

Public Report
Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 08 September 2026

Report Title

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board Scrutiny Review – Street Lighting Columns

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

Jane Maxwell, Director of Policy, Strategy and Engagement

Report Author(s)

Barbel Gale, Governance Manager
01709 807665 or barbel.gale@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the OSMB/IPSC Scrutiny Review into attachments to lighting columns.

The review was commissioned following a Notice of Motion approved by Full Council in April 2026 concerning the impact of structural testing requirements on community initiatives such as hanging baskets, festive decorations, remembrance displays and CCTV installations. The review examined the balance between public safety requirements and the financial and operational impact on Parish and Town Councils. Evidence was gathered from officers, Parish Councils, survey responses and examples of practice from other authorities.

The recommendations seek to establish a clear, proportionate and transparent framework that supports community-led initiatives whilst ensuring the safety and effective management of highway assets.

Recommendations

That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:

1. Receives the following recommendations for consideration and endorsement.

2. Agrees that the report, together with the approved recommendations, be submitted to Cabinet for consideration and a formal response, and that Cabinet be asked to:
 - a. Approve amendments to the Highway Asset Management Plan to incorporate a comprehensive framework for attachments to lighting columns and associated highway assets, setting out requirements relating to permitted and prohibited attachments, risk-based approval arrangements, structural testing and retesting requirements, applicant responsibilities, and enforcement provisions. The framework should apply consistently to all users of lighting columns, including the Council, Parish and Town Councils, contractors and third parties.
 - b. Approve the development and publication of a standalone, publicly accessible Lighting Column Attachments Guidance Document, in consultation with Parish and Town Councils, to provide clear and practical guidance on the application of the Highway Asset Management Plan framework, including attachment classifications, approval processes, testing requirements, responsibilities, communication arrangements, and practical examples of acceptable and unacceptable attachments.
 - c. Establish formal consultation, communication and engagement arrangements with Parish and Town Councils, including consultation on future policy changes, testing programmes and charging arrangements, together with sufficient advance notice of any financial implications to enable effective budget planning, procurement and decision-making.
 - d. Establish clear categories for lighting column attachments, identifying which attachments are permitted without testing, permitted subject to approval and structural testing, or prohibited, and publishes consistent standards for structural testing, assessment criteria, retesting intervals, validity periods and maximum permissible loading thresholds where appropriate.
 - e. Continues to coordinate structural testing arrangements on a borough-wide basis where appropriate and considers longer-term funding, procurement and cost-sharing arrangements to minimise administrative burdens and secure value for money for Parish and Town Councils whilst maintaining compliance with relevant safety standards.
 - f. Ensures arrangements are developed to support the continuation of community display schemes where lighting columns are unable to safely accommodate attachments, including consideration of alternative display solutions, targeted asset replacement where appropriate, the use of structural testing outcomes to identify trends, inform the Council's future investment priorities, replacement programmes and wider asset management decisions.

- g. That the service engages in meaningful discussions with interested parties including Parish Councils, seeking to install displays on lighting columns, with the aim of reaching a shared understanding regarding the timescales and process for replacing damaged or missing columns, and to explore opportunities to facilitate timely installation where feasible.
 - h. Strengthen the enforcement framework for unauthorised attachments by establishing clear compliance procedures and, where legally permissible, implementing arrangements for the recovery of costs incurred in the removal of unauthorised installations, and reviews the effectiveness of the new arrangements within 12 months of implementation, including consideration of feedback from Parish and Town Councils, testing outcomes and enforcement activity, with the findings reported to the relevant Scrutiny Board.
3. Asks Cabinet to formally consider its response to the above recommendations within two months of its receipt, in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.
 4. In responding to these recommendations, it is requested that any response should identify the proposed actions, responsible officer(s), success measures and target completion dates for each recommendation.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Summary of the Parish Council responses to the review survey

Background Papers

RMBC Information considered as part of the review:

Information provided by RMBC Officers in response to questions raised in the initial meeting

RMBC's interim position 11 May 2026

Attachments to Lighting Columns - Hanging Baskets and other attachments - Briefing Note provided by RMBC Officers – 10 July 2026

External information considered as part of the review:

City of Doncaster - [Street Lighting Attachments Policy January 2026](#)

Derbyshire County Council - [Attachments to Street Lighting Columns Policy April 2025](#)

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council - [Street Lighting Columns: Attachments Technical Guidance Note v.1.01 October 2025](#)

Clerk Lighting Column Meeting - 13 May 2026 - Draft Minutes

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None.

