

Background to the Budget and Financial Strategy

1. Budget Challenges

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 enables resources to be aligned to key priorities.

1.1.1 The overarching challenge is to continue to drive better outcomes for our people and place. This challenge is central to the Council Plan for 2022-25, which sets out key objectives and outcomes for this period across the following priority themes:

- Every neighbourhood thriving
- People are safe, healthy and live well
- Every child able to fulfil their potential
- Expanding economic opportunity
- A cleaner, greener local environment

The Year Ahead Delivery Plan sets out the key actions required to help the Council achieve these outcomes and commitments.

1.1.2 Health in Rotherham is generally below the English average, with inequalities widening between the most and least deprived communities within Rotherham, particularly for women. Life expectancy is below the English average and has stalled after rising over the last decade. Although rates of coronary heart disease have reduced significantly over the last 10 years, rates have also reduced nationally, and Rotherham exceeds the national average. There are also high rates of disability and long-term sickness. Work is ongoing to understand the long-term 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 University Centre Rotherham in the town centre which is providing additional earning opportunities for people of all ages. The latest available attainment data for 2019 shows that the gap is widening when compared nationally. Rotherham is 1.5% below the national average at Foundation Stage; 6.0% below the national average at KS2 and 2.4 points below the national average for Attainment 8 scores at KS4.

1.1.4 On the economy there are 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. 5.2% of people are unemployed in Rotherham, which is slightly higher than the regional and national average. Working with partners both locally

and via the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority will be critical to supporting the recovery and renewal of the local economy.

- 1.1.5 Despite the challenges, the Council is making progress with major regeneration schemes and projects. This includes Forge Island, the town centre housing programme, and Future High Streets Fund. £31.6m has been secured from the Towns Fund to carry out ambitious regeneration projects across the town centre, Eastwood and Templeborough and two Levelling Up Fund bids have been approved, securing £39.41m to enhance the town centre regeneration programme and deliver a range of initiatives across the borough to boost the leisure industry, including the creation of a skills village at Gulliver's Valley resort. It will be vital for the Council to continue 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, however the cost of living and house prices are increasing. Despite this house prices remain relatively low in Rotherham when compared nationally, there are also affordable housing options available, such as shared ownership, to support first time buyers to settle here. The Council pays employed staff the real living wage and is accredited by the Living Wage Foundation. Rotherham people are very proud of their local parks and country parks, particularly Clifton Park which has received national awards. 89% of respondents who took part in the Council Plan consultation considered their local parks and green spaces to be very important, particularly for their health and wellbeing.
- 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 Gulliver's Valley, a major family resort in the south of the borough, opened in 2020. Last November, Gulliver's hosted the latest North Star Science School, with Professor Brian Cox among a number of speakers helping to inspire young people to pursue a career in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) subjects. There are also the ruins of Roche Abbey and the award-winning Clifton Park Museum. The borough has a recently refurbished Civic Theatre, a thriving sports scene and four leisure centres. These are all important to the economic and social life of the area.
- 1.1.8 There is a steadily growing population which reached a record total of 265,000 in 2020. This is as a result of a natural increase (more births than deaths pre pandemic), net inward migration and increased life expectancy. Rotherham has 161,200 people of working age (60.8%), 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 52,388 people aged 65 or over including 6,223 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 (30,270 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 vaccinations.

