

Public Report
Improving Places Select Commission

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Places Select Commission – 10 December 2024

Report Title

Thriving Neighbourhoods Annual Report 2023/24

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

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Jo Brown, Assistant Chief Executive

Report Author(s)

Martin Hughes, Head of Neighbourhoods
martin.hughes@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

Progress on the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and the Neighbourhood Working model

Recommendations

Note the progress of the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and the Neighbourhood Working model

List of Appendices Included

None

Background Papers

- Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy 2018-2025
- Rotherham Council Plan 2022-25
- Rotherham Council Year Ahead Delivery Plan 2024/25
- Refresh of Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy cabinet report – 21 November 2022

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Thriving Neighbourhoods Annual Report 2023/24

1. Background

- 1.1 This annual report primarily focuses on the municipal year May 2023 to May 2024 but also covers activity up to and including November 2024.
- 1.2 Cabinet approved the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy (2018-2025) in November 2018 following the introduction of the new neighbourhood working model in May 2017. The Strategy was refreshed and agreed by Cabinet in November 2022 (see Appendix 1). A new Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy will be produced in 2025, following the adoption of the new Council Plan.
- 1.3 This Strategy helps to deliver the Council's vision under the 'Every Neighbourhood Thriving' theme within the Council Plan (2022-25) - *'Our vision for Rotherham is for every neighbourhood to be a thriving neighbourhood, where people are able to work together to achieve a good quality of life. We want to work with local people to find solutions to local issues and to build on our heritage and assets. We will help create vibrant communities in which people feel happy, safe and proud. To do this, we will make it easier to get involved in the local community, work closely with our partners and local voluntary and community groups, enhance our town and village centres, green spaces and libraries, and effectively tackle community issues.'*
- 1.4 The Strategy aims to achieve –
 - Neighbourhoods that are safe and welcoming with good community spirit.
 - Residents are happy, healthy and loving where they live.
 - Residents have the opportunity to use their strengths, knowledge and skills to achieve what is important to them.
- 1.5 The 'Every Neighbourhood Thriving' theme within the Council's Year Ahead Delivery Plan includes the following outcomes that the Council aims to achieve in 2024/25 –
 - Work with communities on the things that matter to them.
 - Residents, organisations and businesses use their skills and resources to help others.
 - Neighbourhoods that are welcoming and safe
 - Local people have access to libraries, cultural activities, parks and green spaces.
 - Local towns and villages are improved.
- 1.6 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report, which was presented to cabinet in September 2023, provided positive feedback on the Council's neighbourhood working model stating – *'The Council's Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy aspires to strengthen the role of ward members as community leaders who can work with their communities, their partners and those delivering service in communities to bring about the changes that communities want to see. The peer team was impressed by the exemplary approach to community engagement at ward level, where dedicated and well-supported Ward Members take the lead.'*

2. Key Issues

Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy

- 2.1 A refreshed version of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy (2018-2025) was approved by Cabinet in November 2022 (see Appendix 1).
- 2.2 A high level Delivery Plan for 2023/24 (see Appendix 2) and a Full Equality Analysis were presented to the Improving Places Select Commission in October 2023. The Delivery Plan combines the Council Plan's Outcomes and Commitments along with the common themes coming out of the 2023/24 ward priorities (see Appendix 3) and identifies the contribution from the Neighbourhoods Team and Elected Members in their community leadership role within their wards. The Delivery Plan also references existing relevant council strategies, programmes and plans. The detailed delivery of activity is captured within the 25 Ward Plans which Elected Members and the Neighbourhoods Teams review and update on a regular basis.
- 2.3 A range of Performance Indicators are recorded throughout the year. The figures from 2021 – 2024 are attached as Appendix 4. Performance and impact are also captured through case studies and stories, that are included in the Members' ward reports, the Good Practice Guide (see Appendix 5), ward e-bulletins and other media channels.

Elected Members as Community Leaders

- 2.4 Elected Members are at the centre of Rotherham's Neighbourhood Working model, which provides them the opportunity to maximise their role as community leaders.