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board Scrutiny Review – Street Lighting Columns

1. Background

- 1.1 This Scrutiny Review originated from a Notice of Motion considered and approved by Full Council on 22 April 2026 entitled “Lighting Columns – Cut unnecessary red tape so that our streets can have floral displays, Christmas decorations, poppies and CCTV.”
- 1.2 The Notice of Motion recognised the significant contribution that hanging baskets, festive decorations, Remembrance displays and CCTV installations make to civic pride, local identity, community wellbeing and public safety across Rotherham's towns and villages. Members acknowledged that many of these initiatives are delivered by Parish Councils, community groups and volunteers, demonstrating strong local engagement and ownership.
- 1.3 The Motion also highlighted concerns regarding the increasing requirement for structural assessments of lighting columns before attachments can be installed. Members heard that the costs associated with testing and compliance were increasingly being passed to Parish Councils and community organisations, creating additional financial pressures and administrative burdens. There was concern that these requirements could discourage community participation and place valued local initiatives at risk.
- 1.4 Particular concern was expressed regarding the impact on smaller Parish Councils and voluntary groups, which may have limited financial capacity to absorb additional costs. Members considered that without a more proportionate approach, some communities could be disadvantaged and less able to deliver enhancements that contribute positively to the appearance, identity and wellbeing of their local areas.
- 1.5 The Notice of Motion therefore sought to establish whether the existing arrangements struck an appropriate balance between public safety requirements and the need to facilitate and support community-led initiatives. Members requested that opportunities be explored to reduce unnecessary barriers, identify good practice from other authorities and determine whether a more transparent, consistent and proportionate framework could be developed for the management of attachments to lighting columns.
- 1.6 In approving the Motion, Full Council requested that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB) examine the issue as part of its work programme, investigate the impact of current arrangements on community participation and develop recommendations to inform future policy and practice.

- 1.7 In response, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and Improving Places Select Commission (IPSC) established a Scrutiny Review Group to investigate the issues raised through the Notice of Motion.
- 1.8 The review was therefore established to examine the rationale for structural testing requirements, assess the impact of current arrangements on Parish and Town Councils and community organisations, consider approaches adopted by other authorities, and identify opportunities to support community initiatives whilst ensuring the safe and effective management of highway assets.

2. Key Issues

2.1 Alignment with the Council Plan

- 2.1.1 The Review is aligned with the following priorities under the Council Plan (2025-2030), as set out below.
- “Places are Thriving, Safe and Clean”
 - “One Council that Listens and Learns.”
- 2.1.2 This Scrutiny Review aligns principally with the Council Plan outcome "Places are Thriving, Safe and Clean" through its focus on effective highway asset management, the development of a consistent framework for the use of street furniture, the promotion of sustainable community-led environmental improvements, and the protection of public infrastructure for future use.
- 2.1.3 The review also supports the outcome "One Council that Listens and Learns" by adopting an evidence-led approach to policy development, engaging with stakeholders throughout the review process, benchmarking practice across other authorities, and seeking to improve guidance, communication and partnership working with Parish and Town Councils.

2.2 Review Methodology

- 2.2.1 A working group was convened comprising the following members of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and Improving Places Select Commission:
- Councillor Steele (Chair)
 - Councillor Adair
 - Councillor Blackham
 - Councillor Sheppard
 - Councillor Thorp
 - Councillor Tinsley

(together, the Review Group)

For the initial meeting Councillor Allen was present as a member of the review group but removed herself when appointed as Cabinet Member for Communities.

2.2.2 Evidence gathering, stakeholder engagement and the development of agreed findings and recommendations were undertaken between May 2026 and July 2026. The Review Group considered evidence through a series of meetings, briefing reports, stakeholder feedback and benchmarking information from other local authorities.

2.2.3 A number of Council Officers and representatives from external partners were invited to participate in both in-person and virtual meetings, with representation from:

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (Council)

- Sam Barstow, Service Director, Community Safety and Street Scene
- Martin Hughes, Head of Neighbourhoods
- Richard Jackson, Assistant Director, Community Safety and Street Scene (where relevant through written submissions)
- Allan Lewis, Group Manager, Street Lighting, Highway Inspections and Street Works Enforcement, (where relevant through written submissions)
- Catherine Oxtoby, Parish Council and Neighbourhoods Liaison Officer

External Partners

- Kate Butler, Parish Clerk at Aston cum Aughton Parish Council

The Review Group was additionally supported throughout by:

- Emma Hill, Head of Democratic Services
- Barbel Gale, Governance Manager
- Kristianne Thorogood, Governance Advisor

2.2.3 Stakeholder Engagement and External Evidence:

The Review Group also considered evidence gathered from:

- Parish and Town Councils across the borough through a dedicated consultation survey
- A Parish Council Clerk attending engagement meetings with Council officers
- Benchmarking and policy information from
 - City of Doncaster Council
 - Derbyshire County Council
 - Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

2.2.4 The Review Group reviewed survey responses from Parish and Town Councils regarding the use of lighting columns for hanging baskets, festive decorations, CCTV, commemorative displays and other attachments. The feedback informed the Review Group's consideration of the practical

implications of current arrangements, communication, costs, governance and future policy development.

