

## Background to the Budget and Financial Strategy

<b>1.</b>	<b>Budget Challenges</b>
1.1	The particular challenges which the Council has to take account of within its budget and financial strategy are set out in a strategic context that provides for resources to be aligned to key priorities.
1.1.1	<p>The overarching challenge is to provide ongoing support to residents, communities and businesses affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, whilst also continuing to drive ambitious plans for Rotherham. This challenge is central to the Council's Year Ahead Plan, which sets out key actions through to May 2021 across the following priority themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thriving Neighbourhoods</li> <li>• Better Health and Wellbeing</li> <li>• Economic Recovery</li> <li>• New Ways of Working</li> <li>• Hope and Confidence in Rotherham</li> </ul> <p>The plan also includes two cross-cutting strands: Equalities and Social Justice and Climate Impact. These are integral to each theme and should be seen as long-term considerations for budget planning.</p>
1.1.2	Health in Rotherham is generally poorer than average. Life expectancy is below the English average and has stalled recently after rising over the last decade. Inequalities are widening between the most and least deprived communities within Rotherham, particularly for women. Rates of coronary heart disease have reduced significantly over the last 10 years but the borough still has high rates of disability and long term sickness. Work is ongoing to understand the health impact of Covid-19 and anticipate future service demand.
1.1.3	Adult qualification levels are below average, notably degree level skills, but these have improved greatly in recent years and Rotherham College, as part of RNN Group, has established a university centre in the town centre. The provisional data for 2019 also shows that Rotherham is 2.8% below the national average at Foundation Stage; 5.8% below the national average at KS2 and 2.3 points below the national average for Attainment 8 scores at KS4.
1.1.4	Covid-19 continues to have a significant impact on the economy, though the government's job retention scheme (furlough), which has been extended to 30 April 21, has reduced or at least deferred redundancies. There will be major challenges for sectors that have been particularly hard hit (e.g. retail and hospitality), whilst young people (including graduates), people from ethnic minorities, women and those with special educational needs and disabilities, are expected to be even further away from the employment market than prior to Covid-19. Working with

	partners both locally and via Sheffield City Region will be critical to supporting the recovery and renewal of the local economy.
1.1.5	Despite the challenges, the Council is committed to progressing major regeneration schemes and projects. This includes Forge Island, town centre housing sites, the Future High Streets Fund bid, and the development of Towns Fund proposals aiming to secure a £25-50m Town Deal. It will be vital for the Council to use its social value policy to ensure opportunities for local people, particularly those hardest hit, are maximised as part of these and other significant local investments.
1.1.6	Rotherham offers a good quality of life combined with a relatively low cost of living. House prices have risen over the years and the average house in Rotherham costs £140,000 but this is far below the English average of £249,000. Rotherham people are very proud of their local parks and country parks, particularly Clifton Park which has won national awards.
1.1.7	There are numerous visitor attractions, notably the stately home of Wentworth Woodhouse which is now being restored. The Magna Science Adventure Centre is a well-established visitor attraction and a major new development is the £37 million Gulliver's Valley family resort in the south of the Borough, which opened in 2020. There are also the ruins of Roche Abbey and the award-winning Clifton Park Museum which has recently been refurbished. The Borough has a Civic Theatre, a thriving sports scene and four leisure centres. These are all important to economic and social life of the area.
1.1.8	There is a steadily growing population which reached a record total of 264,700 in 2018. The population is growing as a result of natural increase (more births than deaths), net inward migration and increased life expectancy. Rotherham has 161,600 people of working age (61%), which is slightly lower than the English average.
1.1.9	Rotherham has an ageing population whereby the number of older people is increasing fastest, and their health and social care needs place increasing pressure on social care budgets at a time of prolonged financial constraint. There are 51,700 people aged 65 or over including 6,100 people aged 85 or over, and these numbers are projected to increase by a third over the next 10 years. Rates of disability place further pressures on social care budgets, with 11.4% of the population (30,000 people) claiming disability benefits compared with 7.8% nationally. Working with partners is critical to meeting the needs of the elderly population, especially during recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic with support for testing and commencement of vaccinations.
1.1.10	There are 51,340 children aged 0-15 in Rotherham and 25,930 young people aged 16-24. Whilst most children get a good start in life, child poverty is polarised across the Borough and life chances vary. Rotherham has a lower proportion of young people aged 18-24 than the

