the MCA to bring approximately 25 out of 45 funding streams into a single integrated pot, allowing greater flexibility to shift resources between capital and revenue and between different programmes, though within agreed outcome frameworks. The Mayor noted that the model gave more freedom than before but did not allow unrestricted spending. Work was ongoing to ensure money was allocated fairly and in line with priorities, including significant investment in Rotherham.

The Mayor highlighted that more than £60m of projects were currently being delivered in Rotherham, with total funding commitments exceeding £250m. He reaffirmed that the MCA would continue to support major assets such as the Advanced Manufacturing Park and improve the transport connectivity required to sustain and grow these strengths.

On Northern Powerhouse Rail (NPR), the Mayor acknowledged public scepticism given previous experiences with HS2 and other cancelled rail schemes but emphasised their intention to hold the Government to account. He welcomed that Rotherham's Main Line Station had been explicitly included and prioritised in the latest NPR plan, crediting sustained lobbying by local Members. Improved rail connectivity to Sheffield, Leeds, Manchester and London, along with electrification of the line to Leeds and future expansion of Sheffield's Supertram into Rotherham, were identified as further opportunities within the NPR proposals.

The Mayor noted that these schemes formed part of a wider Yorkshire-first approach developed jointly as part of the White Rose Rail Plan. He stressed that the NPR programme was a 15-20-year plan, requiring consistent commitment from future governments, and confirmed that he would continue pressing for delivery, particularly the Rotherham Gateway Station.

The Mayor responded to further questions on transport. He noted that

detailed information on the extension of the South Yorkshire Supertram could not yet be shared, as the MCA would be launching its new transport brand and strategy on 16 March 2026. This launch would outline plans for tram extensions, bus franchising, integrated transport, rail, and work relating to the airport. Rotherham was confirmed as central to this work, with several schemes included in the forthcoming proposals.

On ensuring public transport connectivity to key employment sites such as the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation District and the Advanced Manufacturing Park, the Mayor stressed that this remained a significant challenge. Only 1% of South Yorkshire residents could access the AMRC training centre within 30 minutes by public transport, and many young people faced long, complex journeys to reach training placements. The MCA was examining improvements via buses, rail and tram-train, with bus franchising expected to support this work. A six-week consultation on franchising was under way, and all councillors would be invited to detailed engagement sessions. The Mayor emphasised that changes would not occur immediately at the point of franchising, as stability would be prioritised before route redesign.

In response to concerns about maintaining bus service levels during the transition to franchising, the Mayor acknowledged this as a live issue. He referenced the experience in Greater Manchester, where routes lost before franchising had proved difficult to reinstate. The MCA was therefore working to maintain current service levels across South Yorkshire. The Mayor expressed frustration with operators over recent fare increases of up to 20% despite significant public subsidy, and over proposals to withdraw routes ahead of franchising while seeking additional public funding to retain them. The MCA was in ongoing discussions with operators and urged them to reconsider route reductions.

The Mayor concluded by inviting further questions through the Chair and offering to provide additional detail if required.

Councillor A Carter asked what impact the proposed Rotherham Main Line Station would have on the Mayor's transport budget, and whether prioritising the station would affect funding for other local road and transport schemes, including projects such as LNIS in Rotherham. He also asked whether investment would focus solely on the Main Line Station or continue to support wider improvements across the borough and South Yorkshire.

The Mayor explained that the funding position was more complex than would be ideal. Most transport funding was provided through the Transforming Cities Regions (TCR) programme. A significant uplift had been received, totalling around £1.5bn. Approximately £350m of this would be allocated to bus franchising, which would benefit all of South Yorkshire by enabling a more integrated and partly electrified network, as well as giving the MCA greater control over depots and services. A substantial proportion of funding would also support tram-train

infrastructure, including schemes benefiting Rotherham such as Magna, Parkgate, and town centre connectivity, along with work on potential future extensions. Officers were currently assessing how the remaining funding should be distributed.

The Mayor confirmed that the proposed Rotherham Main Line Station remained a key priority linked to the Northern Powerhouse Rail plan. Feasibility work was under way to ensure the project could progress. However, investment would not be focused solely on the station; other schemes would continue to receive funding. This included allocations for pothole repair, active travel, safer roads, neighbourhood improvements, and environmental priorities such as the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Funding would also support culture, business investment, and other strategic areas.

The Mayor emphasised that decisions would be shaped through the Integrated Settlement arrangements, allowing flexibility to move funding across programmes, and confirmed that Rotherham's priorities would remain central in discussions with the Leader and local partners.

Councillor Blackham asked whether the lease secured from the Peel Group for Doncaster Sheffield Airport was sufficiently flexible to avoid restricting the reopening and future operation of the airport.

The Mayor responded that reopening Doncaster Sheffield Airport (DSA) remained a major priority and had been the focus of three years of work involving the Mayor of Doncaster, local councillors, MPs and the MCA. The Mayor emphasised that the shared goal across South Yorkshire was to see the airport reopened as a hub for flights, economic opportunity and job growth, noting the wider potential of the opportunities linked to sustainable aviation. Work with industry partners, including Boeing, was referenced as evidence of future potential.

The Mayor confirmed that throughout the process the MCA had acted to protect taxpayers' money while supporting Doncaster Council's efforts to secure the airport's future. Peel Group had engaged constructively, resulting in improvements to the lease arrangements. The Mayor noted that the challenges and requirements for releasing MCA funding were fully set out in the extensive public documentation published in September and reiterated their commitment to transparency and accountability throughout the process.

Councillor Yasseen raised concerns regarding value for money and the historic use of public funds on major transport schemes. She referred to the previous capital investment in the Rotherham-Sheffield tram connection and the significant cost escalation from an original £15m estimate to a final spend of £75.1m, noting that the National Audit Office had assessed it as poor value. She highlighted worries about repeated cycles of investment, such as the redevelopment of Rotherham railway station lasting only around 20 years before major reinvestment was

required and questioned whether large infrastructure projects were effectively performance-managed.

She asked at what stage schemes should be halted if costs escalate beyond their value, why key risks were not identified earlier in the tram project, and whether such schemes risked becoming “vanity projects” that continue receiving funding despite poor performance. She sought assurance on how the MCA ensured robust oversight, early risk identification, and responsible use of public funds.

The Chair clarified that the Rotherham Tram-Train scheme had been delivered by Rotherham Council and funded directly by the Government. The overspend had been met by Government rather than by South Yorkshire funds, and the Council had signed up to the scheme on that basis.

The Mayor responded by separating the question into two parts: the historic value-for-money issues relating to the tram-train scheme, and current assurance on managing major capital projects.

On the historic position, the Mayor noted that the overspend on the tram-train project had arisen from requirements introduced by Network Rail, rather than from Rotherham Council, the MCA or the Mayoral office. The Chair had already clarified that the scheme had been Government-funded and that the overspend was met by Government. The Mayor added that an inadequate early specification by Network Rail had driven much of the additional cost. Although not in office at the time, he acknowledged the challenges this created.

The Mayor commented more broadly that the UK often failed to maintain continuity in major infrastructure delivery. Skills and expertise gained on large schemes were frequently lost due to long gaps between projects. South Yorkshire, as a pioneer of tram-train technology, had not been able to build sufficiently on that early expertise, partly due to national factors.

