

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 06 July 2026

Report Title

Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy (2026-2032)

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

Yes

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report

Chris Paddock, Interim Director of Policy, Strategy and Engagement

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected.

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report summarises the new Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy, replacing the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy which expired in 2025.

The Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy covers a six-year period to include the 2032 local elections and is intended to be flexible, supporting an agile approach to Neighbourhood Leadership for Councillors and officers.

It deals specifically with the role of Ward Councillors as neighbourhood leaders, building on the strong foundations which have been delivered over the last eight years. The Strategy sets out new aspirations for Ward Councillors to play an enhanced role in bringing residents closer to council services, enabling more responsive and locally impactful delivery.

This aligns with local, regional, and national policy ambitions to create stronger neighbourhood working. A complementary strategy (the new Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy) will be presented to Cabinet in December 2026. This will deal with broader issues of neighbourhood working, including how the council works with external partners within localities.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Approve the approach of producing two strategies: A Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy, focusing specifically on the role of Ward Councillors; and a Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy setting out the overarching ambition for how the Council supports local working.
2. Approve the Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy and the aspirations for Ward Councillors to play an enhanced role in bringing residents closer to council services, enabling more responsive and locally impactful delivery and note the accountability arrangements for services and enhanced focus on wellbeing and health inequalities.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Draft Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy 2026 - 2032

Appendix 2 Equalities Impact Screening Part A

Appendix 3 Climate Impact Assessment

Background Papers

[Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy 2018-2025](#)

[our-inclusion-strategy-2026-to-2030](#)

[LGA corporate peer challenge: Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council | Local Government Association](#)

[English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament](#)

[Protecting What Matters: Towards a more confident, cohesive, and resilient United Kingdom - GOV.UK](#)

[No Short Cuts: Towards a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Recovery - Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods](#)

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy

1. Background

- 1.1 This report sets out a new strategy to enable deeper neighbourhood working and an enhanced role for Ward Councillors as leaders in localities.
- 1.2 Previously, the Council set out arrangements for neighbourhood working and community leadership within its Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy (2018-2025). This Strategy was approved by Cabinet in November 2018 following the introduction of the new Neighbourhood Working Model in May 2017. It was subsequently reviewed in 2022 and has recently reached the end of its lifespan.
- 1.3 The 2023 LGA (Local Government Association) Corporate Peer Challenge Report provided positive feedback on the Council's Neighbourhood Working Model, stating – *'The Council's Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy aspires to strengthen the role of ward members as community leaders who can work with their communities, their partners and those delivering service in communities to bring about the changes that they want to see. The peer team was impressed by the exemplary approach to community engagement at ward level, where dedicated and well-supported Ward Members take the lead'*.
- 1.4 The ambition of the next iteration of this work is to build upon this solid foundation to position Ward Councillors at the centre of a deeper process of neighbourhood engagement and delivery.
- 1.5 To deliver upon the breadth of the ambition, the Council will produce two strategies. A more wide-ranging Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy will be presented to Cabinet for approval in December 2026; this is preceded by the focus of this report, the Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy, dealing specifically with the role of Ward Councillors as community leaders.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge Report (2023), includes a recommendation to *'Develop a clearer and shared understanding of integrated locality working'* and suggested that *'increased co-design and co-production of solutions and services alongside partner organisations can deliver enhanced outcomes for residents through improved services and solutions which are tailored to their needs'*.
- 2.2 This becomes even more important when considered alongside the most recent Resident Satisfaction Survey. This showed that, whilst overall satisfaction with the Council is positive and compares favourably with other peer councils, there has been a gradual decline in trust in the Council and a more significant fall in the feeling that the Council acts on the concerns of local residents. This reinforces previous survey results in support of Rotherham's Pride in Place programmes, which found that *'Residents do not*

feel listened to. While surveys and councillors are valued, people want clearer evidence that feedback leads to change’.