	national average due to people moving elsewhere to study or work. The number of Looked after Children increased from 380 in 2012 to a peak of 662 in 2018 but has now reduced to 611 by January 2021. The number of Children in Need (CIN only) has seen a decrease from 1,430 in March 2016 to 1,146 in January 2021. Meanwhile, the number of Children subject to a Child Protection Plan at the end of December 2016 was 335 rising to 445 in January 2021.
1.1.11	Health inequalities remain a significant issue for Rotherham. Nationally, the Covid-19 pandemic has also been shown to worsen health inequalities with elderly and some minority communities worst affected. A refreshed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, to be launched in 2021, will assist in prioritising greatest need to tackle inequalities.
1.2	The Council remains committed to working with Sheffield City Region to implement the devolution deal, which was agreed in 2020. The deal will bring benefits including control of a new, flexible single pot of funding for economic growth, which incorporates an additional £30 million annual allocation over the next 30 years.
1.2.1	It also secures devolved transport powers and funding; full devolution of the Adult Education Budget of around £35m a year; increased planning capacity and powers to deliver housing and economic growth; and greater control over how and where funds are directed.
1.2.2	Stronger city region working, and collaboration may offer further opportunities for efficiency gains where services are duplicated or where centres of excellence can be established.
1.3	Rotherham's robust partnership arrangements have underpinned the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Links with the local voluntary and community sector have been a central part of the Community Hub and wider humanitarian efforts. Strategically, Rotherham Together Partnership's chief executive officer group has met regularly to share key information and maintain an overview. Joint working with health partners in various forums has, of course, been crucial, whilst Barnsley and Rotherham Chamber have provided vital advice and support in articulating and responding to business needs. These multi-faceted partnership arrangements remain crucial in supporting the borough's recovery and renewal.
1.4	Social Value is becoming embedded in the way the Council commissions and procures goods and services, including capital projects, through the Social Value Portal. This approach is being enhanced through engagement of partners and will be developed further through a community wealth building approach and co-design. Changes to procurement practices interrelate with budget strategy.
1.5	The Council has committed to achieving net zero carbon by 2030. Achieving the zero-carbon target will require significant changes to the

	way the Council operates, delivers services, and implements capital projects and improvements. A new action plan is being developed with key targets that move the Council toward achieving this key commitment.
1.6	The Council is seeking to achieve “Excellent” accreditation under the Local Government Equality Framework by 2022. This requires the Council to examine the way that it works both internally and with communities to achieve improved equality outcomes. Achieving “Excellent” will require attention to the use of resources aligned to equality outcomes as an integral part of budget and service planning processes.
<b>2.</b>	<b>Key Issues – Budget Proposals</b>
2.1	This section incorporates the financial matters related to the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy which have been considered by Cabinet for recommendation to Council.
2.2	<p>In 2018 a set of 6 budget principles were developed to guide decision making and ensure the budget and associated investment/savings options are focused, coherent and reflect the wider priorities of the Borough. The principles are outlined below, ensuring that Rotherham’s public services are sustainable, affordable and fit for the future.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1) <i>Keep residents, particularly vulnerable children and adults, safe from harm and enable more people to live independently</i></b></li> <li><b>2) <i>Drive inclusive growth and ensure Rotherham’s residents are connected to local good quality job opportunities</i></b></li> <li><b>3) <i>Protect Rotherham’s green spaces and improve the quality of the public realm, ensuring our streets are clean and safe</i></b></li> <li><b>4) <i>Become a smaller, more efficient, more connected organisation, working as one Council with a stronger leadership and influencing role</i></b></li> <li><b>5) <i>Adopt a more commercial, outward facing approach to doing business, generating income and leveraging the resources and assets of our partners in Rotherham</i></b></li> <li><b>6) <i>Work with communities and local neighbourhoods to develop independence, wellbeing and resilience</i></b></li> </ol>
2.3	Taken together, the above principles and the priorities outlined below give a strong sense of the strategic direction of the budget and the associated investment/saving requirements to both deliver the Council’s priorities and achieve a balanced budget, including delivering agreed