Member Development and Support

- 2.5 In Spring 2023 all Members that had been Elected in May 2021 were offered the opportunity to have a mid-term review that would allow them to feedback on their role as community leaders and the support they received from the Neighbourhoods Team and Democratic Services. The results of this exercise helped to inform the continued support from these services as well as the Member Development and Induction programmes.
- 2.6 In February 2024 the offer was extended to Members who had been elected before May 2021. This also provided the opportunity to capture feedback from Members that had chosen not to stand in the May 2024 elections. Seven members took up the opportunity and common themes included -
 - Rewarding work – working with their community
 - Challenging work – relationships with some council services, partners and community
 - Role of the Councillor - support required around their Community Leadership functions (Orchestrator, Steward of Place, Advocate, Entrepreneur, Buffer, Catalyst, Sensemaker) and strengths-based working
 - E-casework and Members' Portal – suggestions for improvements

- Representation on Committees and Boards – tips for new Members
 - Member development – suggestions for future programmes
- 2.7 Elected Members are supported on a day-to-day basis by the Neighbourhoods Team. During 2023/24 the Neighbourhoods Team facilitated 287 ward Member briefings. These ward briefings are fundamental to the neighbourhood working model as they provide Members with the opportunity to review their ward priorities, plans and budgets, engage with various partners and services, consider any emerging issues, take a lead on any projects or initiatives, and discuss how to involve and work with the local community.
- 2.8 Following the May 2024 elections new and returning Members were provided with a ward focused induction by the Neighbourhoods Team. This included a Good Practice Guide which had been developed alongside Elected Members throughout the year (see Appendix 5). The ward induction complemented the wider Corporate Member Induction Programme.

Ward Priorities and Plans

- 2.9 Throughout 2023/24, Elected Members continued to work with the Neighbourhoods Team, local communities and a range of partners to develop projects and improve local services to tackle their ward priorities. Details of these initiatives were captured in the individual ward plans, included in the monthly ward e-bulletins and summarised in Ward Members' reports to full Council.
- 2.10 The Elected Members' reports to Council include numerous stories and case studies, illustrating the impact of neighbourhood working, their role as community leaders and progress on ward priorities. The reports started in May 2022 and were completed in January 2024. All the ward reports were published on the ward webpages once presented.
- 2.11 Following the May 2024 elections and the completion of the ward inductions, the Neighbourhoods Team supported the new and returning Elected Members in the identification of their new ward priorities. Members were provided with new ward data, input and advice from council services and partners and local community intelligence, including the results from any recent consultation exercises. The new ward priorities were published on the Council's website in October 2024. A summary is included as Appendix 6.
- 2.12 As well as forming the basis for local action, the ward priorities and plans are used to inform Council decision making, policies, strategies, service plans and resource allocation.

Devolved Ward Budgets

- 2.13 In 2023/24 Elected Members had access to the following devolved ward budgets -
- Community Leadership Fund - £1,584 per individual Elected Member (revenue)

- Ward Capital Budget - £7,120 for two member wards £10,680 for three member wards
- Ward Housing Budget - £4,000 base budget for each ward with an enhancement dependent upon the number of Council homes in the ward
- Local Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – 15% of the total CIL paid to the Council retained in any ward not covered by a Parish Council.

2.14 CLF and Ward Capital Budgets –

- Administered by the Neighbourhoods Team.
- The budget has a roll forward provision, with any funding unallocated in a specific year rolling forward into the following year. 2023/24 was the final year of the roll forward cycle due to the forthcoming election.
- In 2023/24 Elected Members allocated £515,840 to projects, services and activities tackling their ward priorities. £127,994 came from CLF and £387,846 came from the Ward Capital Budget. £554 was not spent across both budgets. Summaries of the allocations made in each ward in 2023/24 were published on the Council website in May 2024.
- Approximately £148,435 of the CLF and Ward Capital Budget was invested directly into the Voluntary and Community Sector, supporting a total of 271 community organisations. £300,784 went into the public sector for additional activities, services or equipment. The remaining £66,623 was used to purchase items/equipment from the private businesses for community activities.