- 2.3 The Strategy has also been designed specifically, to deliver against the Inclusion Strategy themes of Working Together and Responsive Services, supporting Councillors to play an enhanced role in the co-production of services and ensuring that services are available and adaptive to a broader cohort of residents and communities.
- 2.4 Aligned to this, a focus on Neighbourhood Leadership also provides opportunities to develop more specific interventions in areas which experience the most significant health and economic inequality. This in turn, puts Ward Councillors at the heart of the Government’s prevention agenda.
- 2.5 Effective neighbourhood working and governance is also an increasingly vital component of national policy. Rotherham’s established model for neighbourhood working means the Council is well placed to capitalise upon this and position itself as a national leader in supporting Ward Councillors as a conduit to working more closely with and for Rotherham residents.
- 2.6 The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act introduced a new statutory duty on all local authorities to establish "appropriate arrangements" for effective neighbourhood governance. The Act’s goal is to move decision-making closer to residents, so it is led by the people who most understand local needs.
- 2.7 The Act is explicit in its aim to empower Ward Councillors to take a greater leadership role in driving community priorities. It recognises the need for neighbourhoods and Ward Councillors to be a more prominent part of the regional system, alongside the expectation of competency placed on the Mayoral Combined Authority. In February 2026, Mayor Oliver Coppard attended a meeting of the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and referred to this aim and desire to have stronger neighbourhood representation in the wider South Yorkshire system. This approach, and the principle of subsidiarity is further supported by the interim findings of the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods which is reviewing the current state of neighbourhoods across England.
- 2.8 Other partners and institutions are also moving towards a principle of locality and subsidiarity. The NHS 10-Year Health Plan aims to shift care from hospitals to local communities by creating a ‘neighbourhood health service’. This aspiration for neighbourhood health will be a key element of defining what is meant by a ‘Thriving Neighbourhood’; establishing links between this and Ward Councillors will be critical to success.
- 2.9 Ideas of locality are also explored within the government’s current community cohesion approach, defined in the ‘Protecting What Matters’ action plan (published March 2026). This focuses on three core pillars: Confident Communities, Cohesive Communities, and Resilient Communities. The first of these pillars embeds community leadership and local action as a means of creating more confident and enabled communities.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Given that the Neighbourhood Working Model is such a fundamental part of Rotherham's policy infrastructure, and that it was considered to be an '*exemplary approach*' by the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge Team in 2023, doing nothing to replace the expiring Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy was not considered desirable. As a result, two options were considered:

- Option 1: A single Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy, closely aligned with the 2018-2025 approach.
- Option 2 (preferred option): A Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy focussed more specifically on the role of Ward Councillors as leaders within their area, complemented by a Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy with a revised scope as set out above.

Option 1: A Single Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy

3.2 This option considered developing a single Strategy for all neighbourhood leadership and partnership work, effectively continuing the approach which was taken for the 2018-2025 Strategy. This would set out arrangements not only for the role of Ward Councillors but also for coordination of partners, such as Police, Health, and the Voluntary and Community Sector.

3.3 Engagement with Councillors, officers and partners, confirmed that there was an aspiration to build upon the strong foundations which already exist in the Borough and to be more ambitious. This means moving beyond current arrangements and working practice and recognising that a single strategy that covers both Ward Councillor leadership and new local working practices with partners would be both too detailed and broad for a single strategy document.

Option 2: A Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy focused specifically on the Role of Ward Councillors

3.4 The second and preferred option involves the council producing two strategies.

3.5 The new Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy will ultimately define what a Thriving Neighbourhood is and how the Council will work with partners to create deeper working in the borough's localities. It will embed new ways of working that are underpinned by relationships within the Council and with partners in service of community cohesion and empowerment; community and social infrastructure; wellbeing; and young people.

3.6 The Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy provides the foundation for the future, outlining how the Council will support Ward Councillors to evolve their function as leaders in their localities.

- 3.7 Rotherham's Neighbourhood Working Model is already recognised for its strength in supporting Ward Councillors to lead engaging with residents and ensuring that council services respond to their needs.
- 3.8 This Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy seeks to give Ward Councillors an enhanced role as conveners and the conduit for resident aspirations, helping the Council to more readily listen, learn and respond to the needs of residents. The outcome of this will mean that local people feel more connected to the council, building trust and agency in all neighbourhoods.
- 3.9 Like the previous strategy, it is built on 'Strengths Based Working' and the role of Ward Councillors in shifting power and enabling communities to do things for themselves. It also provides more definition on what residents should expect from their Ward Councillors, and the support Ward Councillors can expect to help them deliver against this.
- 3.10 It represents an evolution in terms of each Ward Councillor's function in facilitating links between resident needs and council services. There is an expectation that Ward Councillors play more of a role as translators of local resident needs, as well as being conveners of local networks within their areas.
- 3.11 The Strategy, through a co-design process with Councillors and officers, provides new guidance on what it means to be a '21st Century Rotherham Councillor'. Alongside the seven Nolan Principles, this has identified ten core attributes of Ward Councillors as neighbourhood leaders. These are:
1. **Visible and Accessible** - Approachable, easy to contact, open to conversations, and responsive to the community. Present in the neighbourhood, known to residents and active locally.
 2. **Trusted Listener** - Listening carefully to residents' experiences, needs, and ideas before acting. Absorbing challenge whilst remaining neutral and fair.
 3. **Advocate** - Speaking up for all residents' concerns and aspirations at every level of the council, championing issues that matter locally and standing alongside residents when it counts.
 4. **Empower** - Enabling residents and community organisations to be at the heart of decision making and providing opportunities for them to take control of the things that matter to them.
 5. **Bridge Builder** - Providing the link between residents and the council to ensure local voices shape decisions.
 6. **Champion** - Promoting local pride, strengthening community voice, and supporting local community organisations to thrive.