	savings plans that are a key part of the proposed balanced budget for 2021/22 and MTFS for 2022/23.
2.4	<p>The Budget outlined in this report will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• continue focus on protecting and supporting Rotherham's most vulnerable children and adults whilst trying to ensure that a wide range of services continue to be provided to all residents;</li> <li>• further progress the ongoing transformation of the Council's Adult Social Care Services to provide better services enabling more vulnerable adults to live independently, safely and improve their quality of life;</li> <li>• continue focus on corporate and service transformation, ensuring services continue to be equipped to deliver a high standard of service for the citizens, businesses and stakeholders of the Borough that is fully aligned to the Borough's Community Strategy and the Council Plan priorities; and</li> <li>• continue to reduce management, administration and support costs as far as is sensible to do so.</li> </ul> <p>All of which contribute to the achievement of the Council Plan priorities.</p>
2.5	The key impact of the proposed budget on each Directorate is shown below:
2.5.1	<b>Adult Care, Housing and Public Health</b>
	<b>Adult Care</b>
2.5.1.1	Adult Care is responsible for the provision of social care support and services for vulnerable groups of adults in the borough, including older people and adults with mental ill-health problems, learning disabilities and physical and/or sensory impairments. The Directorate also supports people with housing and support requirements outside of the Care Act duties through housing related support and this includes, for example, people with complex lives and people who have experienced domestic abuse. The Directorate has been and continues to be at the forefront of the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic supporting hospital discharges, testing and vaccination programmes as well as ensuring continuation of service delivery. The Directorate also has a key role in supporting the wider health and care system and externally commissioned providers such as care homes, home care and supported living and voluntary sector partners including micro-enterprises to continue to deliver critical services to customers.
2.5.1.2	Adult Care has statutory responsibility under the Care Act 2014 for managing and delivering:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information, advice and advocacy</li> <li>• Prevention and recovery</li> <li>• Safeguarding</li> <li>• Assessment and care planning</li> <li>• Care, at home and in residential settings</li> </ul>
2.5.1.3	<p>In addition to the pressures and new demand created by the impacts of Covid-19, the Directorate continues to face a number of significant demand challenges as a result of changes in population demographics. There is a sustained budget pressure as a result of an aging population; a rising population of working age adults with long term health and care support needs; increasing acuity and complexity of need for those residents who need support; and increased cost pressures for externally commissioned adult care providers driven by the pandemic. The associated costs and increased risk faced by externally commissioned providers as a result of Covid-19 has highlighted the need for the Directorate to respond through a cost of care exercise with providers and aligned budget strategy to support sustainable fee increases.</p>
2.5.1.4	<p>These demand and budget pressures have resulted in an over-spend in 2020/21, though significant activity has been carried out to reduce the level of overspend during the financial year. The focus for 2021/22 is to continue to support activity to combat the adverse impacts of Covid-19, specifically the roll out of the vaccination programme led by Rotherham CCG and to further implement the complex set of changes needed to reduce demand, working with health and social care partners in the Borough, alongside making significant changes to the way care services are delivered to make care more personalised, responsive and cost effective.</p>
2.5.1.5	<p>Quality of care will continue to be developed and improved through further integration between health and care partners in the borough. Partnership working across the health and care system in the Borough has always been strong but has been positively further driven by the collaborative spirit built up during the response to the pandemic. The Council will continue to support wider system integration and respond proactively to proposed reforms of the NHS to ensure place priorities, population health management and tackling health inequalities remain at the heart of the local offer.</p>
2.5.1.6	<p>Supporting people to live well at home, for as long as possible, remains a key focus, despite the pandemic and will improve quality of life for residents, while reducing cost. This will be achieved through continued investment in preventative care and increased use of emerging technology, to reduce acute and long-term interventions; access to appropriate, coordinated support including more effective support to carers; and personalised care delivered by skilled care workers, family and through new technology.</p>