2.15 Ward Housing Budget –

- The £216,000 annual Ward Housing Budget is made available each year to support projects and investments around our housing estates, to address ward priorities and issues of concern for Council tenants and residents.
- The budget has traditionally been administered by the Housing Service, as it was during 2023/24. Administration of the budget moved from Housing Services to the Neighbourhoods Service in 2024/25 to better align with CLF and Ward Capital Budgets
- This budget also has a roll forward provision, with any funding unallocated in a specific year rolling forward into the following year. 2023/24 was the final year of the roll forward cycle due to the forthcoming election.
- During 2023/24 a total of £455,367 was available within the Ward Housing Budget. £430,368 was allocated to support the delivery of local projects, leaving £24,999 unspent.

2.16 Community Infrastructure Levy –

- A charge that Councils can apply to new developments to raise funds for local infrastructure.
- Wards that are not covered by a Parish Council retain the Local CIL or 'Neighbourhood Portion'. This equates to 15% of the total CIL.
- Administered by the Neighbourhoods Team
- There is no deadline to spend CIL monies.
- This has been made available to Elected Members in non-parished wards since April 2022.

- By the end of 2023/24 the cumulative total of Neighbourhood CIL allocated to 11 of the non-parished wards had reached £401,365.
- By the end of 2023/24 only Swinton & Rockingham ward had allocated any CIL money. This was an £850 payment to one project.

2.17 In total Elected Members allocated £947,058 on projects and services in line with their ward priorities during 2023/24.

Community Engagement

2.18 How both Elected Members and the Neighbourhoods Team communicate and engage with residents, stakeholders and partners is fundamental to Rotherham's neighbourhood working model. Communication & Engagement is embedded in the delivery of the ward plans.

2.19 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report (September 2023) stated that – *'The peer team was impressed by the exemplary approach to community engagement at ward level, where dedicated and well-supported Ward Members take the lead'*.

Website

2.20 The Neighbourhoods home webpage includes information on the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy, an interactive map of all the wards, details on how to apply for devolved ward budgets, links to the Parish Councils section of the Council website and links to all 25 ward pages. In 2023/24 there were 5,308 unique views of this webpage.

2.21 The 25 ward webpages include Elected Members details, a latest news feed, and useful links to other websites. They also allow people to access the ward priorities, ward data profile, annual ward budget statements and the Elected Members' report to Council.

2.22 A review of the webpages in order to increase engagement via this route will be a focus going forward.

Ward E-bulletins

2.23 Each ward produces and circulates a monthly e-bulletin. These are written in consultation with Elected Members and provide local information and numerous stories illustrating the progress made in tackling ward priorities and the impact of neighbourhood working within the ward.

2.24 Subscriptions increased from 9,588 to 11,599 in 2023/24, an increase of 2,011. The engagement rate (the average amount of opens and clicks for bulletins) is 77%. A considerably high rate considering there were 294 bulletins sent out in this period.

Supporting Community Organisations

- 2.25 Supporting local community groups who provide activities that help tackle ward priorities, is a core function of the Neighbourhoods Team.
- 2.26 In 2023/24, the team supported 544 community organisations with general advice, funding, volunteer recruitment and linking them into various partnerships and services. This figure includes the establishment of 13 new community organisations. This work was alongside and in addition to, the ward budget funding which was awarded to 271 community organisations.

Community Events

- 2.27 The Neighbourhoods Team continue to work alongside Elected Members to bring communities together through a range of enjoyable, cultural and social activities and events, which will inspire hope and pride in local communities across the Borough. 354 community events were arranged or supported by the team in 2023/24.