The Mayor emphasised that the ambition to connect Rotherham via tram, tram-train and mainline rail remained the right strategic direction. However, this required strong project management and long-term maintenance. The Mayor noted that historically the Supertram network had suffered from underinvestment in maintenance, partly due to fragmented responsibilities. This had contributed to the ageing fleet and deterioration of infrastructure. He confirmed that the MCA and South Yorkshire Leaders were now reversing this trend, committing more than £600m to renew and improve the tram network, including a new fleet of trams and tram-trains. The Mayor stressed that major capital projects must be accompanied by long-term maintenance funding, noting that infrastructure could not simply be built and left for decades without reinvestment.

The Mayor concluded that the MCA was now focused on delivering

projects effectively, maintaining assets properly, and learning from past issues to ensure value for money.

The Chair observed that Government policy was shifting rapidly in relation to local government and mayoral authorities. Noting potential future changes that could see planning and licensing functions transferred to the Mayoral Combined Authority, along with proposals for fire authority governance to move under the Mayor, while police governance might be removed. The Chair asked for the Mayor's views on the democratic implications of powers being transferred away from local authorities to the regional level, particularly in sensitive areas such as planning and licensing, and how such changes would benefit residents.

The Mayor responded that the question raised important issues about democracy and community agency. Noting that over several decades significant powers had moved away from local communities, including the loss of major industries, strong local institutions and wider council powers previously held in areas such as licensing and utilities. This long-term shift had left many residents feeling he had little control over decisions affecting their daily lives.

The Mayor stated that devolution offered an opportunity to reverse some of this trend by bringing powers and funding back to South Yorkshire. However, he emphasised that this should not result in power being centralised solely in the Mayoral office. Any new responsibilities, such as planning or licensing, should Government transfer them, would need to be exercised in partnership with local councils and local communities.

Using taxi licensing as an example, the Mayor noted that although Government may decide to place this function under mayoral remit, the MCA would still need to work collaboratively across South Yorkshire to maintain the highest possible standards, recognising the improvements and leadership already shown in areas such as Rotherham.

The Mayor stressed that democratic accountability required both partnership and transparency, and that the goal was not only improved governance but restoring a sense of agency for residents, ensuring decisions were taken with communities rather than imposed over them.

Councillor Baggaley asked how local councillors and communities could work more effectively with the MCA. He noted that in his ward a number of meetings took place between the MCA and council officers, but there was no local elected representation within those working groups. He also highlighted that business cases were being developed without the local councillors being involved, despite these projects having significant community impact. He therefore asked how local Members and local communities could be better engaged in MCA processes going forward.

The Mayor responded that he aimed to make himself as accessible as possible to residents and councillors, including regular community visits,

monthly phone-ins on local radio, use of social media, and public meetings. He acknowledged, however, that informal engagement was not a substitute for formal governance or structured opportunities for local involvement.

It was noted that the MCA remained a new organisation, still developing its systems and processes while Government continued to transfer new responsibilities. He emphasised the importance of maintaining an ongoing conversation about how local councillors and communities could best engage with the MCA and confirmed that he attended forums such as this meeting specifically to listen and learn how engagement might be improved.

He highlighted that much local input already reached the MCA through chief executives, officers and council leaders, with whom he was in regular communication, but stated he was open to exploring more direct methods for involving local councillors in MCA work where appropriate. He invited Members to approach him with suggestions on how local expertise and community structures could be better incorporated.

The Mayor reiterated his belief in devolution, stating that decisions should be taken as close as possible to the people they affect. He accepted that the MCA did not always get engagement right and welcomed further discussion on strengthening local involvement.

Councillor Thorp asked whether the investment in the proposed Rotherham Main Line Station would reduce the funding available for wider road safety improvements across the borough. He noted that road safety remained a top public concern, with strong community support for additional crossings and measures around schools, yet councillors were often told there was no available funding through the Mayoral Combined Authority. He therefore asked whether prioritising the train station would limit or worsen access to MCA funding for road safety schemes.

The Mayor confirmed that investment in the proposed Rotherham Main Line Station would not reduce funding available for road safety improvements. He stated that the number of people killed or seriously injured on South Yorkshire's roads had been too high for many years, due in part to long-term underinvestment in public and active travel infrastructure. This had contributed to increased car use, congestion and road danger.

The Mayor explained that, when he took office, South Yorkshire had recently been refused Bus Service Improvement Plan funding, despite bidding for over £550m. The region had also experienced historic underinvestment from successive governments. However, he noted that the funding situation had now changed significantly, with South Yorkshire expecting around £1.5bn in capital funding between 2027 and 2032. He stated that this investment would support improvements not only in rail, tram-train and buses, but also in road safety. The road safety team had

been brought back into the MCA, enabling renewed investment in crossings and safety schemes, particularly for children. The Mayor reiterated his commitment to making South Yorkshire one of the safest places to walk, wheel, scoot and cycle, including significant funding for side-road crossings and pedestrian improvements. He emphasised that the MCA could and would invest in both the Rotherham Station project and road safety, and that the two were not in conflict.

Councillor Yasseen raised concerns about the environmental implications of reopening DSA. She noted that both the MCA and local councils had declared a climate emergency in 2019 and had committed to achieving net zero by 2040, a target she already regarded as extremely challenging. She questioned how enabling one of the highest-emission forms of transport could be reconciled with those commitments, given that aviation emissions could outweigh reductions from all other sectors. She asked how this apparent contradiction would be addressed and how the airport's return to operation could align with achieving net zero. Councillor Yasseen also asked whether it was appropriate or sustainable for councils or combined authorities to take responsibility for running airports.

The Mayor responded that no council would be running the airport. The airport would instead be operated by Fly Doncaster, an arm's-length body established with specialist expertise built into its governance, including the board and chief executive. The Mayor reiterated his long-held view that airports should be run by professionals from the private sector and confirmed that this model would be followed.

Funding for the airport's reopening would flow through the MCA once specific conditions were met. The Mayor argued that this approach protected taxpayers' money while enabling the airport to function as a major economic driver for South Yorkshire. He highlighted its potential to create significant employment, support logistics and freight, and improve global connectivity.

Addressing the climate concerns raised, the Mayor acknowledged the climate emergency and the tension between aviation and net-zero ambitions. However, he argued that aviation would remain a necessary part of modern economic and international life, and that the solution was not to eliminate flying but to develop more sustainable aviation. He emphasised that South Yorkshire was already leading in this field, citing Boeing's lightweighting and advanced manufacturing work in the region, supported in part by MCA investment. The Mayor stated that DSA could become a centre for sustainable aviation innovation, contributing both to net-zero progress and to local economic opportunity. He concluded that the MCA's approach aimed to balance climate commitments with economic needs, enabling both sustainable aviation development and local job creation.

The Chair thanked Mayor Coppard for attending, answering questions and giving his time, and also expressed appreciation to his accompanying

officer Charlie Sweeney, for his support.

#### 111. BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX REPORT 2026-27

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety, Councillor Alam OBE introduced the 2026/27 budget, noting that it had undergone extensive consultation with officers, the budget working group, and Cabinet Members, and was now out for wider consultation. It was stated that scrutiny's views were sought at this meeting, and that any recommendations would be reported to Cabinet. It was noted that a couple of Cabinet Members would contribute, specifically on investments.