2.5.1.7	Though much of the focus during 2020/21 has understandably been responding to Covid-19 and ensuring critical service delivery, the Directorate remains committed to delivering long-standing transformation programmes. Care for adults with complex support needs will be transformed to enable people to access both high quality primary care and a broader range of care pathways, and stronger connections to family and community support. Similarly, with health partners, the Council will continue with the remodelling of mental health services, with a greater focus on early intervention, improved accessibility and more responsive, personalised service.
2.5.1.8	<p>The priorities, as outlined, can only be achieved if there is a high quality, motivated social care workforce in place. Further implementation of the operating model put in place during 2020/21 will take place, applying the learning from the initial period of operation to refine the approach and engender continuous improvement. This was a whole system change in the way services and resources are organised and additional evidential changes will assist Adult Care to manage and deliver the services it provides. This continues to be assisted by a comprehensive workforce development plan, building skills and confidence in assessments and delivery of cost-effective strength-based outcomes.</p> <p>Recognising the impacts of Covid-19 on the workforce will also be a key facet of 2021/22 with processes in place to support staff and to ensure that staff working remotely as well as those in front facing delivery roles have access to the resources, equipment and managerial support they need to effectively and safely discharge their duties.</p>
2.5.1.9	These priorities are designed to deliver a long term, sustainable reduction in demand pressures facing the directorate, and thus better able to manage to deliver services within budget.
	<b>Public Health</b>
2.5.1.10	Public health has led the Council's response to Covid-19 throughout 2020/21 from a health protection perspective and this has been and continues to be the primary focus of activity. Nevertheless, Public Health is an integral element of the Borough's health and social care system, promoting wellbeing and independence. Tackling health inequalities resulting from the pandemic will be a key aspect of activity during 2021/22 alongside the statutory functions that Public Health is responsible for. These include the commissioning of public health services, including: sexual health; drug and alcohol; 0-19; and a holistic wellbeing service which encompasses NHS Health Checks, weight management, alcohol brief interventions and stop smoking treatment.
2.5.1.11	Alongside commissioning services, Public Health has a pivotal role in providing intelligence, evidence-based advice, advocacy and challenge to ensure that the health of residents is safeguarded. This has been crucial in supporting activity to understand the impacts and trends of the