- 1.1.10 There are 51,434 children aged 0-15 in Rotherham and 25,171 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 Children in Need (CIN only) reduced significantly from 1,678 in March 2018 to 902 at the end of November 2021. Meanwhile, the number of Children subject to a Child Protection Plan at the end March 2018 was 648 this also had reduced by the end of November 2021 to 467. The number of Looked after Children reduced from 662 in October 2018 to 569 at the end of December 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. The refreshed Joint Strategic Needs Assessment will assist in prioritising greatest need to tackle inequalities, and a prevention and health inequalities strategy and action plan is being developed with partners.
- 1.2 The Council remains committed to working with the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority 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 regional 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 continue to underpin 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 continues to meet 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 continues to be embedded in the way the Council commissions and procures goods and services, including capital projects. This approach is being expanded by working with other local 'anchor' organisations to identify joint approaches that can bring further benefits to local people. The accreditation of the Council by the Living Wage Foundation as a "Living Wage Employer" paying the "real living wage" demonstrates a further commitment in supporting the Council's Social Value Policy priorities. It signals the Council's commitment to not only pay employed staff the real living wage, but also secure it for people employed in delivering services in Rotherham through eligible contracts with external organisations.
- 1.5 The Council has committed to achieving net zero carbon by 2030. This will require significant changes to the way the Council operates, delivers services, and implements capital projects and improvements. The Council published its first Climate Emergency Annual Report in March 2021, including a Carbon Action Plan for 2021/22. Since then, a tree management protocol and guidance has been produced, an initial heating decarbonisation plan has been developed for primary Council operational buildings, and the Community Energy Support Scheme was launched. A new medium term and long-term strategy is being developed with key targets that will move the Council further towards achieving this crucial commitment. Capital funding of £1m has been allocated to develop a renewable energy project to supply or offset electricity used by Council operational buildings.
- 1.6 The Council is seeking to achieve "Excellent" accreditation under the Local Government Equality Framework by the end of 2022. The Council is currently reviewing the way that it works both internally and with communities to achieve improved equality outcomes. This includes reviewing the Council's equality objectives as part of the production of a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy that will underpin the new Council Plan. Achieving "Excellent" will require attention to the use of resources aligned to equality outcomes as an integral part of budget and service planning processes.

2. Key Issues – Budget Proposals

- 2.1 This section incorporates the financial matters related to the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which need to be considered by Cabinet for recommendation to Council.
- 2.2 In January 2022 the Council approved the new Council Plan for 2022-25 and this plan has driven the budget priorities for 2022/23. There are five themes informing our way of working to achieve better outcomes.

2.3 The Council Plan provides a strong sense of the strategic direction for the budget and the associated investments 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 and MTFs for 2022/23 to 2025/26.

2.4 The Budget outlined in this report will:

- benefit all residents whilst ensuring those that need extra support receive it;
- provide significant additional funding to ensure adult social care services are sustainable in the medium term through the provision of funding to support increasing demand and service pressures and support the stability and sustainability of vital provider services;
- deliver significant investment in housing and regeneration across the borough, ensuring the continuation of the recent strong economic growth and enhancing employment opportunities and the local environment;
- improve the customer experience of residents by continuing to focus on corporate and service transformation and efficiency, ensuring services continue to be equipped to deliver a high standard for citizens, businesses and stakeholders of the borough that is fully aligned to the borough's Community Strategy and Council Plan priorities; and
- provide further support to help those households on the lowest incomes with their cost of living pressures over the next two coming years through the provision of further Additional Local Council Tax Support.

2.5 The key impact of the proposed budget on each Directorate is shown below:

2.5.1 **Adult Care, Housing and Public Health**

Adult Care

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 Councils 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:

- Information, advice and advocacy
- Prevention and recovery
- Safeguarding
- Assessment and care planning
- Care, at home and in residential settings including managing any provider failure
- Adult Care also has a statutory responsibility under the Mental Health Act 1983 for the 24 hour provision of the Approved Mental Health Professional

2.5.1.3 In addition to the pressures and new demand created by the impacts of Covid-19, the Directorate continues to face a number of significant 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 with an aligned budget strategy to support sustainable fee increases.

2.5.1.4 The focus for 2022/23 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. The directorate is continuing to implement the mental health review, focussing on ensuring there is a strong social care offer in our joint response with health partners. The outcome will require the redirection of the mental health social care budget.

2.5.1.5 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. With the introduction of the new Health and Care Bill (target date July 2022)

and the statutory requirement for an integrated care system, the Council will continue to have a key role in supporting this transition to a wider system integration and respond proactively to the proposed reforms of the NHS, to ensure place priorities, population health management and tackling health inequalities remain at the heart of the local offer. This Bill also proposes a lifetime cap on the amount anyone in England will need to spend on their personal care, alongside what was described as a more generous means-test for local authority financial support. This will bring additional burdens and responsibilities for the directorate as more people will require a social care assessment, financial assessment and maintenance of a care account.