7. **Communicator** - Making sure residents are aware of things that are happening or may impact in their neighbourhood through multiple channels and explaining why decisions have been made.
8. **Responsible Representative** - Using power transparently and ethically on behalf of all residents and acting with integrity, fairness, and accountability.
9. **Connector** - Developing effective relationships between council services, partners, community groups, and residents to achieve shared priorities and outcomes.
10. **Problem Solver** - Working with the community to resolve local issues by navigating systems, influencing decisions, mediation, and unlocking solutions.

3.12 Six linked workstreams are identified to underpin the aspiration of the Strategy:

1. **Ward Priorities and Plans** - Providing evidence and insight to enable Ward Councillors to have information, to complement their local knowledge, to support leadership ambitions and plans.
2. **Devolved Neighbourhood Budgeting** – Optimising the local budgets which can be made available to Ward Councillors and residents to respond to local need.
3. **Leadership in Support of Council and Partner Services** – Developing new protocols and working arrangements to enable all Ward Councillors to be able to shape services specific to their area.
4. **Ongoing Support and Leadership Development** – Supporting Ward Councillors to evolve as leaders.
5. **The Role of Residents in Neighbourhood Leadership** – Supporting Ward Councillors to encourage residents to get proactively involved and have greater influence and agency in their area.
6. **Measuring Impact and Feeding Back** - Better measuring the impact of the Neighbourhood Leadership and Neighbourhood Coordination functions. Enabling more frequent and centrally collated resident feedback to provide further influence over the core functions of the council.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 Consultation on the Strategy has focussed on the practical role of Ward Councillors and their interaction with other parts of the Council. This has included:

- Consultation and co-production workshop with Councillors (including those on the Improving Places Select Commission and Overview and

Scrutiny Management Board), exploring the evolving role of Ward Councillors as 21st Century Rotherham Councillors alongside expectations of engagement with services.

- Consultation and co-production workshop with Council services and partners, considering the potential for improved local working and opportunities to facilitate better sharing of information and more responsive local delivery.
- A questionnaire shared with all Councillors to offer an opportunity to contribute to the development of the strategy. The survey was completed by 15 Councillors.

4.2 Further engagement will take place in support of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy over the course of Autumn 2026. This will include engagement with a wider partnership cohort as well as engagement with local residents to understand their expectations from neighbourhood delivery.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 Delivery of the Strategy is predominately via the 25 ward plans. Ward Councillors and the Neighbourhoods Teams review and update these plans on a monthly basis.

5.2 Ward Councillors present reports to Council to illustrate progress against their ward priorities - the latest cycle of reports to Council commenced in July 2025 - with a Thriving Neighbourhoods annual report presented to Improving Places Select Commission.

5.3 A Thriving Neighbourhoods Programme Board, chaired by the Director of Policy, Strategy and Engagement, has been established to oversee the development and delivery of both strategies. This will replace the previous Localities Working Board and will report directly into the Strategic Leadership Team. This will provide the direct line of communication from ongoing resident dialogue and decisions on the evolution of council services.

5.4 New protocols and delivery arrangements will be drafted and socialised with Councillors and officers over the course of the remainder of 2026. These will include enhanced arrangements for local service accountability and escalation.

5.5 A draft of the new Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy will be completed ahead of Cabinet in December 2026.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 There are no additional financial implications as a result of the proposed approval to produce the two strategies, a Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy and a Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy. The activity required to deliver these two strategies will be covered within existing budget allocations.

6.2 There are no direct procurement implications to deliver these two strategies. However, if there is any requirement for services to support their