	Covid-19 pandemic. Public health advice has been provided not just to the NHS and across the Council Directorates, but across the whole Borough to include schools, work places and social care providers to support continuation of critical activity and responses to emerging infection control and public health requirements.
2.5.1.12	Life expectancy at birth in Rotherham for males is 1.9 years below the England average and for females is 1.7 years below the England average, which is indicative of a range of health inequalities in the Borough. This is further demonstrated by a difference in life expectancy of more than nine years for both men and women between the Borough's most and least deprived wards. The Borough has higher smoking prevalence and lower levels of physical activity than the national average which also correspond with local patterns of deprivation. These along with the associated health gap contribute to lower levels of economic productivity in the borough demonstrating the strong links between prosperity and health.
2.5.1.13	Public Health is working with colleagues across the Council and with partners, to ensure that health is considered in all policies, contributing to a wider impact on health, wellbeing and prosperity for residents. Public Health have continued to lead the implementation of the Better Mental Health for All strategy, adapting this to meet the changing Mental Health demands of Covid including the addition of a bereavement support offer. Public Health have also continued delivery of the Be the One campaign and to focus on needs during the pandemic including through the loneliness plan for the Borough.
2.5.1.14	Public Health have met all budget expectations for 2020/21 and are preparing to deliver a level budget in 2021/22 whilst ensuring best value is achieved through a number of procurement programmes that will be taken forward.
	<b>Housing Services</b>
2.5.1.15	Housing Services hold overall landlord responsibility for the management and maintenance of the borough's 20,200 council homes. They provide information advice and guidance on the housing options available to residents and oversee any adaptation to homes required by residents, e.g. for accessibility/health reasons. Housing services are also responsible for building new, affordable, high quality homes in the borough.
2.5.1.16	The service will continue to ensure that a robust, sustainable Housing Revenue Account 30-year Business Plan is in place. The effective delivery of this plan will ensure that the borough's 20,200 council homes are maintained effectively, meet the decent homes standard and continue to develop an ambitious programme of new homes in the Borough to meet future demands and replace those lost through the right to buy scheme. This will be achieved by building on council owned

	sites and acquiring new homes from private developers through Section 106 agreements.
2.5.1.17	The General Fund budget will continue to be used to address homelessness and deliver aids and adaptations to homes.
2.5.1.18	Efficiencies will continue to be delivered by sustaining tenancies and specific support for tenants on Universal Credit, high performance on void turnaround times; rent recovery and leasehold income collection. Alongside this, savings will be made in the repairs and maintenance service via a new contract that started in April 2020. These measures will both increase income and deliver efficiencies, with no detrimental impact on residents in the borough.
2.5.1.19	Covid -19 has had an impact on the service in 2020/21 and will continue to affect how the business operates going forward. Generally, services have adapted well to comply with social distancing and are able to deliver services effectively. The homelessness service has seen demand increased significantly due to Covid-19, however successful grant funding applications have enabled a new rough sleeper team to be established and further resources deployed to meet local housing needs.
2.5.2	<b>Children and Young People's Services</b>
2.5.2.1	The Directorate for Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) is responsible for social care services, education and skills, early help and family engagement. It has a statutory responsibility for the safeguarding of children and young people and is supported by a dedicated performance, quality, commissioning and business support team.
2.5.2.2	Nationally, children's social care services are operating in a tough budget and demand context. There has been an unprecedented surge in demand for children's social care support in recent years - a trend that shows no signs of abating.
2.5.2.3	Compounding the national trend, Rotherham's improvements have impacted on the increased number of children in care. This increase in care demand occurred despite the significant improvements made to early help and investment in programmes including Edge of Care, PAUSE and Family Group Conferencing.
2.5.2.4	The 2020/21 & 2021/22 Directorate priorities are to sustain improvements in children's social work, through the development and implementation of a new early help and social care pathway; to focus on building in-borough capacity for both Looked After Children and additional provision for children with learning difficulties and disabilities; and to further develop interventions and services designed to better manage demand earlier. To build capacity in Rotherham to better meet the needs of looked after children, our strategy will incorporate a renewed approach to foster care recruitment and establishing new

