

Public Report
Delegated Officer Decision

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Delegated Officer Decision – 18 August 2026

Report Title

Re-Commission of a Sensory Impairment Service

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

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report

Ian Spicer, Executive Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

Grant Terms associated with the Council's Sensory Impairment Service reach their term on 31 March 2027.

The Service is currently provided by Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind (SRSB) and is known as Rotherham Sight and Sound.

The service makes a positive contribution to the Council's duty under the Care Act 2014 to promote wellbeing and prevent, reduce and delay the need for care. The people who benefit from the service are living in their own homes in the community.

The Service offers a variety of services to enable people with sensory impairment to achieve their optimum level of independence. It is a preventative service and supports the Council to divert demand away from higher cost care and support options.

It also supports the Council's Adult Care Directorate to meet its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 with an enhanced sensory offer above the statutory Care Act 2014 requirements. The service is unique in that they have a dual purpose in meeting the needs of both the deaf and blind community and are able to meet the needs of the deafblind.

The Service is well established in Rotherham.

This report outlines the proposal for the Council to continue to secure the services going forward under a further grant arrangement.

Recommendation

1. That, a grant be directly awarded to Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind for the provision of a Sensory Impairment Service in Rotherham. To be offered prior to the conclusion of the current arrangement on 31 March 2027 to secure the service for a period of 3 years from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2030

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Record of Officer Executive Decision

Appendix 2 Service User Survey Summary

Appendix 3 Professionals and Partners Survey Summary

Background Papers

None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Re-Commission of a Sensory Impairment Service

1. Background

1.1 The Sensory Impairment Service was developed in 2016 and has been provided by Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind (SRSB) since its inception.

1.2 In October 2020 Cabinet agreed to fund the service via a grant for the period April 2022 to March 2024 and a further period from April 2024 to March 2027, the latter was agreed as a direct award to SRSB due the specialist nature of the service and the additional financial investment, in the building the service operates from and service offer, made by the charity.

1.3 There is now a requirement to secure the service post March 2027.

1.4 Service Outputs:

Over the period April 2024 to March 2026:

- A total of 695 referrals were made to the service
- 1241 visits to people in their own homes
- 947 pieces of equipment were issued to 482 people
- 215 benefit claims completed generating a total income of £1,030,785
- 111 BSL advice and support sessions (each session is 3 hours) dealing with 261 issues.

1.5 Profile:

As of 31 March 2026, the service worked with 3,121 people (1,685 visually impaired, 1,436 hearing impaired). This total includes 331 people with a dual sensory loss (recorded under their main sensory impairment).

Data on people with a sensory impairment¹ suggests that Rotherham Sight and Sound recipient numbers are significantly representative of the Rotherham wider sensory impaired population, with 31% of people (3,121 people out of 10,197 population) with a moderate or severe sensory impairment accessing the service.

1.6 Principal aims of the service:

A single point of access to information, advice and specified services for people with sensory impairments which enable people to:

- Live as independently as possible
- To maintain and, where possible, improve their quality of life and well-being
- To enjoy the same quality of life that could reasonably be expected by any resident of the Borough
- Seamless interface between services and avoid barriers

¹ Pansi and Poppi data: [Projecting Adult Needs and Service Information System](#) and [Projecting Older People Population Information System](#) (taken from ONS population projections)

- Access a range of service options which promote independent living, avoid duplication, delay, repetition and are provided at the right time

1.7 The building on Ship Hill, in the town centre, is a well utilised space offering activities, social groups, and advice for both the visually and hearing-impaired. Tailored support is also provided for deaf people who use British Sign Language (BSL), with several staff members proficient in BSL. The café is also a popular social hub.

1.8 Staff assist people with benefit claims, emotional support, counselling and advice on specialist equipment and technology. Daily activities are provided, alongside a hearing aid repair service and staff work out in the community, offering visits, equipment advice, tailored group activities and sensory awareness training.

1.9 Sensory awareness training is provided to other organisations. Recently this has included RMBC Customer Service Team and Transport Services, Grimm & Co, Rotherham College and Rotherham Hospital.

People with a sensory impairment participate in these sessions and information packs provided.

1.10 Added Value

1.11 Volunteer dividend:

As at May 2026, there are 65 volunteers supporting the service. Volunteers provide the befriending service, support with the Look Ahead workshops, assist with activities, meet and greet and help in the café.

The average number of volunteer hours per month is 113. This equates to an in-kind monetary contribution of £17,235 per year (£12.71 national living wage x 113 hours a month).

1.12 Rehabilitation Officers for the Visually Impaired (ROVIs):

SRSB have two qualified Rehabilitation Officers for the Visually Impaired (ROVIs). The Council has a statutory duty to provide rehabilitation independence training and employs its own qualified staff. However, SRSB's ROVI resource, has been required, most recently between March 2024 and March 2025, to support the Council to reduce waiting lists resulting from long-term sickness absence of staff.