The Service Director, Financial Services, Rob Mahon provided a technical overview of the main points from the budget report. Noting that the 2026/27 budget process had been more challenging than in recent years due to delays in the Government's Fair Funding Review. Although the final outcome was positive, the slow progress had required the Council to plan for both potential savings and potential investment scenarios.

It was reported that the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) had been updated in November and that a briefing on the budget journey had been presented to OSMB in January following the outcome of the Fair Funding Review. Key points highlighted included:

- The Fair Funding Review had been positive for the Council, simplifying funding mechanisms and providing a three-year funding position.
- The Council had received an increase of £9.2m for 2026/27, rising to £21.2m by 2028/29, alongside the 2025/26 recovery grant.
- Pensions revaluation was expected to reduce contributions by £6.6m per year from 2026/27.
- September CPI of 3.8% had uplifted certain grants and the settlement funding assessment, improving the funding position.
- Service grants, including extended producer responsibility, had been uplifted, increasing spending power.
- Council Tax and Business Rates collection remained strong overall, despite a significant issue connected to speciality steel.
- Savings for 2025/26 were on track, with route optimisation savings expected to be fully realised in 2026/27.
- The Council's reserves remained robust, with no further use proposed for 2026/27 onwards other than the Local Plan, identified as appropriate one-off expenditure.

However, continued financial pressures were noted, particularly rising demand and complexity in both adults' and children's social care. Market inflation and the loss of a major business rates payer, Speciality Steel, had created further pressures and increased the likelihood of business rates write-offs. Capital financing costs linked to the wider capital programme also continued to impact the MTFS.

The Service Director, Financial Services went on to outline the key

financial implications within the budget report. Adult Social Care demand and inflationary pressures had been addressed through an additional £8.6m allocation. CYPs was due to receive £4.8m, including £2.8m to correct historical under-inflation and £2m to meet inflationary pressures in 2026/27.

Home-to-school transport was reported to be in a more stable position following work over the previous 18-24 months; however, national demand pressures remained, and £0.5m per year had been added to the MTFs to accommodate expected growth.

Pay awards, the removal of national pay spine point 2 from 2026/27, and ongoing Real Living Wage obligations had been built into the budget. The update presented to OSMB in January had shown a £1m budget pressure for 2026/27 and 2027/28, with further challenges anticipated in 2028/29. Given the uncertainty of the next 2-3 years, officers advised that no immediate action was required at this stage.

The budget report therefore moved from the January position to the proposed decisions for 2026/27, including:

- Savings totalling £3.2m.
- A Council Tax increase of 3.95% (0.95% above the LGFS assumption).
- A 3.8% uplift in fees and charges, higher than the previously assumed 2%.
- £2.8m in proposed revenue investments.
- New capital investment proposals, with associated revenue financing built into the budget.

No further use of reserves was proposed beyond 2025/26, apart from £2.2m earmarked for the Local Plan. The Council Tax Support top-up scheme would continue, funded via the Crisis Resilience Fund, providing up to £131.44 relief for Band A households.

It was highlighted that, despite national uncertainty and increasing demand pressures, the Council continued to demonstrate strong budget management and a balanced budget was presented for the next two financial years.

The budget was based on the provisional financial settlement, with the final settlement expected shortly. Any changes would be incorporated into the inflationary budget. An adjustment to fees and charges would be required before Council due to the Government's recent decision to delay rent convergence, meaning increases would now be phased from 2027/28 and 2028/29.

The Leader, Councillor Read provided an overview of the key elements of the budget proposals, expanding on the earlier technical presentation. He noted that Rotherham had been a beneficiary of the Government's Fair Funding Review, receiving £9m more than expected compared with the previous year's position. While funding remained below the level the

Council would wish for in order to fully restore services reduced during austerity, this was nonetheless a significant improvement on recent years.

However, he highlighted that the Council faced £13.4m of additional pressures in children's and adults' social care for 2025/26 to ensure those services were properly funded. As a result, services had been asked to identify efficiencies that would not disadvantage residents. This had led to approximately £3m of savings, through better use of grant funding and sustainable changes achieved during the past year.

The Leader highlighted that approximately £900,000 of the proposed savings related to working-age adult social care. This was based on modelling which showed that Rotherham's average spend per service user was higher than comparable authorities. By reviewing support packages as new service users entered the system, the Council expected to deliver services more efficiently while maintaining individual needs assessments. He emphasised that all decisions would continue to be based on the specific needs of each person, and the saving could be achieved without reducing the quality of care.

The Leader noted that the only change likely to be noticeable to residents was a slight reduction in customer service operating hours, with Riverside House and the contact centre losing about 30 minutes each day from its operating times. He reported that usage data showed very few customers accessed the service during this time. He also reminded Members that a more substantial reduction in evening call-centre hours had been implemented 12 months earlier without any negative feedback. He stated that the Council was confident the adjustment would not disadvantage residents while contributing to the required efficiency savings.

The Leader explained that, once efficiencies had been identified, the Council considered how the available funding could be used to improve quality of life across the borough. A key theme of the investment proposals was responding directly to issues raised by residents.

He highlighted a £300,000 investment to establish a High Streets Team. While the Council already had strong inward-investment and business-start-up teams, residents continued to express frustration about the condition and vitality of high streets across the borough. The new team would provide dedicated, hands-on support to businesses, initially in principal towns and then more widely, through activities such as events, promotions, growth advice, and help accessing grant funding, including schemes similar to the successful Shop Unit Grant. The intention was to use this discretionary support to help reinvigorate high streets and strengthen local communities.

The Leader reported that, following last year's selective licensing consultation, the Council had established a small team to respond to issues consistently raised by tenants, landlords and residents. While selective licensing had successfully maintained minimum housing

standards over the past decade, consultation feedback showed that communities had not seen wider improvements to their neighbourhoods or the public realm.

With the additional funding available, the Council was now able to resource this work. Local Neighbourhood Forums, bringing together tenants, ward councillors, residents and landlords, would be supported to identify and address local concerns. The budget included £100,000 per year in capital funding for small-scale public realm improvements such as fencing, planting and similar works.

Additional civil enforcement capacity would be provided to tackle issues such as fly-tipping and environmental problems in the affected areas, with officers based locally to build community knowledge. Dedicated tenant support would also be introduced to assist residents who were vulnerable or at risk of exploitation, helping them access wider services including employment support.

The Leader stated that these measures would ensure that communities which had previously not felt the benefits of selective licensing would now see practical, visible improvements.

The Leader highlighted a £350,000 investment to expand the Healthy Holidays programme. He explained that the core, Government-funded scheme provided holiday activities and a hot meal for children receiving free school meals, four days a week during school holidays. However, he noted that the strict eligibility threshold for free school meals meant many low-income families were excluded despite facing similar financial pressures.

The additional local funding would allow the Council to work with providers to create free extra places for children not eligible for free school meals. The Leader advised that further work was required to finalise the delivery model and fair allocation process. Based on current uptake patterns, around 2,500 children could benefit from approximately 10,000 additional day places. With an estimated 25,000–30,000 children in Rotherham not receiving free school meals, the challenge would be to target the support to those most in need without introducing restrictive or complicated criteria.

The Leader reported a £450,000 investment to strengthen the Educational Psychology Service. He noted that while Rotherham performed comparatively well against other authorities on assessments, the process remained difficult for families and current performance levels were not sufficient to meet growing demand. The investment aimed to increase universal support for schools to help identify and address needs earlier, reducing escalation. It would also support efforts to reduce waiting times for children with the most significant needs. The Leader acknowledged that this was a substantial financial commitment but stated that it was necessary to improve outcomes for children and families.