- 2.2.5 The Review Group, would like to place on record their thanks to all officers, Parish and Town Councils, and external contributors who supported the review and provided valuable evidence, experience and insight which assisted the Review Group in reaching its conclusions and recommendations.

2.3 Discussion themes and key insights

- 2.3.1 Discussions at the meetings centred around the following themes:

2.4 Managing Risk, Safety and Community Expectations

- 2.4.1 The first meeting of the Review Group focused on the use of lighting columns and highway street furniture for hanging baskets, festive decorations, CCTV cameras, commemorative displays and other attachments. Members considered the competing priorities of maintaining public safety, complying with national industry guidance, and supporting community-led initiatives that contribute positively to local environments and civic pride.

- 2.4.2 Members received an overview of the interim arrangements that had been agreed with Parish and Town Councils following concerns regarding the structural integrity of lighting columns carrying additional loads. It was explained that, whilst structural testing had become a necessary requirement following updated industry guidance, the Council had sought to mitigate the immediate impact by agreeing to contribute 75% of testing costs, with Parish and Town Councils funding the remaining 25%. Members noted the importance of balancing public safety requirements with the financial challenges faced by local councils whose budgets had already been established for the financial year.

- 2.4.3 A significant part of the discussion centred on the safety implications associated with attachments. Members learnt that some hanging baskets currently in use could weigh up to 60kg once planted and watered and that concerns had been raised by industry specialists regarding the suitability of lighting columns to support loads of this nature. Members discussed the need for a proportionate approach that recognised the distinction between heavier attachments, which may affect structural integrity, and lightweight commemorative or community displays which present minimal risk. The development of clear thresholds and categories of attachment emerged as a key area for further consideration.

- 2.4.4 The Review Group considered the implications for a wide range of attachments beyond hanging baskets, including CCTV cameras, speed monitoring equipment, public notices and commemorative poppies. Members acknowledged that a "one size fits all" approach was unlikely to be appropriate and that any future framework would need to reflect differing levels of risk depending on the type, size and purpose of the attachment.

Members indicated support for a practical and evidence-based approach that avoided unnecessary bureaucracy whilst maintaining public safety.

- 2.4.5 The issue of unauthorised installations was also examined. Members were informed that concerns had been raised regarding attachments being installed without approval or structural assessment. Discussions focused on the potential legal, safety and liability implications should a structural failure or public safety incident occur. Whilst recognising the frustrations experienced by some Parish Councils, Members emphasised the importance of ensuring that any future framework provides clarity regarding responsibilities, compliance requirements and enforcement arrangements.
- 2.4.6 Members also considered the wider condition and resilience of the borough's lighting column network. Discussion highlighted that a failure to meet structural requirements for additional attachments does not necessarily indicate that a column is unsafe for its primary purpose of supporting street lighting. However, the review identified an opportunity to develop a clearer understanding of asset condition, future investment requirements and the relationship between highway asset management and community use of street furniture.
- 2.4.7 The importance of communication and stakeholder engagement emerged as a recurring theme throughout the review. Members received an update on engagement with Parish and Town Councils and recognised the need to better understand the practical challenges faced by local councils and community groups. The review highlighted concerns relating to communication, consistency of information and understanding of requirements, reinforcing the need for closer partnership working as the review progressed.
- 2.4.8 Members concluded that there was a need for a clearer and more transparent policy framework governing attachments to lighting columns. The development of comprehensive guidance, supported by amendments to the Highway Asset Management Plan, was identified as a key outcome of the review. Members considered that future guidance should clearly define permitted and prohibited attachments, approval requirements, roles and responsibilities, testing expectations and enforcement arrangements. Such an approach would support consistent decision-making, improve understanding amongst stakeholders and help balance community aspirations with the Council's statutory duties as Highway Authority.
- 2.4.9 In summary, the first meeting highlighted the complexity of balancing public safety, asset management responsibilities and community expectations. Whilst Members recognised the value that attachments such as hanging baskets, festive decorations and commemorative displays bring to local communities, there was consensus that a more structured, proportionate and transparent framework was required. The meeting established the key lines of enquiry that would underpin the remainder of the review, including structural safety, stakeholder engagement, policy development, communication arrangements and lessons that could be learned from the approaches adopted by other local authorities.