1.13 Additional investment:

SRSB own the building on Ship Hill. During 2023-24, significant funds have been invested. Developments include a fully equipped kitchen area which is used to provide daily living classes, a refurbished meeting room which can be hired out, a lift which has opened up use of the first floor and a café for use by visually impaired people and their family members/carers. The café has proved

very successful, in particular, it helps sensory impaired people engage with the service and is often the first step in engaging in other services and activities.

SRSB have received grant funding from RMBC since April 2017. Initially a budget of £140,000 was awarded to pump prime the development of the service in Rotherham, this was reduced to £125,000 in the second year and has remained the budget since then. The grant amount currently remains at £125,000. This currently represents a 53% contribution towards the costs of delivering the whole service currently provided at Ship Hill.

Since 2017, SRSB has invested its own funds into Rotherham Sight and Sound. In the financial year 2024/2025, total income for RSS was £138,104 (this includes £125,000 grant funding and £13,104 other income: attendee contributions, room hire and donations) and total expenses were £234,636 – a deficit of £96,532. The financial outcome for 2025-26 is expected to show a similar funding gap.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The Sensory Impairment Service grant agreement reaches its current term on 31st March 2027 and there are currently no ongoing arrangements in place for the continuation of this service.
- 2.2 A replacement arrangement is required in order to continue the Sensory Impairment Service.
- 2.3 The current grant recipient is an experienced VCS provider, who has a substantial understanding of the needs and challenges facing people with sensory impairment. The service offer is multi-faceted and supports people who are sight impaired, hearing impaired or deaf-blind.
- 2.4 The multi-faceted nature of the service offers people with sensory impairments streamlined access to the relevant support without unnecessary 'hand-offs' which ensures a positive experience for those accessing the service.
- 2.5 Grant Amount:
- 2.6 The grant awarded for 2024 to 2027 was £375,000. This does not fund the whole service operated from the Ship Hill premises, which is subsidised by SRSB through other fundraising activity.
- 2.7 An inflationary increase of the budget available has been agreed with the revised value of the grant for 2027 to 2030 being fixed for the three years at £469,560 (£156,520 per annum).

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Option 1 – not recommended - Undertake a competitive grant process

- 3.2 The Rotherham Sight and Sound Service is multi-functional, possessing the skills and capabilities to provide support to people affected by sight loss, to people affected by hearing loss and to people with both sight and hearing loss.
- 3.3 Whilst the needs of each cohort remain distinct the service is successful in achieving positive outcomes for each distinct cohort and has achieved a level of integration between the blind and the deaf community.
- 3.4 This level of expertise in a composite provision is uncommon in the care and support market.
- 3.5 Due to the specialised nature of the service, there is a requirement to have a suitable and accessible building base. The SRSB has made a substantial financial investment into the development of the service and remodelling and adapting the building from which the service is delivered. This level of financial contribution cannot be assumed from another provider via a competitive grant.
- 3.6 Any change in provider would also require a change in venue as SRSB own the building on Ship Hill.
- 3.7 The budget available to support the grant is relatively low and potentially unattractive to prospective bidders to be able to operate at the current level of quality, capacity, and efficiency.
- 3.8 For the reasons set out in this report it is unlikely that Option 1 will achieve the desired outcome for people accessing the service and provide the added value currently received.

3.9 Option 2 - recommended – Direct award a grant to Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind

- 3.10 Option 2 will enable the incumbent provider to continue to develop the service at the current location and offer the benefits described above.
- 3.11 It is therefore recommended that Option 2 is progressed and prior to the conclusion of the grant term, SRSB are awarded a new grant agreement for a period of 3 years - 1st April 2027 until 31 March 2030 - to deliver the Sight and Sound sensory impairment service in Rotherham.
- 3.12 The current service level agreement is fit for purpose, and no major amendments are required.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 To inform this paper, surveys were undertaken with both service users and professionals/partner organisations during June 2026. A total of 123 service users and 24 professionals responded, providing a comprehensive picture of

the impact, quality and value of the service. Overall, the findings from both surveys were overwhelmingly positive and demonstrate that Rotherham Sight and Sound plays a vital role in supporting people with sight loss, hearing loss and dual sensory loss to maintain independence, wellbeing and social inclusion.

4.2 Service User Experience and Outcomes (full summary in Appendix 2)

4.3 Service users reported very high levels of satisfaction with the support they received. Around three-quarters of respondents were **very satisfied**, with a further 20% satisfied. Most respondents found the service easy to access, felt treated with respect and understanding by staff, and said the support fully or mostly met their needs. Recommendation levels were exceptionally high, with **94% stating they would recommend the service to others**.