The Leader went on to report a £200,000 allocation to fund a trial of discounted swimming for older residents. He described this as an opportunity, made possible by the improved budget position, to enhance quality of life for people aged over 65. Current participation levels for this age group were low, and the trial, linked to the existing Moving Well programme, would test whether reduced prices encouraged greater physical activity. He explained that the scheme was intended as a temporary pilot, aimed at generating evidence on whether discounted access could sustainably increase participation. He hoped the trial would lead to more older residents taking up swimming and provide useful insight to inform future targeted investment.

The Leader also highlighted planned capital works to improve green spaces, noting investment particularly at Herringthorpe and Ulley, along with additional revenue funding for Rother Valley Country Park. These improvements were intended to enhance residents' experience of local parks and leisure spaces.

The Leader noted that the capital programme also included a range of essential infrastructure works, forming a significant portion of the planned investment. While he did not detail each scheme, he confirmed these were necessary projects that supported the borough's long-term asset management.

In closing, he confirmed that the proposals resulted in a 3.95% council tax increase, remaining below the Government's cap for the seventh consecutive year. He highlighted the cumulative benefit of this approach, with the average Rotherham household estimated to be around £100 per year better off next year and in future years compared with applying maximum increases. He described the rise as a responsible and sustainable step that protected services without placing undue pressure on residents.

The Leader also reiterated that the Council Tax Support Top-Up Scheme would continue, funded through Government grant. This would provide significant reductions, often reducing bills to zero, for approximately 14,000 working-age households, easing financial pressures on low-income residents. He concluded that the overall proposals represented a strong and balanced package and recommended them for consideration.

The Chair introduced the next stage of the budget item. He explained that each Cabinet Member would now present the key elements of their portfolio, supported by officers in attendance. He asked Members to keep questions and comments brief in order to allow as many contributions as possible and to enable scrutiny to focus on detail, noting that the role of scrutiny was to act as a "critical friend." He also reminded Members to avoid political statements during the meeting, emphasising that such remarks were more appropriate for full Council when the budget would be

formally set.

He then invited Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor Cusworth to begin with her main budget items.

Councillor Cusworth presented the main budget proposals relating to Children and Young People's Services. She noted that the directorate included two savings of £400,000 linked to grant optimisation, explaining that the Council sometimes received grant funding for activity already under way or for staffing that could be funded differently, allowing these efficiencies to be realised.

She highlighted the £4.8m investment in children's social care, made possible through the improved Government settlement. She then outlined four further areas of investment and associated capital proposals designed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families, particularly those who were vulnerable or disadvantaged.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People confirmed the £453,000 investment in Educational Psychology, which would expand the service to meet rising demand. This would reduce waiting times for assessments, increase support for children with SEND, and provide schools with improved access to expert advice on emotional wellbeing and mental health. The additional capacity would also help address issues such as rising anxiety, emotionally based school avoidance, and links to elective home education.

She reiterated the importance of the £350,000 expansion of the Healthy Holidays programme, which would provide around 10,000 additional day places. The scheme offered free activities and a school-meal-quality lunch for children, working closely with voluntary and community sector partners. She noted that many low-income families were not eligible for free school meals and therefore welcomed the opportunity to widen access. Councillor Cusworth encouraged elected Members to visit sessions within their wards, highlighting the positive impact on children's enjoyment, confidence and social inclusion.

Councillor Cusworth outlined further investment proposals within Children and Young People's Services. She noted a £26,000 allocation for school uniform support, linked to an expected 20% increase in eligibility due to free school meal entitlement changes under Universal Credit. The funding would continue to provide £70 vouchers at key transition points, starting school, moving to junior school, and moving to secondary school. She clarified that vouchers could be used at any retailer, not only specialist uniform shops.

She confirmed an additional £100,000 to expand universal youth work, enabling further sessions and wider engagement. Since the programme began in 2021, delivery had grown well beyond the initial target of 750 sessions, reaching 1,260 sessions in the past year. The investment would

strengthen both youth club provision and outreach activity, working with the voluntary and community sector to provide safe spaces, trusted adults, and positive role models for young people.

Councillor Cusworth also highlighted a £208,000 capital investment for new youth outreach vehicles to replace ageing fleet. These vehicles would support mobile youth work, particularly in neighbourhoods where young people did not access traditional youth centres. She described local examples of successful outreach, such as work in Thrybergh, where regular engagement, supported by the mobile unit, had enabled youth workers to build strong relationships with groups of young people and provide early help where risks were identified.

She concluded that the set of proposals demonstrated the Council's commitment to supporting vulnerable children and families, promoting educational achievement, and expanding opportunities for young people across the borough. She welcomed scrutiny of the proposals and confirmed she was happy to take questions.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety, Councillor Alam OBE to highlight his main budget items. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety reported two investment areas within the portfolio.

First, internal audit played an important role in governance by providing assurance on service effectiveness and adding value. The team had remained stable for several years due to the extensive experience of existing auditors, but its small size, compared with other authorities, meant future resilience was a concern. To address this, proposals were made to establish two trainee auditor posts and one principal auditor post to support succession planning and future-proof the service.

Second, the Cabinet Member highlighted increasing cyber security threats, noting recent disruptions experienced by major organisations. To strengthen the Council's protection against cyber-crime, proposals were made to create two additional posts to enhance cyber security capability.

Next the Chair invited the Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Green Spaces, Councillor Marshall to present her main budget highlights. The Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Green Spaces reported several proposed investments.

The events team sought additional capacity to support the borough-wide events programme, including major cultural, civic and town-centre events. Visitor numbers had continued to grow, with 95,500 attending the Rotherham Show in 2025, despite the team comprising only 3.8 FTE posts. Investment was therefore proposed to expand capacity, supporting culture-led regeneration, increased footfall, stronger community engagement and enhancement of Rotherham's cultural identity.

Increased visitor numbers at Rother Valley Country Park, driven partly by favourable weather, had placed pressure on site maintenance, health and safety requirements and the management of anti-social behaviour. With the new Waterfront Café expected to attract further visitors, proposals were made to expand the ranger team to ensure the park remained safe, well maintained and welcoming.

Phase two of the roadside cleansing team was proposed. Phase one had been established in October 2025, focusing on rural verges and fly-tipping until March 2026, before moving to scheduled maintenance of the 32 gateway sites. To maintain momentum and widen impact, it was proposed to double the available resources.

From 28 October 2026, the household waste recycling centres were scheduled to be insourced, transitioning from external contractors to RMBC management. The strategy aimed to improve service quality, resident satisfaction, accountability and sustainability, with an emphasis on reuse and improved waste management practices.

A 12-month pilot for discounted swimming for residents over 65 was proposed, aimed at increasing physical activity and improving health outcomes. The pilot would provide evidence of uptake, impact and value for money.

Capital investment was proposed to replace fleet equipment for green spaces, including Clifden Park, Rother Valley Country Park and Waleswood Caravan Park, and to purchase a trailer to support movement of machinery between sites.

The resurfacing of the Herringthorpe Athletics Track was proposed, as the 1990 track surface had reached the end of its functional life. Without intervention, the facility risked becoming unusable, impacting schools and community use.