2.5 Parish and Town Council Engagement and Feedback

- 2.5.1 Members considered feedback gathered through direct engagement with Parish and Town Councils, including discussions held with Parish Clerks and information submitted in advance. The purpose of this engagement was to better understand the practical implications of the Council's requirements and to identify opportunities to improve future arrangements.
- 2.5.2 Survey responses demonstrated the widespread use of lighting columns for community purposes. Fourteen Parish and Town Councils responded to the survey and, of the 24 responses received overall, 92% reported using lighting columns for hanging baskets, 79% for remembrance poppies, 63% for festive decorations and 33% for CCTV installations.
- 2.5.2a The Review Group also noted that awareness of the requirements was not universal. Whilst 67% of respondents believed that permission and structural assessments were required before attachments could be installed, 21% were unsure and 13% believed that no permission or testing requirements applied. Members considered that this highlighted the need for clearer communication and greater consistency in the information available to stakeholders.
- 2.5.3 The Review Group noted that there was broad recognition amongst Parish and Town Councils of the importance of maintaining public safety and ensuring that attachments to lighting columns do not compromise highway infrastructure. However, concerns were raised regarding the implementation of the requirements, particularly in relation to timescales, procurement arrangements, communication and affordability.
- 2.5.4 A recurring theme from stakeholder feedback was the perception that the existing process was complex and burdensome. Survey responses indicated that 54% of respondents found the process difficult or very difficult to navigate, whilst only 13% described it as easy. Members heard concerns relating to delays in obtaining information and approvals, uncertainty regarding costs, and the administrative burden associated with identifying lighting columns and completing application requirements. Whilst the Council had sought to simplify arrangements through the introduction of a coordinated procurement process, Parish and Town Councils expressed a desire for clearer communication, defined timescales and greater certainty regarding the steps required to obtain approval. Members recognised that an effective policy framework would need to be supported by straightforward guidance and a transparent application process.
- 2.5.4a Members were particularly concerned by the impact that uncertainty surrounding the requirements had already had on community initiatives. Survey responses indicated that approximately half of respondents had experienced delays or cancellations to planned activities as a result of testing requirements or associated costs. The Review Group noted that many Parish and Town Councils had already entered into contractual

arrangements for hanging baskets, festive displays and related services before the requirement for structural testing became fully understood.

- 2.5.5 Members noted that most Parish and Town Councils participating in engagement activities had indicated a preference for the Council to undertake procurement of structural testing on their behalf. This was viewed as potentially reducing administrative burdens and improving consistency of approach. However, the discussions also highlighted the importance of ensuring that local councils receive regular updates regarding expected testing schedules and timescales for decision making.
- 2.5.6 The Review Group also considered concerns raised regarding compliance and enforcement. Members were informed that some Parish Councils had indicated an intention to install attachments without obtaining the necessary approvals. Whilst recognising the frustrations expressed by some stakeholders, Members concluded that transparency around responsibilities, liabilities and consequences for non-compliance would be an important component of any future policy framework.
- 2.5.7 Overall, the engagement exercise demonstrated a clear willingness amongst Parish and Town Councils to work within an appropriate safety framework. However, the feedback also identified significant concerns regarding communication, implementation, affordability and administrative complexity. Members concluded that future arrangements should seek to balance regulatory requirements with practical delivery considerations, whilst ensuring that local councils are supported through clear guidance, timely consultation and proportionate requirements.

2.6 Understanding the Scale and Nature of Attachment Usage

- 2.6.1 Members considered information provided by officers regarding the extent to which lighting columns are currently used for community and operational purposes across the borough. This evidence was important in helping the Review Group understand the scale of any future testing, licensing and asset management arrangements.
- 2.6.2 Members noted that the Council is responsible for approximately 36,646 lighting columns across the borough, comprising around 27,888 steel columns and 8,758 concrete columns. The scale and diversity of the asset base reinforced the need for any future framework governing attachments to be proportionate, practical and financially sustainable. Members recognised that arrangements must balance public safety, asset management responsibilities and community aspirations whilst remaining deliverable across a network of this size.
- 2.6.3 The Review Group learnt that there are 31 Parish and Town Councils within the borough and that a significant number currently utilise lighting columns for activities such as hanging baskets, festive decorations and community displays. Initial indications suggested that at least 17 Parish and Town Councils may wish to continue installing attachments in future years.

- 2.6.4 Members noted that usage patterns varied significantly between locations, with some Parish and Town Councils making extensive use of lighting columns to support seasonal and environmental initiatives. This highlighted the need for future arrangements to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate differing local circumstances whilst maintaining a consistent borough-wide approach.
- 2.6.5 The discussions reinforced the importance of establishing accurate records relating to the number, location and type of attachments installed throughout the borough. Members recognised that improved data collection would support future decision-making, help identify infrastructure requirements and contribute to more effective long-term asset management.
- 2.6.6 The Review Group concluded that a greater understanding of current usage patterns would be essential in informing future policy development and ensuring that any requirements introduced remain proportionate to the level of risk presented by different types of attachment.