Consultation

- 2.28 The Neighbourhoods Team and Elected Members have led on the consultation for the Towns and Villages projects within their wards. This has provided the local community the opportunity to inform the design of the various schemes. 13 Towns and Villages schemes had been completed by the end of March 2024. The remainder will be completed in 2024/25.
- 2.29 The Neighbourhoods Team continue to advise and support council services and partners who wish to consult within wards and neighbourhoods. This is in accordance with the Council's Consultation and Engagement Framework.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 2.30 The Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy has further emphasised the need to promote and provide opportunities for all communities within the Borough. In 2023/24, the Neighbourhoods Team supported 220 activities, projects or initiatives that have targeted communities with protected characteristics. These include consultation exercises, support/funding for community groups and support for community events.
- 2.31 Over the next 12 months the Neighbourhoods Team will continue to work with Elected Members to provide more opportunities for communities with protected characteristics to get involved in local consultation, activities and co-produced community action.

Integrated Locality and Partnership Working

Ward Priorities

- 2.32 The priorities within ward plans form the basis of local projects, partnerships and networks which are supported by the Neighbourhoods Team and Elected

Members. These priorities are shared across all Council services and partner agencies to help inform strategies, service plans, the allocation of resources and the delivery of services. A summary of the 2023/24 ward priorities is included as Appendix 3. The new 2024/25 ward priorities, which were published in October 2024, is included as Appendix 6.

- 2.33 Work continues to increase the visibility of the ward priorities to all staff across the council. This includes ward priorities being considered during the development of the new Council Plan, service planning and strategy development, ongoing discussions with various management teams and neighbourhood tours for staff.

Neighbourhood Partnerships and Networks

- 2.34 A range of neighbourhood-based partnerships and networks have continued to meet or have been established in order to tackle the priorities within the ward plans. This includes the Community Action Partnerships (CAPs) which operate in all 25 wards and provide a vehicle to tackle community safety related issues. Work continues to improve how community safety issues are tackled within localities.
- 2.35 In 2023/24 the Neighbourhoods Team co-ordinated 734 neighbourhood partnership and network meetings. These have been a mix of in-person and online Teams meetings.

Parish and Town Councils

- 2.36 Parish and Town Councils are key to local partnership and neighbourhood working. The Parish Council Liaison Officer is a fairly unique post and illustrates the importance the Council places on these positive relationships. A number of the Parish Councils recognise this as a model of good practice.
- 2.37 Over the last year the Parish Council Liaison Officer has worked alongside the Parish Councils to –
- Monitor and promote the Joint Working Agreement with the Council
 - Meet with each other, council services and partners on a regular basis.
 - Link into Elected Members and key council services to address local issues.
 - Develop their response to potential future flood or emergency incidents.
 - Hold events and celebrations – including early preparation with council services for events such as Remembrance Sunday
 - Recruit Parish Council representatives to various Boards and Group, such as the Transport Advisory Group
 - Access learning and development opportunities.
- 2.38 The Parish Council Liaison Officer co-ordinates the Parish Council and RMBC Joint Working Group, Parish Council Network events, Clerks meetings and joint learning and development sessions. During 2023/24, 24 of the 31 Parish and Town Councils in Rotherham were involved in one or more of these meetings and events.

- 2.39 The Parish Council Liaison Officer also engages with those that have chosen not to get involved in any of the joint meetings or events, via the Parish Councils' e-bulletin, attending their meetings or individual discussions with the clerk.