Further investment was proposed for Ulley Country Park, including replacement of the visitor centre. The new facility would enhance revenue generation, improve the visitor experience, provide inclusive community space and support educational and social outcomes for young people with SEND through vocational opportunities. The centre supported a wide range of user groups, including Ulley Sailing Club, the Sea Cadets, Friends of Ulley Country Park, Wickersley School and Sports College, and vocational training programmes.

At the Chair's invitation the Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, Councillor Williams opened by thanking the Executive Director and Service Directors in the Regeneration and Environment Directorate for their work on the budget process, and for the personal support provided in his first year in the role.

The Cabinet Member noted that in summary, proposals were grouped under three broad themes: highways maintenance, road safety, and

support for high streets.

Under highways maintenance, the Cabinet Member highlighted significant investment in the structure's maintenance programme. Recent assessments of highway structures had identified essential works required to maintain safety and usability, and the proposed funding would enable these repairs. Additional allocations were proposed for repairs to Old Flatts Bridge, allowing restrictions to be lifted once parapet works were completed, and for Fleet Bridge to fund design and planning work for future reconstruction.

On road safety, several proposals were presented. Funding was proposed to support the production of ward-level road safety plans, enabling identification of priority locations for future interventions. Funding was also allocated to progress the pedestrian crossing programme, allowing detailed designs to be drawn up for the top five priority sites following a review of more than 50 requests. The Transportation Minor Works Programme would continue, with clearer definitions of eligible interventions. Funding was also proposed to develop plans and designs for improvements at Treeton Lane Crossroads, a longstanding area of concern.

In relation to high streets, the Cabinet Member welcomed the continued investment supporting town centres, building on previous initiatives such as street cleansing teams, Street Safe teams and business support officers. Additional small budgets would be made available in each of the five areas to support local promotional and activity-based initiatives. Councillor Williams concluded by noting that the proposals represented positive investment across communities and responded directly to local priorities.

At the Chair's invitation the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, Councillor Baker-Rogers reported on the position for Adult Social Care. It was noted that, in line with other urban areas, the borough had an ageing population with increasingly complex needs, and the Council had statutory duties to meet eligible care requirements.

Adult Social Care in Rotherham had continued to focus on enabling residents to live independently at home for as long as possible, though this approach carried significant cost pressures. Inflation and rising demand meant that the portfolio required additional budget provision to meet statutory obligations, rather than to fund new revenue or capital initiatives.

The Cabinet Member emphasised the importance of value for money and noted that the Directorate had a strong record in this area. Work would continue, including reviewing spend on working-age adults while ensuring needs continued to be met. It was also reported that construction of the new homes at Canklow, which will provide day opportunities for people with high support needs, was progressing, and the Councillor Baker-

Rogers looked forward to its opening.

At the Chair's invitation the Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Beresford provided an update on selective licensing and thanked the Leader for the overview already given. It was noted that views from tenants, landlords, ward members and the scrutiny panel had been taken into account, particularly concerns that previous schemes had not delivered a visible difference in neighbourhoods. While earlier schemes had been effective in addressing issues within properties, they were less focused on external environmental concerns.

The new approach was described as an opportunity to make a more significant and visible impact. This would be achieved through strengthened enforcement, addressing issues such as fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour, and through enhanced tenant engagement to ensure residents' priorities were clearly understood.

On the capital side, the Cabinet Member explained that the programme included £100,000 in the coming year and £500,000 over five years for small-scale environmental improvements. These would be informed by the new stakeholder board and delivered in partnership with agencies such as the police, with a focus on designing out crime and tackling environmental issues.

The Cabinet Member for Housing highlighted a request for £135,000 to support the Welfare Rights Service. This funding was intended to maintain the existing service rather than introduce new provision. The service currently supported residents with serious cancer diagnoses, with around 900 Rotherham residents benefiting from advice on benefits and support, such as transport assistance for those undergoing chemotherapy.

The service had previously been funded by Macmillan Cancer Support, but reduced donations meant Macmillan might no longer be able to sustain its contribution. While Macmillan might still provide some funding, the amount and timing were uncertain. The proposed allocation would ensure the Council could continue delivering this vital service for residents.

Councillor Beresford reported a revenue saving relating to the Housing First programme, which supported some of the most vulnerable and complex tenants to sustain their tenancies. The intention was not to reduce or cease the service but to fund it differently. As referenced by the Leader, alternative funding had been identified through the Homelessness Prevention Grant, enabling the same level of support to continue without direct Council funding. This change would deliver a saving of approximately £190,000.

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

Councillor Blackham queried the budget increase, noting that while the proposed additional projects and services totalled approximately £900,000, the overall budget had risen by £4.8 million. He asked what the remaining £3.9 million would fund that had not been provided in the current year.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People responded that the £4.8 million increase related specifically to social care pressures. This funding was required to continue meeting existing commitments, including rising placement costs and increasing complexity within the private market. The additional proposals referred to earlier, such as educational psychology support, school uniform support, additional places and universal youth work, were separate to this and did not form part of the £4.8 million. The £4.8 million therefore covered demand-led social care costs rather than new initiatives.

In his supplementary Councillor Blackham sought clarification that the £4.8 million increase related solely to meeting inflationary pressures, increased demand and associated costs. In response the Service Director, Financial Services confirmed that the £4.8 million increase comprised £2.8 million to address historic under-inflation, as previously outlined to OSMB, and a further £2 million for inflation in the 2026-27 financial year. It was noted that this funding was separate from the revenue investment proposals discussed by Members, which related to additional activities within the budget and Council Tax report.

Councillor Tinsley BEM asked a question regarding selective licensing. He queried the shift away from a fully self-funding model, given the proposals for increased civil enforcement and capital improvements. He also asked what support would be provided in areas no longer covered by selective licensing, such as Maltby, where similar issues continued to occur.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed that selective licensing was normally self-funding, with licence fees covering the cost of property inspections and the work carried out within homes. However, the Council had chosen to expand the approach to include external environmental improvements and enhanced enforcement activity, which required additional funding. This also reflected feedback from tenants, landlords, ward members and scrutiny, leading to the establishment of a stakeholder panel and improved routes for tenants to seek support.

Regarding areas no longer covered by selective licensing, such as Maltby, the Councillor Beresford noted that their removal from the scheme reflected improvements achieved during previous designations. It was confirmed that the Council continued to operate a private rented sector enforcement team to support both tenants and landlords in those areas, alongside wider investment initiatives such as those in Maltby town centre.

Councillor Tinsley BEM followed up by noting that existing enforcement officers were already in place and queried whether the additional resources proposed for selective licensing areas amounted to a general increase in civil enforcement capacity. He expressed concern that, while the focus on selective licensing areas was understandable, other areas no longer within the scheme, such as Maltby, also continued to face similar issues and might require additional support. He cautioned that the scope of the approach might be too narrow and suggested that broader coverage could be beneficial.

In response, the Cabinet Member acknowledged the point raised and confirmed that the focus of the selective licensing proposals was on the most deprived areas, where issues such as fly-tipping and environmental crime remained persistent and required targeted intervention. These areas experienced ongoing problems that needed a concentrated approach to change long-standing patterns of behaviour and improve local conditions.