2.7 Learning from Other Local Authorities and Future Policy Development

- 2.7.1 Members were keen to understand how other Highway Authorities had responded to similar challenges and whether there were examples of best practice that could inform future arrangements in Rotherham. The Review Group examined examples of policies and guidance adopted by neighbouring and comparable authorities, including the City of Doncaster Council, Derbyshire County Council and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council.
- 2.7.2 Despite differences in local processes, Members observed a high degree of consistency between authorities in relation to key requirements. These included the use of licensing or approval processes, the requirement for structural assessments where appropriate, restrictions on certain categories of column and the allocation of responsibility to organisations seeking to install attachments.
- 2.7.3 Members were particularly interested in how other authorities had differentiated between attachment types and developed proportionate requirements for lower-risk activities. Examples considered by the Review Group included separate arrangements for commemorative poppy displays and simplified approval routes for temporary or lightweight installations. Members recognised that similar distinctions could help improve clarity and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens.
- 2.7.4 The examples reviewed also demonstrated the importance of publishing accessible guidance documents that clearly define responsibilities, application requirements, technical standards and enforcement arrangements. Members considered that the absence of a dedicated public guidance document in Rotherham had contributed to confusion amongst stakeholders and that the development of such guidance should form part of the review's recommendations.

2.7.5 A recurring theme across the authorities considered was the need to balance community aspirations with the Highway Authority's statutory duties and liability obligations. Members recognised that whilst community displays contribute positively to local pride and place-making, robust governance arrangements are required to ensure that public assets remain safe and fit for purpose.

2.7.6 The Review Group concluded that there was a clear opportunity for Rotherham to develop a comprehensive policy framework that reflects national guidance whilst addressing local circumstances. The evidence reviewed suggested that improved guidance, clearer processes and a proportionate risk-based approach would help provide greater certainty for communities whilst ensuring the Council continues to meet its legal and asset management responsibilities.

2.8 Further Evidence and Emerging Findings

2.8.1 Emerging Evidence from the Structural Testing Programme

2.8.2 At the final meeting of the Review Group, Members received an update on the progress of the borough-wide structural testing programme. At that stage, approximately 310 lighting columns had been tested, of which only 10 failed assessments for additional loading, representing a failure rate of approximately 3.2%. Members noted that this was significantly lower than had been anticipated from earlier sample testing and provided greater assurance that many existing community initiatives could continue, subject to compliance with the emerging testing and approval framework. The Review Group considered that these results demonstrated the value of undertaking a structured testing programme and suggested that the scale of the issue may be more manageable than originally feared.

2.8.3 Members also considered the variation in testing outcomes between different locations across the borough. Particular interest was expressed in understanding whether failure rates were influenced by factors such as column age, condition, design characteristics or location. The Review Group recognised that the information generated through the testing programme could provide a valuable evidence base, not only for decisions relating to attachments, but also for the Council's wider highway asset management and investment planning processes.

2.8.4 Consistency and Transparency of Future Testing Arrangements

2.8.5 Evidence presented during the meeting highlighted potential variations in inspection and reassessment periods for individual columns. Members noted that some columns appeared to require further assessment after one, three or five years, rather than following a standard interval. Whilst officers agreed to clarify the position, the discussion highlighted the importance of ensuring that future testing arrangements are transparent, evidence-based and readily understood by stakeholders.

2.8.6 The Review Group concluded that stakeholders should be provided with clear information regarding testing outcomes, validity periods, retesting requirements and the reasoning behind different inspection intervals. Members considered that transparency in these arrangements would support confidence in the overall framework and reduce uncertainty for Parish and Town Councils seeking to plan future activities.

2.8.7 Compliance, Enforcement and Accountability

2.8.8 The Review Group considered updates regarding unauthorised installations that remained in place despite requests for removal. Members noted that particular concerns existed where attachments had been installed on concrete columns which are unsuitable for structural testing and not considered appropriate for carrying additional loads.

2.8.9 Whilst Members recognised the concerns and frustrations expressed by some stakeholders during the review, there was a clear view that any future framework must be underpinned by fair and consistent compliance arrangements. Members considered that organisations following the agreed processes should not be disadvantaged by instances of non-compliance and that the Council should ensure there is clarity regarding enforcement powers, responsibilities and liabilities.

2.8.10 The potential recovery of costs associated with removing unauthorised installations was also discussed. Members considered that, where legally permissible, recovery of reasonable costs may help reinforce the importance of compliance whilst protecting public resources from avoidable expenditure.

2.8.11 Long-Term Sustainability and Future Investment

2.8.12 As the review progressed, Members increasingly focused on the longer-term implications of the emerging testing results. Whilst acknowledging that public safety must remain the primary consideration, the Review Group recognised that testing outcomes may have implications for the continuation of long-established community initiatives in certain locations. Members noted, however, that the overall failure rate emerging from the testing programme was relatively low. Whilst this was encouraging, the Review Group recognised that the impact of individual failures could still be significant in locations where established floral displays or community initiatives relied upon a small number of specific columns.