- 2.5.1.6 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.
- 2.5.1.7 Though much of the focus during 2021/22 has understandably been responding to Covid-19 and ensuring critical service delivery, the Directorate remains committed to delivering long-standing transformation programmes. This includes a commitment to build and deliver a new day opportunities service for people with a learning disability, autism and high support needs. This involves key capital investment of £2.1m. Support for adults with high 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. The 'People at the Heart of Care' white paper December 2021 outlines a 10-year strategy for Adult Social Care. This will bring increased expectations and burdens on the directorate. There is a funding package proposed to assist with implementation, but initial assessments suggest this will leave a funding gap of £1.5b nationally.
- 2.5.1.8 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.

- 2.5.1.9 Recognising the impacts of Covid-19 on the workforce will also be a key facet of 2022/23 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.
- 2.5.1.10 Recruitment and retention of workers in the Adult Care Sector is presenting significant challenges for the borough, broadly in line with the national position. Actions to address this have been put in place during 2021/22 and will continue during 2022/23. This includes a targeted recruitment programme, promotion of the care sector as a career of choice and development of an achievable and supportive career progression pathway.
- 2.5.1.11 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.

Public Health

- 2.5.1.12 Public health has co-ordinated the Council's response to Covid-19 throughout 2021/22 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 2022/23 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.
- 2.5.1.13 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.
- 2.5.1.14 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.

- 2.5.1.15 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.
- 2.5.1.16 Public Health have met all budget expectations for 2021/22 and are preparing to deliver a level budget in 2022/23 whilst ensuring best value is achieved through a number of procurement programmes that will be taken forward.

Housing Services

- 2.5.1.16 Housing Services hold overall landlord responsibility for the management and maintenance of the borough's 20,019 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.
- 2.5.1.17 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 20,019 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.
- 2.5.1.18 The General Fund budget will continue to be used to address homelessness and deliver aids and adaptations to homes.
- 2.5.1.19 Efficiencies will continue to be delivered by sustaining tenancies and supporting tenants in financial difficulties, high performance on void turnaround times; rent recovery and leasehold income collection. Alongside this, savings continue to be made in the repairs and maintenance service via the 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.
- 2.5.1.20 Covid -19 has continue to impact the service 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 **Children and Young People's Services**

- 2.5.2.1 The Directorate for Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) is responsible for early help and family engagement, youth offending service, social care services, education and skills. 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 challenging 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 and continues to see a rise in children in care across the region.
- 2.5.2.3 Against the national trend, Rotherham's improvements have positively impacted on reducing the number of children in care. The reduced demand has been supported through the significant improvements made to early help and investment in programmes including Edge of Care, PAUSE, the House Project and Family Group Conferencing.
- 2.5.2.4 In 2022/23 the Directorate priorities are to continue to sustain improvements in children's social work, through ongoing development and implementation of the 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 continue 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 fostering and 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, whilst continuing to improve educational outcomes, particularly at Key Stage 4 and for children with SEND.

- 2.5.2.7 Following on from the SEND inspection additional investment has been provided into SEND to support demand management, ensure timeliness in assessing for and developing good quality EHCPs and additional resource to support the promotion and upkeep of the Local Offer. In terms of the SENDIASS additional funding has been received from the CCG to support service delivery.
- 2.5.2.8 Actions to deliver 2022/23 second phase of the Early Help & Social Care (EH & SC) pathway savings have now completed with transformation plans now focusing on the Front Door. 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 569 at the time of the December 2021 financial forecast and projected to continue to reduce in 2022/23.
- 2.5.2.9 The LAC numbers reducing is linked to the impact of the Demand and Market Management Strategies.
- 2.5.2.10 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. Development of Rotherham's in-house residential homes are progressing well, with three homes now open and the other remaining 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.
- 2.5.2.11 The Right Child Right Care initiative (RCRC) will continue in 2022/23, with discharge plans that will be managed through the RCRC Performance Meetings. RCRC is a key aspect to ensuring that Rotherham's placement projections remain in line with projections are delivered on budget.
- 2.5.2.12 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 **Regeneration and Environment**

- 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; with emphasis on delivering against the Council Plan priorities and the Year Ahead commitments. The Directorate has been successful in securing significant external funding, linked to the priorities and building on the Council's own investments. A key part of the work for 2022/23 and into future years is to deliver these projects and programmes.
- 2.5.3.2 The Directorate has a broad portfolio of responsibilities including:
- Community safety
 - Environmental protection

- Licensing
- Schools' catering and cleaning
- Waste collection, management and disposal
- Street cleaning and grounds maintenance
- Parks, countryside and green spaces
- Leisure, sport and physical activity
- Tourism and events
- Heritage, museums and archives
- Libraries and neighbourhood Hubs
- Planning and Building Control
- Regeneration and Economic Development
- Transport and highways
- Asset Management and Property
- Emergency Planning, Business Continuity
- Council-wide Health and Safety
- Passenger Transport and Fleet Services

2.5.3.3 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, the Directorate has a significant Capital budget consisting of Council funding and funding from external sources.