	contractual arrangements with providers to create additional residential capacity.
2.5.2.5	These proposed changes to service delivery will build on the success of the improvement and on the early successes of the more preventative based approaches. The agreed new early help arrangements have now been implemented, focusing on ensuring early help interventions are targeted at the root causes of children entering the care system, as well as alternatives to care that have a strong evidence base.
2.5.2.6	The new education and skills service operating model is now embedded including the Rotherham Education Strategic Partnership. Our school facing services will be reviewed to ensure that they are as efficient and effective as possible, while continuing to improve educational outcomes, particularly at Key Stage 4 and for children with SEND.
2.5.2.7	In 2019/20 & 2020/21 the first elements of the Early Help & Social Care (EH & SC) pathway have now been implemented with the second phase to be implemented over the next two financial years. The implementation is linked to a reduction of overall caseloads (CIN/CP/LAC) with LAC numbers reducing from a high of 662 (October 2018) to 616 at the time of the December 2020 financial forecast. They are projected to continue to reduce in 2021/22.
2.5.2.8	The LAC numbers reducing is linked to the impact of the Demand and Market Management Strategies.
2.5.2.9	The main focus of Market Management continues to be increasing the number / capacity of in-house foster carers and therefore reducing demand for independent sector fostering placements, which is now showing improvements through the work of Bright Sparks and the Fostering Team. Residential Block Contracting is now all open and the plan is now to bring on line Rotherham's in-house residential homes, with Pegasus now open and the other homes planned to open over the next 16 months. The creation of additional capacity in Rotherham will enable more young people to be supported locally at a cost effective price.
2.5.2.10	The Right Child Right Care initiative (RCRC) continues in 2021/22, with discharge plans that will be managed through the RCRC Performance Meetings. The House Project will also continue in 2021/22 which enables a number of young people to move from their current residential and fostering into their "forever" homes.
2.5.2.11	Alongside these savings, the Directorate is also reviewing the wider CYPS budget to determine if there are any other opportunities for efficiency savings.
2.5.3	<b>Regeneration and Environment</b>

2.5.3.1	The Regeneration and Environment Directorate's focus is to develop and promote Rotherham as a good place to live, work and visit through supporting sustained economic and housing growth across the borough and ensuring that the Town Centre is thriving, attractive and vibrant.
2.5.3.2	The Regeneration and Environment Directorate's focus is on delivering against the Year Ahead priorities and actions.
2.5.3.3	<p>A particular emphasis is to develop and promote Rotherham as a good place to live, work and visit through supporting sustained economic and housing growth across the borough and ensuring that the Town Centre is thriving, attractive and vibrant.</p> <p>The Directorate has a broad portfolio of responsibilities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community safety</li> <li>• Environmental protection</li> <li>• Licensing</li> <li>• Schools' catering and cleaning</li> <li>• Waste collection, management and disposal</li> <li>• Street cleaning and grounds maintenance</li> <li>• Parks, countryside and green spaces</li> <li>• Leisure, sport and physical activity</li> <li>• Tourism and events</li> <li>• Heritage, museums and archives</li> <li>• Libraries and neighbourhood Hubs</li> <li>• Registration and bereavement services</li> <li>• Planning and Building Control</li> <li>• Regeneration (including business support)</li> <li>• Transport and highways</li> <li>• Asset Management and Property</li> <li>• Emergency Planning, Business Continuity and Health and Safety</li> </ul>
2.5.3.4	The Directorate's budget is focussed on the delivery of frontline services to ensure the Borough's neighbourhoods are clean, safe and inclusive, to create an environment where people want to live, work and play. In addition, it is a priority to grow the economy for Rotherham. Many frontline services overcame significant challenges in 2020/21 as a result of Covid-19, examples such as school catering, cleaning, registrars, health and safety, building services, environmental health, waste services. In contrast a number ceased to operate or developed alternative ways of operating such as the theatre, museum, events and libraries.
2.5.3.5	The adopted Town Centre Masterplan is being implemented including the proposal for a vibrant leisure quarter at Forge Island, which has recently finished the flood prevention and wider enabling works. 2019 saw the further need to diversify the town centre and the Government has made an "in principle" offer of £12.6m of funding to the Council from the Future High Streets Fund. The Council has submitted detailed