2.8.13 Members concluded that future arrangements should not focus solely on permissions and testing but should also support consideration of alternative solutions where columns are unable to safely accommodate attachments. These could include alternative display methods, dedicated structures designed specifically for floral displays, or the use of testing information to inform future asset replacement and investment programmes. The Review Group considered that such an approach would support both community aspirations and the Council's wider asset management objectives.

2.9 Emerging Themes and Key Insights

2.9.1 Communication and Stakeholder Engagement

2.9.2 One of the most consistent themes arising throughout the review was the importance of effective communication and engagement between the Council and Parish and Town Councils. Whilst stakeholders generally accepted the need for appropriate safety measures, many respondents expressed concern regarding the timing of communications and the limited opportunity to plan for the implications of the new arrangements.

2.9.3 Throughout the review, Members recognised that attachments vary considerably in size, weight, duration and potential impact on highway infrastructure. Evidence gathered through the Parish and Town Council survey demonstrated strong concern regarding the proportionality of the requirements being applied. Of the respondents surveyed, 83% considered the requirements to be either somewhat disproportionate or very disproportionate, whilst no respondents considered them proportionate. Members noted that many stakeholders felt insufficient distinction was being made between lightweight, temporary attachments and larger installations that create more significant structural and safety considerations.

2.9.4 The Review Group concluded that a risk-based framework represents the most appropriate approach to balancing public safety with practical implementation. Members considered that future arrangements should distinguish more clearly between differing categories of attachment, recognising that low-risk commemorative or temporary displays do not present the same level of risk as heavier installations such as hanging baskets, festive decorations, CCTV equipment or speed monitoring devices.

2.9.5 Members further concluded that the proposed categorisation of exempt, conditionally permitted and prohibited attachments would provide a transparent and proportionate framework capable of applying controls according to the level of risk presented. Such an approach would help improve understanding, reduce unnecessary administrative burdens and provide greater confidence that regulatory requirements are both evidence-based and proportionate whilst continuing to protect public safety and the integrity of the Council's highway assets.

2.9.6 Clarity, Consistency and Transparency

2.9.7 Evidence gathered during the review demonstrated a desire amongst stakeholders for greater clarity regarding requirements, responsibilities and processes. Survey responses and engagement activity identified uncertainty in relation to approvals, testing arrangements, maintenance obligations, liabilities and enforcement procedures.

2.9.8 Members considered that future arrangements should be supported by a clearly defined policy framework and comprehensive guidance

documentation. The Review Group concluded that greater transparency would improve consistency in decision-making, reduce misunderstanding and provide increased certainty for all organisations seeking to utilise lighting columns for community purposes.

2.9.9 Proportionate and Risk-Based Regulation

2.9.10 Throughout the review, Members recognised that attachments vary considerably in size, weight, duration and potential impact on highway infrastructure. Evidence indicated a strong desire amongst stakeholders for arrangements that distinguish between low-risk and higher-risk installations.

2.9.11 The Review Group concluded that a risk-based framework represents the most appropriate approach to balancing public safety with practical implementation. Members considered that the proposed categorisation of exempt, conditionally permitted and prohibited attachments would provide a transparent structure capable of applying controls proportionate to the level of risk presented.

2.9.12 Affordability, Capacity and Deliverability

2.9.13 The review highlighted concerns regarding both the direct and indirect costs associated with compliance. Stakeholders referred not only to testing costs but also to the administrative burden involved in identifying assets, coordinating testing, obtaining approvals and maintaining records. These concerns were particularly evident amongst smaller Parish and Town Councils operating with limited administrative resources.

2.9.14 Members concluded that future arrangements should seek to minimise unnecessary administrative burdens and make best use of coordinated approaches where appropriate. Borough-wide procurement, shared testing arrangements and standardised processes were identified as opportunities to improve efficiency and secure greater value for money.

2.9.15 Balancing Public Safety and Community Benefit

2.9.16 Members were mindful throughout the review of the significant contribution that hanging baskets, festive decorations, remembrance displays and other attachments make to local identity, civic pride and community wellbeing. Evidence gathered from Parish and Town Councils demonstrated strong support for these initiatives and highlighted their importance to local communities.

2.9.17 The Review Group concluded that public safety and community benefit should not be viewed as competing objectives. Rather, the review demonstrated that clear guidance, proportionate controls and effective communication can support the continuation of valued community initiatives whilst ensuring that the Council continues to fulfil its responsibilities as Highway Authority.