The Cabinet Member for Housing also noted that, although the new enforcement resources were directed at selective licensing areas, there was flexibility to provide occasional support to other areas, such as Maltby, should specific hotspots or issues arise. Members were encouraged to raise such concerns so that support could be deployed where appropriate.

Councillor Tinsley BEM raised a query regarding the household waste recycling centres. He noted that when scrutiny previously considered the delivery options, the cost differences between retaining the outsourced model, adopting a hybrid approach, or bringing the service fully in-house had been marginal, with outsourcing being the cheaper option. He commented that additional resources were now being invested, increasing the cost to taxpayers. He also observed that the former contractor had managed recycling activity, including operating a reuse shop, and questioned whether the new arrangements offered good value for money given that similar tasks could potentially have been carried out under the previous model.

In response the Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment explained that the changes represented an enhancement to the existing household waste recycling centre service. Ahead of the operation being brought in-house in October, the Council had reviewed current arrangements and identified opportunities to improve the support offered to residents in recycling their materials correctly. It was also confirmed that the Council intended to establish a reuse shop at one of the Rotherham sites over the next year, building on the type of provision previously referenced. He stated that this formed an additional element of the service the Council wished to develop.

The report noted that by 2028-29 there would be a £9.279m deficit in the financial budget. Councillor Yasseen asked what specific measures were

being developed, and by when, to address the funding gap. The Leader noted that there remained significant risk in the year-three budget position. Reference was made to last year's budget report, where a similar deficit had appeared in year three and had subsequently moved into year two but was now in balance. Members were advised that figures typically changed over a three-year period and, therefore, the current projected deficit was not a primary concern at this stage. The budget would continue to be closely monitored, with costs controlled and responsible decisions taken on council tax. The Council was considered to be in a sustainable interim position, though actions would be taken if the projected deficit remained a concern in 12 months' time.

A question was raised by Councillor Yasseen regarding the investment in the track at Herringthorpe Playing Fields, highlighting concerns about the lack of community consultation. It was noted that a masterplan for the site had been repeatedly promised over several years, including by successive Cabinet Members, but had not yet been delivered. Without this masterplan, requested by both the Member and the Friends of Herringthorpe Playing Fields for a decade, it was queried how the Council could be confident that the investment represented the best use of funds or reflected local community priorities. It was asked whether it would be more prudent to await the completion of the long-promised masterplan before proceeding.

The Leader explained that investment in the Herringthorpe running track had been brought forward in response to representations from users, including the Harriers and other groups, who considered it their highest priority. The track was reported to be deteriorating to the point of becoming unsafe, and the investment was presented as necessary to ensure continued use of the facility.

In her supplementary, Councillor Yasseen expressed concerns about the lack of community consultation and the absence of the long-promised masterplan for the site. It was noted that a masterplan had been requested by ward members and the Friends of Herringthorpe Playing Fields for a decade, and that investment was being made in a piecemeal way without a clear strategic context. It was questioned how priorities between different user groups could be determined without this overarching plan, and it was suggested that the investment should have been deferred until the masterplan was completed.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment noted that user groups had made strong representations regarding the athletics track, which was described as a well-used but rapidly deteriorating facility. Advice received from Athletics England indicated that the track was unlikely to remain usable beyond another year. Members were informed that, without replacement within the current year, the track would have to close in 2027, and the proposed investment was therefore presented as an immediate response to its physical condition.

Councillor Baggaley asked question regarding the revenue savings, specifically the treasury management saving line, for which no appendix had been provided. Clarification was requested on what this treasury management saving related to. In response the Service Director, Financial Services reported that the Council had generated consistent savings through its Treasury Management strategy over recent years. Some of these recurring savings had been built into the budget for 2025-26 to 2027-28. Additional in-year savings continued to be delivered beyond those already assumed. It was noted that the same Treasury Management approach, regularly reported to the Audit Committee, was expected to continue to support the budget throughout the MTFS period without further challenges.

A question was raised by Councillor Baggaley regarding how the DSG Safety Valve arrangements fitted into the budget. Reference was made to the projected increase in the DSG deficit over the period and to the end of the statutory override in 2027–28. Clarification was sought on how the Council intended to begin reducing the deficit as the override expired, and whether the MTFS currently reflected the financial impact once the override was removed or whether a significant spike would appear when it ended.

It was reported that the Safety Valve programme had enabled the Council to return the DSG position to balance, removing the previous £20m negative reserve. Members were reminded that the Government's statutory disregard meant that any DSG deficit would not impact the General Fund until 2027–28, and that this deadline had already been extended several times. It was suggested that further national delays were likely, particularly given that wider social care reforms affecting DSGs had also been pushed back.

It was emphasised, however, that the Council could not rely on further extensions and must continue to reduce demand pressures. The service would therefore continue work aligned with the former Safety Valve programme, including maximising local placements, reducing costly out-of-borough provision, and increasing capacity within local schools.

It was noted that the MTFS did not yet factor in the end of the statutory mitigation in 2027–28. Members were advised that, should the Government adhere to that timeframe, the removal of the disregard would create a pressure on the General Fund that would need to be addressed at that point. It was confirmed that the budget and MTFS were kept under continual review in line with Government policy changes, and the Council would respond accordingly as further national direction emerged.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People noted that the DSG pressures were not unique to Rotherham, as many authorities held deficits and had also participated in Safety Valve arrangements. While the programme had provided substantial support, including capital investment to expand local provision and keep children

educated within the borough, the wider national system had not yet been fixed. As a result, DSG deficits were beginning to rise again in several Safety Valve authorities. Members were informed that councils were awaiting further national reforms, including the forthcoming 'Children's Wellbeing and Schools' Bill and accompanying white paper. It was emphasised that efforts continued to maximise in-borough provision, not only for financial reasons but because it was considered better for children to remain near peers and siblings wherever possible. It was also suggested that the statutory override was likely to continue for several more years.

A question was raised by Councillor Thorp regarding the costings, specifically the £73,971 allocated for a tennis court. Clarification was requested on what this expenditure related to. In response it was noted that the expenditure formed part of the ongoing programme of tennis court refurbishment across the borough and related to one of those schemes.

A supplementary question was raised noting that the Lawn Tennis Association had recently spent £150,000 resurfacing the courts and asking why the Council was intending to spend a further £73,971. It was noted that there may have been some confusion with the athletics track refurbishment, and officers agreed to check the position and report back to Councillor Thorpe.

A question was raised regarding the £200,000 allocated to support discounted swimming for people over 65. It was noted that, at a previous meeting on funded activity to encourage increased participation, commercial operators had been asked to offer half-price swimming for this age group. Clarification was sought by Councillor Thorp on whether the Council would be subsidising the remaining cost to those operators, and it was suggested that operators should instead have been advised that offering half-price entry could generate additional income without Council support. In response it was confirmed that no additional payments were being made to the private operator of the leisure centres. The Council would be subsidising the reduced-price offer for residents aged over 65, but the operator would not receive any extra funding beyond the standard fees paid for use of the facilities.

The Leader noted that, under the existing PFI arrangements for the leisure centres, prices were set by the operator. While the model was acknowledged to be costly, it had helped protect the facilities during austerity. The Council was using a small amount of funding to subsidise access for residents over 65, as it was considered beneficial to them, and it was confirmed that lessons would be learned from the approach.