2.5.3.4 The adopted Town Centre Masterplan is being implemented, with progress made on improving the streetscene (Public Realm), new town centre housing (public and private led schemes), flood alleviation works (including the Canal Barrier and the Goit) and development of the projects contained in the Future High Streets Fund (markets, library, public realm and Grimm and Co new premises) and progress made on Forge Island with Arc Cinema and Travelodge. The Town Centre implementation will continue to move forward and will be expanded both geographically (out to Templeborough and Eastwood) and in terms of projects and funding, especially due to Towns Fund (£31.6m) and Levelling Up Funding (£19.5m for the Town Centre package).

2.5.3.5 The Council has also been successful in securing £19.9m of Levelling Up Funding for a package focussed on the visitor economy and skills. This programme is centred around the leisure economy and associated employment and skills and is focussed on some of the borough's major attractions (Gullivers, Wentworth Woodhouse, Maltby Academy, Magna, Rother Valley Country Park and Thybergh Country Park).

2.5.3.6 Street cleansing, grounds maintenance and enforcement staff have been reorganised on a locality basis, working closely with multi-agency partners such as local policing teams. The regulatory services have rolled out a seven-day out of hours response service to tackle anti-social behaviour. The in-house Highways Service has made huge progress in improving the roads via the "£24 million to 2024" roads programme. This will continue into 2022/23 and will also see the start of the implementation of the Council's £4m investment to improve local towns

and villages, building on investments in street cleansing and the three-year litter bin replacement programme to keep streets tidy.

- 2.5.3.7 A new cycling strategy has been developed with key projects underway such as the Sheffield Road Scheme which will create dedicated cycle lanes on a main route between Rotherham and Sheffield. The Transforming Cities programme, together with the Active Travel Fund, will deliver £12 million worth of improvements for public transport, walking and cycling by March 2023.
- 2.5.3.8 The Council continues to play its role in electric vehicle infrastructure with 62 charge points and more to come, along with new adopted planning policies for housing and commercial developments to provide electric charging points.
- 2.5.3.9 Following the devastating floods in 2019, work has been taking place to secure funding for the development of six priority flood prevention schemes with initial construction taking place along the River Don corridor in and around Rotherham Town Centre. To date over £5 million has been spent, with a further £5.8 million committed to additional schemes, which includes Kilnhurst, Parkgate, Rawmarsh, Whiston, Laughton Common and Catcliffe, alongside a gully renewal programme across the borough.

2.5.4 **Corporate Support Services**

- 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.

Finance and Customer Services

- 2.5.4.2 The Directorate provides services in the following four areas:
- Financial Services
 - Finance, Accounting, Insurance
 - Local Taxation, Housing Benefit, Income Collection and Financial Assessments for care services
 - Procurement
 - Legal Services
 - Legal
 - Elections

- Registration and Bereavement
- Customer, Information and Digital Services
 - ICT
 - Customer Services
 - Information Management
- Internal Audit

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. The directorate has a key role in ensuring effective governance arrangements are in place across the Council and encompasses a number of key statutory roles (Chief Finance Officer [S151 Officer], Monitoring Officer [MO] and Senior Information Reporting Officer [SIRO]).

2.5.4.4 Over the last two years 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 prevented those meetings being held physically for a significant period of time. The ability for many staff to work from home has ensured the ability to continue to deliver vital services from home.

2.5.4.5 Quick and robust decision making, reprioritisation of resources and effective procurement and financial advice has meant that businesses providing services to the Council have been paid more quickly than they otherwise would, ensuring their cash flows have been supported during challenging times; business grant schemes have been developed and implemented quickly, supporting over 5,000 businesses with payments totalling £85.6m, following the provision of Government funding for such schemes.