2.10 Conclusion

- 2.10.1 The Review Group found broad acceptance amongst stakeholders that appropriate safeguards are required to ensure that attachments to lighting columns do not compromise public safety or the integrity of highway assets. Evidence gathered throughout the review demonstrated a willingness amongst Parish and Town Councils to work within an agreed framework where requirements are clearly explained, proportionate and consistently applied.
- 2.10.2 A significant finding of the Review Group was that stakeholders did not generally challenge the principle of structural testing where justified by risk. Evidence gathered through the Parish and Town Council survey, stakeholder engagement, officer evidence and discussions throughout the review indicated broad acceptance of the need to ensure that attachments to lighting columns are managed safely and responsibly. However, concerns were consistently raised regarding the way in which the requirements had been introduced and implemented. In particular, stakeholders highlighted the timing of communications, the limited advance notice provided, uncertainty around responsibilities and costs, and the practical implications for councils that had already set budgets or entered contractual commitments for community display schemes. The Review Group concluded that the long-term success of any future framework will depend not only upon the technical requirements it contains but also upon effective communication, meaningful consultation, transparency and proportionate implementation arrangements.
- 2.10.3 The Review Group concluded that there is a clear need for a comprehensive and publicly accessible framework that provides certainty regarding approvals, responsibilities, testing requirements, maintenance obligations and enforcement arrangements. Such a framework should be supported by detailed guidance, clear communication arrangements and ongoing engagement with Parish and Town Councils to promote consistency, understanding and confidence in decision-making.
- 2.10.4 The Review Group further concluded that future arrangements should be founded upon a proportionate and evidence-based approach. Attachments should be considered according to their level of risk, allowing regulatory controls, testing requirements and resources to be focused where they are most needed whilst minimising unnecessary administrative and financial burdens. A risk-based approach would better reflect the differing characteristics of attachments and help ensure that community initiatives can continue where this can be achieved safely.
- 2.10.5 Members are of the opinion that the review presents an opportunity to establish a clear, proportionate and sustainable approach to the management of lighting column attachments across the borough. By combining robust public safety standards with improved communication, stronger partnership working and greater transparency, the Council can continue to support valued community initiatives whilst fulfilling its statutory

responsibilities as Highway Authority. These conclusions directly informed the recommendations contained within this report.

2.11 How the Findings Informed the Recommendations

2.11.1 The Review Group was satisfied that the recommendations contained within this report are directly supported by the evidence gathered throughout the review. The review identified broad support for community-led initiatives such as hanging baskets, festive decorations, remembrance displays and CCTV installations, alongside widespread recognition of the need to ensure that attachments to lighting columns are managed safely and in accordance with the Council's responsibilities as Highway Authority.

2.11.2 Evidence gathered through stakeholder engagement, the Parish and Town Council survey, officer evidence and benchmarking activity identified a number of recurring themes which directly informed the recommendations contained within this report. In particular, the Review Group found that:

- Stakeholders broadly accepted the need for appropriate safety controls and structural assessments where justified by risk but sought improved communication, consultation and implementation arrangements. This finding informed Recommendations 2(c) and 2(g).
- Existing requirements lacked clarity and consistency, resulting in uncertainty regarding approvals, responsibilities, testing requirements and enforcement arrangements. This finding informed Recommendations 2(a) and 2(b).
- A more proportionate and risk-based approach was required to distinguish between differing categories of attachment and the level of risk they present. This finding informed Recommendation 2(d).
- Parish and Town Councils identified administrative burdens and cost pressures associated with testing, approvals and compliance and expressed support for coordinated approaches capable of reducing costs and improving efficiency. This finding informed Recommendation 2(e).
- The emerging results from the structural testing programme suggested that many community initiatives could continue where supported by an appropriate assessment framework, whilst highlighting opportunities to use testing information to support future asset management, investment decisions and alternative solutions where attachments cannot safely be accommodated. This finding informed Recommendation 2(f).
- Concerns regarding unauthorised installations highlighted the importance of clear compliance expectations, responsibilities and enforcement arrangements. This finding informed Recommendation 2(h).

- 2.11.3 The Review Group concluded that the recommendations represent a balanced and evidence-based response to the issues identified during the review. Taken together, they seek to improve communication, transparency, consistency and proportionality whilst ensuring that public safety, effective asset management and support for community-led initiatives remain central considerations.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Option A: Do Nothing (Not Recommended)

- 3.1.1 This option would retain the current arrangements without introducing a revised policy framework, additional guidance, enhanced consultation arrangements or changes to approval and enforcement processes.

- 3.1.2 The Review Group does not support this option as it would not address concerns identified during the review relating to communication, consistency, transparency and uncertainty regarding the management of attachments to lighting columns. It would also fail to provide Parish and Town Councils with the clarity and certainty they requested through the review process.

3.2 Option B: Develop a Comprehensive Policy Framework and Guidance (Preferred Option)

- 3.2.1 This option would implement the recommendations contained within this report, including amendments to the Highway Asset Management Plan, publication of a dedicated guidance document, clearer categorisation of attachments, enhanced consultation arrangements and a more transparent approval and enforcement framework.