Councillor Thorp raised a further question regarding the £200,000 subsidy for over-65s swimming, asking what the Council was actually paying for. It was queried whether individuals would need to claim the subsidy themselves or whether the Council would effectively be funding the majority of the operational costs. Clarification was sought on how the

subsidy worked in practice and what the £200,000 was being used to cover.

It was explained that the subsidy would be managed through the existing PFI arrangements. The Council made monthly payments to the PFI provider, and the discount offered to over-65s would be tracked and reclaimed through that contract. The PFI agreement would be adjusted to reflect this process. Over-65s would simply pay the discounted price at the leisure centre, with the operator recording those transactions and the Council reimbursing the value of the discount.

The Service Director, Financial Services explained that the subsidy would be managed through the existing PFI arrangements. The Council made monthly payments to the PFI provider, and the discount offered to over-65s would be tracked and reclaimed through that contract. The PFI agreement would be adjusted to reflect this process. Over-65s would simply pay the discounted price at the leisure centre, with the operator recording those transactions and the Council reimbursing the value of the discount.

Councillor Monk asked about the replacement of the outreach vehicles, referring to the identified risk about the availability of skilled and well-trained drivers needed to utilise the vehicles effectively. Clarification was sought on whether this was already impacting service delivery and, if so, whether the number of vehicles being replaced was appropriate given staffing levels. If the issue was not currently affecting the service, further information was requested on how the team was being future-proofed to ensure full utilisation of the vehicles.

The Service Director, Family Help confirmed that the availability of skilled drivers was not currently affecting the outreach service. The risk related instead to ensuring sufficient trained drivers in future. Most staff were still relatively early in their driving careers, and the service had in place a programme of training and refresher courses. A timetable would be followed to maintain ongoing driver competency and safeguard future capacity.

Councillor A Carter asked about the impact and value for money of the previous capital investment in replacing the bin lorry fleet. He noted that recent council meetings had reported vehicle breakdowns and asked whether the replacement had occurred, whether it had been effective, and why there was no current budget provision, was the replacement still pending, or had it happened without delivering the expected benefits?

In response the Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Green Spaces reported that the procurement for the new bin lorry fleet had gone out to tender. Members were advised that there had been a significant number of vehicle breakdowns over the winter period, which had required the temporary hiring-in of vehicles. The service was now awaiting the outcome of the tender process.

In his supplementary Councillor A Carter noted it seemed like quite a long time to get to that point where the Council was currently out to tender and queried why hasn't that taken a year? The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment noted that the procurement process had been protracted but was now concluded. Tenders had closed in the middle of the previous month, and the contract was expected to be awarded later in the month. No new funding was included in the current year's budget, as the purchase would be delivered from previously approved investment. The order for the new vehicles was expected to be placed by the end of February.

Councillor Yasseen raised a question about the new Selective Licensing stakeholder board: who decided who sat on it, and how tenants, especially given historically low engagement, would be identified and reached out to for participation.

The Cabinet Member for Housing confirmed that the stakeholder board was still being scoped and had not yet been finalised. Members were invited to suggest participants. Councillor Beresford noted that contact details gathered through the consultation, covering residents, tenants, and landlords, would be used as a starting point, alongside ward members. It was emphasised that tenants and other stakeholders would help shape the board's design, with letters to be issued to invite engagement and ensure the structure reflected what people wanted.

It was noted that work was still being put in place and asked whether any timescales had been established. It was felt that the consultation indicated the approach extended beyond the Selective Licensing team and required cross-council involvement. Examples included homelessness services, ASB and community enforcement. Councillor Yasseen asked whether a clear framework would be developed to define responsibilities and ensure accountability across teams, given that the aims related to wider area improvement, not just property issues.

Councillor Beresford explained that no definitive timescales could be provided, as recruitment was still required for key posts such as engagement officers and enforcement officers. These roles needed to be in place before effective tenant engagement could begin. She noted that the approach was broader than before, particularly regarding ASB and environmental crime. Existing challenges had arisen because the council had relied on an already stretched Community Protection Unit serving the whole borough. The new model would introduce dedicated in-house resources forming a small team responsible for internal property enforcement and external area issues. This would reduce reliance on CPU and allow officers to respond directly, which represented a key difference from the current arrangements.

The Chair asked whether the uplift in Adult Care and Children's Services was sufficient, or whether further increases would soon be required. In

response, the Leader stated that the uplift was considered sufficient based on analysis of current cost pressures and demand within the services. It was noted that while future pressures could not be ruled out, the budget was judged to be adequate and a reasonable assessment of current needs.

The Chair went on to ask if the capital programme affordable long term? The Service Director, Financial Services confirmed that the capital programme position was fully reflected in the budget and MTFS. Each time the capital programme or borrowing requirements were increased, the associated capital financing costs were built into the revenue budget in advance of projects being delivered. It was noted that slippage could create short-term savings, but provision was made annually to ensure the future affordability of the programme. The Board was advised that current capital investment levels were lower than in previous years. As a result, the Council's future debt repayment through the Minimum Revenue Provision was now higher than its new capital investment, meaning the overall capital financing requirement was reducing year on year, which was considered a positive position.

A question was raised by Councillor Baggaley regarding capital investments, noting that funding had been allocated for design work and feasibility studies but that schemes were not always progressing to delivery at pace. Clarification was requested on how the Council intended to ensure that projects moved beyond preliminary stages into delivery, given that budgets had already been set aside for this work.

The Leader explained that progression from design work to delivery depended on the individual schemes. Some projects were expected to be funded through City Region or Mayoral Combined Authority funding, while others might require further decisions within the Council's own capital programme.

It was acknowledged that, historically, schemes had not been prepared in advance, as design work often began only once major funding had been secured. This approach had delayed delivery by several years and left the Council poorly positioned when new funding opportunities arose. The current strategy aimed to be more proactive by allocating modest capital sums upfront for preparation work, accepting that this carried some risk if external funding did not materialise or costs later proved unaffordable. However, it was felt that this approach provided clearer options and greater readiness compared with previous years, when plans had not been developed early enough to progress.

Councillor A Carter asked whether there was any national information on how other councils were funding welfare rights services, querying whether this approach was unique to the Council or part of a wider trend. In response the Executive Director of Adults, Housing & Public Health explained that the Council employed its own staff to deliver the welfare rights service, supported by financial contributions from Macmillan. While

this model was considered effective, combining council staff with specialist cancer-related benefits expertise, it was noted that arrangements varied nationally. In some areas, Macmillan was likely to run standalone services. However, officers did not have detailed information on the exact position across all local authorities.

In his second question, Councillor A Carter raised a query regarding the cost of the bridge element of the Rotherham Gateway scheme. It was noted that the bridge works appeared to be significant, and clarification was sought on why the Council was liable for the cost. He queried whether the need for bridge improvements arose from changes made under the Clean Air Zone programme, which had been funded by government, and why these works had not been anticipated or included within the original scheme.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment confirmed that the query related to the Old Flats Bridge and noted that the structure was the Council's responsibility as it formed part of the local road network. The bridge and parapet had suffered structural failure, and exploratory works undertaken over the past year had required one lane to be closed for an extended period. It was explained that the Council therefore had a duty to carry out the necessary structural repairs. Although the cost was significant, £1.9m in the programme for the following year, The Executive Director stated that the works were essential to ensure safety for road users and residents and would be progressed as quickly as possible.