2.5.4.6 Following on from the many online processes developed in 2020, more online processes have been introduced to enable Customer access to services to be maintained throughout the pandemic along with the introduction of a new face to face customer service model and booking system to support those customers who aren't able to access digital solutions. A digital inclusion strategy is being developed with partners across the borough. Short term investment made over the last year in customer services telephone staffing has assisted in managing demand. However this has still been very challenging and telephone demand continues to put pressure on these resources whilst further digital solutions are being implemented. A key focus for the year ahead is to improve telephone wait times.

2.5.4.7 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 continued to be redirected to deliver various elements of Covid related support and this is likely to continue into the early part of 2022/23. The Revenues and Benefits service have maintained strong performance despite the challenges facing many Rotherham residents as caseloads for support have increased over the last year, most likely driven by the pandemic and household finances have been stretched. The development of support schemes and the careful and strategic use of various Government Grants including the Household Support Fund have enabled over 16,632 accounts to receive additional Local Council Tax Support for a further year and the proposed budget continues this for a further two years, providing much needed financial support to those households on the lowest incomes.

Assistant Chief Executive's Directorate

2.5.4.8 The Directorate has six distinct areas of responsibility:

- Human Resources & Organisational Development
- Neighbourhoods
- Communications & Marketing
- Democratic Services
- Policy, Performance and Intelligence
- Change and Innovation

2.5.4.9 The Directorate has continued to provide support to services across Council directorates, including ongoing assistance with the Council's response to the pandemic and facilitating the delivery and monitoring of Council priorities as set out in the Year Ahead Plan, as well as the development of new priorities set out in the new Council Plan.

2.5.4.10 During 2021/22, the directorate has continued to play a pivotal role in assisting the Council's ongoing 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:

- Providing a reliable source of information to the public and the workforce through a variety of formats, including regular Covid and neighbourhood e-bulletins.
- Sustaining high quality data reporting on a daily and weekly basis, providing essential information to inform decision making throughout the pandemic.
- Continuing to assist local volunteers to support vulnerable residents during the pandemic, including practical support, emergency food provision and befriending.
- Continuation of effective and accountable democratic decision making, including ensuring a safe return to face-to-face full council meetings.
- Supporting members to act as community leaders so they can

initiate and fund activity to support local vulnerable people, including administration for new members and the successful delivery of the Member Induction Programme following elections in May 2021.

- Advice and support to the workforce to enable them to deliver essential services and support to residents.

2.5.4.11 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 to support our communities and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), including developing new ward plans, a Joint Working Agreement with Parish Councils and the Staff Volunteering Policy. The Directorate has also continued to facilitate partnership working and development of key policy areas including social value, climate change and equalities. This has included the achievement of Real Living Wage Accreditation for the Council, supporting the Afghan citizens resettlement scheme and supporting the development of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

2.5.4.12 The directorate has also worked closely with all directorates to consult, draft and develop the new Council Plan for 2022-25, establishing the Council's priorities in the upcoming period. This has included developing a Year Ahead Delivery Plan to support these objectives, detailing the key milestones to be achieved for 2022.

2.5.4.13 In the coming 12 months, the directorate aims to continue to provide excellent support services across the Council. Key areas of focus will be to:

- Maintain high quality communication and information to the public and the workforce.
- Provide oversight and quality assurance on delivery against the Council Plan priorities including through our big hearts big changes programme.
- Secure further commitments through our social value policy and work with partners to maximise the impact of our collective spending power.
- Further embed equalities and climate change policy commitments into Council activity, including the refresh of the Council's equality strategy and objectives.
- Continue to work with members to deliver the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy building community resilience and supporting volunteer development.
- Enhance partnership working to achieve better outcomes across the borough, including refreshing the Rotherham Together Plan.
- Continue to develop and support the workforce, enhancing skills and knowledge across the organisation.
- Refresh the member development programme, supporting members to provide effective leadership.
- Continue to support Members in delivering the expectations of the electorate's community priorities, ensuring the robust and

efficient management of Council business and maintaining an open and transparent scrutiny function.

- Develop a strengthened approach to our development and use of business intelligence to build a clearer picture of the borough and its residents as well as informing decision-making.
- Implementing our new workforce plan to ensure that we attract, recruit and retain talented individuals into key roles becoming an employer of choice, and also strengthen our engagement and development of our existing workforce.

2.5.4.14 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.