- 3.2.2 The Review Group considers this to be the preferred option as it provides a balanced approach which maintains public safety, supports community-led initiatives where appropriate, improves communication with Parish and Town Councils, and promotes greater consistency and transparency in decision-making.

3.3 Recommended Proposal

- 3.3.1 The Review Group recommends Option B and asks Cabinet to consider the recommendations set out in this report and provide a formal response within two months in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 Consultation and engagement formed a key part of the review.

- 4.2 Evidence was gathered through:
- Scrutiny Review Group meetings.
 - Officer briefings.

- Meetings with Parish Council representatives.
- A Parish Council survey.
- Examination of practices used by other councils.

4.3 Results from the survey and engagement activities demonstrated broad support for community initiatives but also highlighted concerns regarding communication, affordability and implementation.

4.4 The findings from this consultation have directly informed the recommendations contained within this report.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 Accountability for considering and implementing any recommendations arising from this report will rest with Cabinet and the relevant officers, subject to Cabinet's determination of its response to the scrutiny review.

5.2 In accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, Cabinet is required to formally consider and respond to recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board within two months of receiving this report.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 The recommendations contained within this scrutiny review do not, in themselves, create an immediate financial commitment. Any financial or procurement implications arising from Cabinet's consideration of the recommendations would need to be fully assessed and costed by the relevant service areas as part of the development of Cabinet's response and any subsequent implementation proposals.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 The recommendations contained within this scrutiny review do not, in themselves, give rise to any immediate legal implications. Any legal implications arising from Cabinet's consideration of the recommendations would need to be considered as part of the development of Cabinet's response.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 The recommendations contained within this scrutiny review do not, in themselves, give rise to any immediate human resources implications. Any such implications arising from Cabinet's consideration of the recommendations would be considered as part of the development of Cabinet's response.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 The recommendations contained within this scrutiny review do not, in themselves, give rise to any immediate implications for children and young

people or vulnerable adults. Any such implications would be considered as part of the development of Cabinet's response.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 The recommendations contained within this scrutiny review do not, in themselves, give rise to any immediate equalities or human rights implications. The recommendations are intended to support a more transparent, consistent and proportionate approach to managing attachments on lighting columns across the borough.
- 10.2 Any equalities or human rights implications arising from Cabinet's consideration of the recommendations would be assessed by the relevant service areas as part of the development of Cabinet's response and any subsequent implementation proposals, including consideration of whether a full Equality Impact Assessment is required.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 The recommendations contained within this scrutiny review do not, in themselves, give rise to any immediate implications for CO₂ emissions or climate change. Any environmental or climate-related impacts associated with future asset replacement, testing programmes or implementation proposals arising from Cabinet's consideration of the recommendations would be assessed by the relevant service areas as part of the development of Cabinet's response.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 The recommendations have significant implications for Parish and Town Councils, who are the principal users of lighting columns for hanging baskets, festive decorations, commemorative displays and CCTV installations.
- 12.2 The proposed arrangements aim to provide greater certainty, transparency and consistency in decision making.
- 12.3 The recommendations also have implications for community organisations, volunteers and suppliers who support local events and initiatives. Improved communication and clearer guidance should assist these organisations in planning and delivering activities more effectively.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 The review identified several key risks:
- Structural failure of lighting columns carrying additional loads.
 - Public safety incidents.
 - Unauthorised attachments.
 - Financial pressures on Parish and Town Councils.
 - Damage to relationships between the Council and local communities.
 - Inconsistent decision making caused by unclear guidance.

- 13.2 The recommendations seek to mitigate these risks through:
- Risk-based structural testing arrangements.
 - Clear categorisation of permitted, conditionally permitted and prohibited attachments.
 - Improved consultation and communication.
 - Publicly available guidance.
 - Consistent approval and enforcement processes.
 - Better use of testing information to inform future asset investment and replacement programmes.
- 13.3 The Review Group considers that these measures provide the most balanced approach to protecting public safety whilst continuing to support the community-led initiatives that contribute positively to the borough's towns and villages.

Accountable Officer

Emma Hill, Head of Democratic Services and Statutory Scrutiny Officer
Barbel Gale, Governance Manager

Approvals obtained on behalf of:

	Name	Date
Service Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phillip Horsfield	07/08/26
The Executive Director with responsibility for this report	Emma Hill, Head of Democratic Services, on behalf of Jane Maxwell, Director of Policy, Strategy and Engagement	26/08/26
Consultation undertaken with the relevant Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Communities - Councillor Allen	10/08/26

Report Author: Barbel Gale, Governance Manager
01709 807665 or barbel.gale@rotherham.gov.uk

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