4.4 Professional Perspectives (full summary in Appendix 3)

4.5 Professionals also expressed strong confidence in the service. Respondents included representatives from social care, housing, health services and the voluntary sector, the majority of whom regularly support people with sensory impairments. Nearly two-thirds had made referrals to Rotherham Sight and Sound.

4.6 Professionals identified Rotherham Sight and Sound as a trusted local specialist service and demonstrated good awareness of its core functions, particularly the provision of specialist sensory equipment, support groups, welfare advice, hearing aid services and BSL support.

4.7 Feedback received by professionals from people they had referred was universally positive. People were reported to have experienced improved independence, increased confidence, enhanced social networks, better financial wellbeing and reduced reliance on statutory services. Several professionals repeated the description of the service as a “lifeline”, citing examples where support had prevented deterioration in mental health, increased independence and delayed the need for formal care.

4.8 Professionals also emphasised the importance of maintaining a local, accessible community base, with 88% rating a dedicated building as important or very important. The refurbished premises were seen as a valued hub where people can access specialist support, equipment, activities and social opportunities.

4.9 Areas for Development

4.10 While feedback was overwhelmingly positive, both surveys identified opportunities for further improvement. These included:

- Reducing waiting times for some equipment and assessments.
- Increasing awareness of the full range of services available, particularly among professionals.
- Expanding activities and social opportunities where funding allows.

- Maintaining and expanding support and communication opportunities for Deaf BSL users.
- Enhancing technology support and outreach to people who may not actively engage in groups.
- Continuing to develop preventative and early-intervention services.

These will be addressed over the next grant period if approved

4.11 Overall Conclusion

- 4.12 The combined findings present a strong picture of a highly valued service that delivers significant benefits for local people with sensory impairments. Both service users and professionals recognise Rotherham Sight and Sound as a trusted source of specialist support that improves quality of life, promotes independence, reduces isolation and enhances wellbeing. The service is widely regarded as a vital community asset and an important element of the wider sensory support pathway in Rotherham, providing both practical assistance and a trusted source of social and emotional support.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 If this proposal is agreed, the new Grant agreement will be in place by September 2026. Any revisions required to the current service specification and terms will be agreed with the Provider prior to this.
- 5.2 If not agreed a competitive grant process will be undertaken in the period September to October 2026 with a view to awarding a grant in November 2026.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 As the recommendation is to proceed with the Service via a grant agreement, there are no direct procurement implications as grants do not fall within the scope of procurement legislation (Procurement Act 2023).
- 6.2 The Sensory Impairment Service Grant to Rotherham Sight and Sound is funded by revenue budget and there is £156,520 available on cost centre 134640.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 The application to the Executive Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health to directly award a grant to Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind for the provision of a Sensory Impairment Service in Rotherham is appropriate in the circumstances described in this ODR.
- 7.2 The grant will be offered prior to the conclusion of the current arrangement (31 March 2027). The grant will therefore secure this service for a period of three further years from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2030.

- 7.3 The current grant recipient (SRSB working through Rotherham Sight and Sound) is an experienced provider, who has a substantial understanding of the needs and challenges facing people with sensory impairment. As such, it makes commercial, service provision and legal sense to continue with SRSB in a field where there are limited providers. For those reasons, holding a competitive procedure would be unlikely to ensure the selection of a suitable provider. Current service user satisfaction levels are high which again points to the advantages of maintaining continuity with the incumbent provider.
- 7.4 A suitable grant agreement will need to be identified and then agreed by SRSB and signed off with assistance from Legal Services. This agreement will contain all the necessary provisions to enable continuation of the service while protecting the integrity of the grant, including remedies for the Council in the event of service defaults or grant misuse.
- 7.5 Under the Council's Constitution and Contract Procurement Rules the Executive Director of Adult Care, Housing and Public Health has powers to permit the grant funded service provision process outlined in this report.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no implications for the Council.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 The services outlined in this report make a positive contribution in supporting vulnerable adults in Rotherham. As the report recommends continuing the services long term there are no negative implications envisaged. The Rotherham Sight and Sound service offers parents of children with sensory impairment support and therefore indirectly provides positive benefits to children and young people.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 The recommendation to sustain the services outlined in this report has positive implications for people with protected characteristics including people with disabilities, mental ill health and unpaid carers.
- 10.2 The service provides equality data as part of its quarterly report to Commissioners.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 This proposal has no additional impact on emissions.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 The services described in this report complement those provided by our health partners and assist in reducing demand on more formal services.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 Risk:

The Provider will not accept the offer of the Grant.

13.2 Mitigation:

In initial discussions, the Provider has indicated their willingness to continue to provide the service.

14. Accountable Officers

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