	proposals to Government as to how that funding would be utilised and awaits confirmation of the offer. Confirmation is expected by the end of February 2021.
2.5.3.6	Rotherham's economy, like most others has been severely affected by Covid-19 and attention is focussed on the economic recovery, especially through the SCR Economic Recovery Plan. A key part of this is leveraging in external funding for economic development and regeneration priorities. An example of this is the Town Deal, where the Council and partners will submit proposals to Government by the end of January 2021.
2.5.3.7	The investment into the Council's roads continued as part of the new investment into Highways following on from the 2020 Roads Programme, which sees an additional £6m per year invested. The major scheme at College Road Roundabout Scheme was completed in 2020 as well as agreement from Government to fund the A630 Parkway Widening scheme.
2.5.3.8	The Directorate has a key role in creating and maintaining a rich cultural and leisure offer and delivering a cleaner, greener Rotherham. 2020 saw huge challenges for frontline services such as the household waste service which continued to operate through Covid 19 with the exception of a short period of non-collection of green/garden waste.
2.5.3.9	In 2020 the Council approved a new library strategy along with investments into libraries. New Zonal Working arrangements for street cleansing, fly tipping and bulky waste services commenced with a focus on neighbourhood working.
2.5.3.10	The Directorate played a lead role in responding to Covid-19, especially through the Emergency Planning, Business Continuity and Health and Safety services. In addition, frontline enforcement services such as enforcement adapted to new Covid-19 work in order to help protect the public.
2.5.3.11	Some other notable achievements in 2020/21 includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- September 2020 the opening of a new 420 place primary school at the Waverley new community.</li> <li>- Adoption of six Supplementary Planning Documents to form part of the Local Plan and planning policy.</li> <li>- 7 days opening for the Household Waste Recycling Centres</li> <li>- Fleet maintenance brought in house</li> <li>- A start on site for public realm improvements in the Town Centre.</li> </ul>
2.5.4	<b>Corporate Support Services</b>
2.5.4.1	Two directorates make up the Council's corporate services - Finance & Customer Services and Assistant Chief Executives. Their role is to

	support the delivery of front line Council services by promoting the most effective use of resources whilst ensuring services are compliant with council regulation and national legislation. These services provide leadership, influence, advice and a cross-cutting perspective to enable the Council to operate effectively. They are responsible for providing effective support and advice to all Council services to help ensure they function efficiently; and to support elected members in making informed and lawful decisions.
	<b>Finance and Customer Services</b>
2.5.4.2	<p>The Directorate provides services in the following four areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Finance, Accounting, Insurance</li> <li>▪ Local Taxation, Housing Benefit, Income Collection and Financial Assessments for care services</li> <li>▪ Procurement</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Legal Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Legal</li> <li>▪ Elections</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Customer, Information and Digital Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ICT</li> <li>▪ Customer Services</li> <li>▪ Information Management</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Internal Audit</li> </ul>
2.5.4.3	The Directorate is committed to providing outstanding, high quality professional support services that are valued by its customers, both internal and external. Over the last year the directorate has been critical to supporting the Council in service continuity during the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring remote access to Council systems for staff and ensuring continuity of the democratic process through technology, enabling elected members to continue to hold formal decision making meetings via remote/virtual meetings whilst Covid restrictions have prevented those meetings being held physically.
2.5.4.4	Customer access to services has been maintained with the development of many online processes and a new Customer Relation Management system was implemented to enable this. A number of services have been developed online to improve efficiency and ease of access such as taxi licensing and a bulky waste booking system.
2.5.4.5	Over the last year the finance service has continued to identify and realise substantial savings, particularly in relation to treasury management activity and this will continue to directly support the funding for front line services. A significant resource has been redirected over the last year to deliver Covid business support grants, Council Tax hardship support and Covid-19 self-isolation payments and this will continue into 2021/22.