It was clarified that the bridge issues were not caused by the Clean Air Zone works. Following the Parkway improvement works, routine safety checks identified problems with the bridge structure. Subsequent investigations and exploratory works then confirmed the extent of the repairs required. The Leader noted that the defects came to light after the Parkway widening, rather than being created by it.

In response to a further question Councillor A Carter regarding whether choosing not to apply the maximum council tax increase would have any impact on the Council's eligibility for the Government's Fair Funding Settlement the Service Director, Financial Services confirmed that no it did not.

A concern was raised by Councillor Thorp regarding the proposal for three new Business Support Officers within the Thriving Neighbourhoods programme, at a cost of £304,000. It was noted that each officer would have only £25,000 available to support businesses, which was felt to be a limited sum relative to the staffing costs. Members questioned whether a single officer with a larger support budget might provide greater benefit to small businesses, particularly those on high streets that may struggle to fund improvements to their premises.

The Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment clarified that the £25,000 allocated to each area was not intended to provide direct

financial support to individual businesses. Instead, the funding was designed to support jointly agreed activity with local business communities, such as promotional campaigns, seasonal events, or initiatives like Christmas lights, to help boost footfall and trading.

It was acknowledged that £25,000 would not be sufficient for individual grants, and this was not the purpose of the scheme. Officers noted that the Council had delivered a business grant programme over the previous year, providing direct financial support, and hoped to offer similar opportunities next year through SYMCA and successor funding to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

A follow-up question asked what tangible benefits three Business Support Officers would bring to high streets, given that other funding streams were already available to support businesses directly. In response the Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy explained that the key benefit of the three Business Support Officers was to provide a clear, dedicated point of contact for each high street, enabling businesses to raise issues more easily and access council support. The roles were also intended to strengthen engagement with ward councillors and improve coordination of council services on high streets. He noted that businesses often felt they lacked the promotional support given to the town centre, and these posts would help address that by supporting day-to-day business needs and delivering small-scale promotional activities funded through the allocated area budgets.

Councillor Tinsley BEM noted that ward councillors already worked closely with local businesses through ward coordinators and that these relationships were effective. He expressed concern that investing in additional staff might not be the best use of resources compared with directing more funding toward direct business support, such as grants, rental incentives, or measures to reduce empty high-street units. It was highlighted that many businesses wanted support to improve occupancy and attract more shoppers, and there was some doubt about whether the proposed balance between staffing and financial assistance was appropriate.

In response, the Chair emphasised the need for staff capacity to support high-street businesses effectively, noting that assistance could not be provided without dedicated officers in place. He described the roles as an investment intended to strengthen support for businesses. He further stated his confidence that the responsible Cabinet Member and officers would deliver the planned financial savings and avoid an overspend, confirming that the budget would be monitored throughout the year.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety noted that, based on previous performance, the Council had consistently balanced its budgets over the years. Monthly monitoring processes were in place, with Cabinet reporting to Scrutiny, and directors and officers worked diligently to remain within budget. While future circumstances could not be

guaranteed, officers expressed confidence that the Council would continue to manage its finances responsibly.

A question was raised by Councillor Tinsley BEM about whether the previously discussed pressures relating to Speciality Steel had any impact on the decision to set a flat council tax level for the year. The Service Director, Financial Services explained this had been reflected within the MTFS projections, and business rate forecasts had been adjusted downwards to reflect the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the site.

In response it was confirmed that the issue had not affected the setting of council tax, as business rates and council tax decisions were not directly linked. It was explained that budget and MTFS decisions were taken collectively across all proposals rather than one investment decision determining changes to council tax.

The Chair referred to the length of the reports and accompanying documents submitted for consideration to this and other meetings, indicating that at times this led to bulky agenda packs. As a result of this he highlighted an additional recommendation: that the Council should review and refine its approach to producing reports to ensure they were clearer, more concise and easier to read. He noted that streamlining reports would also reduce printing, lower costs and support the Council's carbon-reduction aims. He emphasised that this applied to all reports, not only budget reports.

Upon a majority vote the recommendations including the additional one were agreed.

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

1. Approval of the Budget and Financial Strategy for 2026/27 as set out in the report and appendices, including a basic Council Tax increase of 1.95% and an Adult Social Care precept increase of 2%.
2. Approval of the extension to the Local Council Tax Support Top Up Scheme, that will provide up to £131.44 of additional support to low-income households accessing the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme. It will support those most financially vulnerable to rising household costs, through reduced Council Tax bills as described in Section 2.5.15
3. Approval of the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2028/29, as described within Section 2.6.
4. Approval of the Reserves Strategy as set out in Section 2.8 noting that the final determination of Reserves will be approved as part of reporting the financial outturn for 2025/26.
5. To delegate authority to the Service Director of Planning, Regeneration and Transport in consultation with the Service Director of Financial Services and Cabinet member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, to approve the specific detailed

allocations and use of the Local Plan Reserve.

6. To note and accept the comments and advice of the Executive Director of Corporate Services (Section 151 Officer), provided in compliance with Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, as to the robustness of the estimates included in the Budget and the adequacy of Reserves for which the Budget provides as set out in Section 2.14.
7. To note the feedback from the public and partners following the public consultation on the Council's budget for 2026/27 which took place from 28 November 2025 to 9 January 2026, attached as Appendix 5.
8. Approval of the proposed increases in Adult Social Care provider contracts and for Direct Payments as set out in Section 2.4.
9. Approval of the proposed approach and increases in Children's Social Care costs as set out in Section 2.4.23.
10. Approval of the revenue investment proposals set out in Section 2.7 and Appendix 2.
11. Approval of the proposed revenue savings set out in Section 2.7 and Appendix 4.
12. Approval of the Council Fees and Charges for 2026/27 attached as Appendix 7.
13. Application of the Business Rates Reliefs as set out in Section 2.10, in line with Government guidance.
14. Approval of the proposed Capital Strategy and Capital Programme as presented in Section 2.12 and Appendices 3A to 3F.
15. Approval of the Treasury Management matters for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 9 of this report including the Prudential Indicators, the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy, the Treasury Management Strategy and the Investment Strategy.
16. Approval that any changes resulting from the Final Local Government Finance Settlement 2026/27 be reflected in the Budget and Council Tax Report to Council on 4 March.
17. Continuation of the principles and measures adopted since April 2020 to make faster payments to suppliers on receipt of goods, works and services following a fully reconciled invoice as described in Section 2.11.
18. Approval of the procedure for Budget allocations for the Community Leadership Fund as set out in Section 2.9.
19. Approval that the Capital Programme Budget continues to be managed in line with the following key principles:
  - i. Any underspends on the existing approved Capital Programme in respect of 2025/26 be rolled forward into future years, subject to an individual review of each carry forward to be set out within the Financial Outturn 2025/26 report to Cabinet.
  - ii. In line with Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules 7.7 to 7.11 and 8.12, any successful grant applications in respect of capital projects will be added to the Council's approved Capital Programme on an ongoing basis.

- iii. Capitalisation opportunities and capital receipts flexibilities will be maximised, with capital receipts earmarked to minimise revenue costs.

An additional recommendation to Cabinet was that:

- OSMB recommends the Council review and refines its approach to producing reports, ensuring that they are clearer, more concise, and easier to read. Streamlined reporting will also help to reduce printing requirements, contributing to lower costs and supporting the Council's work to improve its carbon footprint.

**112. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no urgent items.