development or because of their development new activity is required, then procurement processes will be followed. All procurement activity (revenue and capital) must be procured in compliance with relevant legislation (the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended), the Procurement Act 2023, or the Health Care Services (Provider Selection Regime) Regulations 2023) and the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 The Council has power to adopt and implement the proposed Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy under its general functions and community leadership role. The proposals are consistent with the Council's obligations to promote effective neighbourhood governance, including the requirements set out in emerging legislation such as the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act.
- 7.2 The Act establishes a statutory expectation that local authorities must put in place "appropriate arrangements" for neighbourhood governance, enable decision-making closer to residents, including meaningful local involvement. The Act also requires local authorities to make arrangements to support and strengthen the role of Ward Councillors as community leaders and ensure governance arrangements are effective, transparent, and accountable.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no specific Human Resources implications arising from the content of this report.
- 8.2 The Organisational Development function will provide appropriate advice and support should any learning and development interventions be identified.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 The Neighbourhood Working Model includes the need to identify ward priorities and agree action to address these through ward plans. The most recent ward priorities were published in October 2024 and illustrate where Ward Councillors are targeting resources towards Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults. This includes new or additional activities, improved facilities, or improved access to services. A number of Wards have priorities which will try to mitigate against the 'Cost of Living' crisis and the impact on families.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 As work commences on the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy, there will be further engagement (with residents and partners) which will provide additional opportunities to assess equalities performance. This will ensure that further mitigations are considered and can inform the implementation of the Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy.

10.2 Given that this is part of a suite of strategies and that the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy, will have a more direct focus on the needs of residents and specific communities, it is suggested that a single Equalities Assessment (Part B) is completed to accompany the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy in December 2026.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 The Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy will not pose any risk to Rotherham’s plans in relation to climate crisis. The proposed activities offer an opportunity for enhanced dialogue on climate and nature and possible innovation in support of ‘net -zero’ objectives.

11.2 Neighbourhood Leadership and the broader ambition of bringing residents closer to services and decision making could potentially have wide ranging benefits in supporting resilience and adaptation. Through collaboration, ward councillors and Neighbourhood Coordinators can play an active role in mitigating the disproportionality of climate impact, supporting diverse groups and those with protected characteristics to overcome impacts such as increased heatwave events.

11.3 Ward councillors can be supported to better understand impacts of climate within their locality which can in turn, ensure that this is given greater prominence in their development of ward plans and allocation of ward budgets.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 Joint working with partners across the public, voluntary, and private sectors is essential to the delivery of the Neighbourhoods Leadership Strategy and the Council’s Neighbourhood Working Model.

12.2 The ward priorities and plans are informed by the experience and intelligence from these partners, which encourages the establishment of shared priorities and goals.

12.3 A range of neighbourhood-based partnerships and networks are in place to tackle the priorities within the ward plans. This includes Community Action Partnerships (CAPs) which operate in all 25 Wards and provide a vehicle to tackle community safety-related issues.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 Risks and the associated mitigations relating to the delivery of the Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy are captured and tracked in the Policy Strategy and Engagement Risk Register. These include:

Risk	Mitigation
External factors limit community cohesion and trust, undermining the strategy	The council will work with local, regional, and national partners to monitor and take proactive action in

	response to national trends and sentiment. Enhanced arrangements for sharing information and feedback will enable a more rapid and informed response to this.
Lack of development or support for local councillors preventing them maximising their role as community leaders	An enhanced role for Neighbourhood Coordinators will enable them to identify training and development needs on an ongoing basis. This will be supported by more agile member support, related directly to the competencies within this strategy.
Understanding and engagement of local councillors.	Working with political groups and scrutiny committees to ensure that Councillors are well informed and see the benefits of engaging with the support available to them through this strategy.
Capacity of Council services and partners to respond to local priorities and issues	Clearer governance through the new Thriving Neighbourhoods Board, will provide more formal links to Strategic Leadership Team, providing clear routes to use Executive Directors to support their directorates to engage with the principles of the strategy and the actions emerging from local dialogue and evidence.
Parish Councils not actively involved in neighbourhood working	Parish Council coordination is managed through the Neighbourhood Team, who work closely with Parish Clerks to ensure they are offered a similar level of support and engagement as other places. This is delivered in collaboration with relevant ward councillors.
Lack of service responsiveness undermining delivery	New protocols, practices, and arrangements for escalation will be developed following the approval of the strategy. These will be socialised with Strategic Leadership Team, Service Directors and with individual Directorate Leadership Teams to provide clarity and understanding of new ways of working.
Inconsistent neighbourhood coordination across wards	Neighbourhood Coordinators already work collaboratively, meeting collectively on a monthly

	basis and working together with neighbouring areas on an ongoing basis.
Failure to address inequalities	Neighbourhood Leadership will be an essential element of the overall council strategy for tackling inequality. It will provide valuable information and focussed intervention. It will not however, be the only strategy or intervention in this space. Enhanced monitoring and feedback will drive a deeper impact on factors which impact upon inequality and will enable clearer identification of risks and challenges in specific localities.

14. Accountable Officers

Jane Maxwell
Director Policy, Strategy and Engagement

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	John Edwards	19/06/26
Executive Director of Corporate Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	11/06/26
Service Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	17/06/26

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This report is published on the Council's [website](#).