2.5.4.6	The Internal Audit team remains an effective, low cost service and continues to work across all areas in the Council to provide assurance of governance, risk management and the control framework. The pandemic has impacted the audit plan as some resources have been required to support the grants processes and the plan has been revised to take account of this. The service has subjected itself to an external assessment of performance against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and it has been confirmed that the standards are met evidencing the improvements achieved over the last few years.
2.5.4.7	Over the coming year there will be further focus on the delivery of improved customer service across the Council and investment into further improvements to customer response times in the Customer Contact Centre. The implementation of a new customer service model will take place once Covid restrictions allow and a refreshed Digital Strategy has been developed.
	<b>Assistant Chief Executive's Directorate</b>
2.5.4.8	<p>The Directorate has six distinct areas of responsibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human Resources</li> <li>• Neighbourhoods</li> <li>• Communications</li> <li>• Democratic &amp; Scrutiny Services</li> <li>• Policy, Performance and Intelligence</li> <li>• Change and Innovation</li> </ul>
2.5.4.9	The Directorate has continued to provide support services across council directorates, assisting with the council's response to the pandemic and facilitating the development, delivery and monitoring of council priorities as set out in the year ahead plan.
2.5.4.10	<p>During 2020, the ACEX directorate has played a pivotal role in assisting the Council's response to the pandemic. This has included providing advice and information both to the workforce and to the public, helping them to adapt to rapidly changing situations. Key deliverables include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing a reliable source of information to the public and the workforce through a variety of formats and including daily neighbourhood e- bulletins.</li> <li>• Creating high quality data reporting on a daily and weekly basis, providing essential information to inform decision making throughout the pandemic.</li> <li>• The establishment of the Council's community hub to support vulnerable residents during the pandemic, including practical support, emergency food provision and befriending.</li> <li>• Supporting members to act as community leaders so they can initiate and fund activity to support local vulnerable people.</li> <li>• Continuation of effective and accountable democratic decision</li> </ul>

	<p>making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advice and support to the workforce to enable them to deliver essential services and support to residents.</li> </ul>
2.5.4.11	<p>The directorate has also continued to deliver its core provisions including internal and external communications and HR support functions. Work has continued as part of the Thriving Neighbourhoods strategy and key Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) service level agreements have been co-designed and enhanced to provide humanitarian support to vulnerable residents. The Directorate has continued to facilitate partnership working and development of key policy areas including social value, climate change and equalities.</p>
2.5.4.12	<p>The directorate has also worked closely with all directorates to develop the year ahead plan ensuring that the council's priorities around thriving neighbourhoods, health and wellbeing and economic recovery continue to be delivered in collaboration with partners. In addition, the plan reflects the Council's commitment to continue to develop new ways of working particularly through staff development and activity designed to build hope and confidence in Rotherham.</p>
2.5.4.13	<p>In the coming 12 months, the directorate aims to continue to provide excellent support services across the Council. Key areas of focus for 2021 will be to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain high quality communication and information to the public and the workforce.</li> <li>• Provide oversight and quality assurance on delivery against The Year Ahead Plan priorities.</li> <li>• Development of the new Council plan.</li> <li>• Facilitate the delivery of additional social value in Council procurement and commissioning processes together with pursuing community wealth building models.</li> <li>• Further embed equalities and climate change policy commitments into Council activity.</li> <li>• Enhance partnership working including the role of VCS organisations in economic and social renewal post Covid-19.</li> <li>• Continue to work with members to deliver the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy building community resilience and supporting volunteer development.</li> <li>• Continue to develop and support the workforce, enhancing skills and knowledge across the organisation, and ensuring interventions are in place to address health and wellbeing issues amongst our staff.</li> <li>• Make preparation for the elections in May 2021 including the introduction of the new wards.</li> <li>• Implement the new member development programme, providing high quality advice and support to enable effective leadership.</li> <li>• Continue to support Members in delivering the expectations of the electorate, ensuring the robust and efficient management of Council business and maintaining an open and transparent</li> </ul>

	scrutiny function.
	In the coming twelve months, the Directorate will continue to challenge itself and review its practices and develop and modernise its service offer. Continuous improvement will be founded on the principles of best value and sustainable change.