Rotherham Town Centre

- 2.40 The Neighbourhoods Team has the lead role in promoting a placemaking approach within Rotherham town centre by bringing all key stakeholders together to achieve common goals and ensure the town centre becomes a desirable place to live, work and visit.
- 2.41 The Town Centre Community Co-ordinator is an integral link between those involved in the economic regeneration of the town centre, various council services, local businesses, the VCS, residents and visitors.
- 2.42 A Town Centre Operational Group meets on a monthly basis to encourage and support the co-ordination of services and partners in the town centre, with a particular focus on
- Regeneration schemes and planning
 - Community Safety
 - Streetscene
 - Events
 - Traffic and Transport
 - Housing
 - Communication and Community Engagement
 - Data and Business Intelligence
- 2.43 From a Neighbourhoods perspective, particular achievements over the last year include –
- Forge Island – providing local business and colleges with updates, building up relationships with the operators of the Hotel and Cinema and regularly visiting the site to ensure it is in good condition and deal with any emerging issues
 - Rotherham Canalside project - working with Community Payback and the Canal and River Trust to make environmental improvements to the canal and lock side area.
 - Reytons' concert - supporting businesses to prepare for the increase in visitors and co-ordinating a team of volunteers on the day to welcome and guide visitors to Rotherham.
 - Working with local businesses - point of contact for existing businesses, welcoming new investors and providing advice, support and signposting
 - Vacant buildings - ensuring that details of vacant buildings up for sale or to let are promoted on the 'Invest in Rotherham' website.
 - Partnership walkabouts - carried out weekly to identify issues and work services and partners to resolve.

North, Central and South Locality Areas

- 2.44 A number of council departments and partners operate their services on a North, Central and South Locality Area basis. These include Neighbourhoods, Housing, Environmental Enforcement / CPU, Streetscene and SY Police.
- 2.45 Senior managers from these services and others meet on a regular basis to exchange information and discuss the area wide delivery of services in response to ward plan priorities and issues raise by CAPs or other neighbourhood partnerships. They are also in a position to advise and lead on translating borough-wide strategies into local action.

Significant events

- 2.46 Floods – following the floods in October 2023, which primarily impacted on residents in Catcliffe, Whiston and Laughton Common, the Neighbourhoods Team redeployed resources to support these communities to recover. Understandably, this primarily focused on Catcliffe. The response included –
- Managing the Humanitarian Centre (Catcliffe Memorial Hall) from October 2023 to February 2024.
 - Door-to-door health and wellbeing checks, and follow up calls
 - Co-ordinating multi-service/agency advice and information drop-ins
 - Co-ordinating donations of food, clothes, furniture and equipment
 - Regular communication and engagement with residents
 - Supporting community organisations to continue operating and community events
 - Establishment of the Catcliffe Community Recovery Group – which continues to meet
 - Assisting with the development of a Catcliffe Flood Plan and a Corporate Community Recovery Plan
- 2.47 Violent Disorder – following the riot that took place at Manvers in August 2024, the Neighbourhoods Team again redeployed resources to support the community to recovery. This included –
- Supporting the community clean-up
 - Co-ordinating a multi-agency drop-in
 - Regular communication and engagement with residents
 - Direct support for the Manvers Residents' Association
 - Contributing to wider Community Cohesion activity across the borough
- 2.48 The redeployment of resources for these two events did initially have an impact on the core business of the Neighbourhoods Team, which was communicated to all Elected Members at the time. Any current activity relating to these two events is now being picked up as business as usual.

Future Place Based Working

- 2.49 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report included a recommendation to '*Develop a clearer and shared understanding of integrated locality working*' and suggested that '*Integrated locality working through increased co-design and co-*

production of solutions and services alongside partner organisations can deliver enhanced outcomes for residents through improved services and solutions which are tailored to their needs.'

- 2.50 The 2024/25 Year Ahead Delivery Plan has taken account of this recommendation - *Develop and deliver a Phase 1 action plan that ensures the Council and its partners are maximising opportunities to join-up activities and initiatives in the three locality areas of the borough.*
- 2.51 A Place-Based Working Project group was established in June 2024 and agreed the initial action plan in September 2024 which includes –
- Governance
 - Budgets & Resources
 - Collaborative working across Council Services
 - Supporting Elected Members as Community Leaders
 - Communication & Engagement
 - Staff Development

2 Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 The report presented is for information.

4 Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 The report presented is for information.

5 Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 The report presented is for information.

6 Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)

- 6.1 There are no financial and procurement implications, other than those relating to the Neighbourhoods core management budget and the Elected Members' ward budgets.

7 Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)

- 7.1 There are no direct legal implications.

8 Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct staffing implications other than the recruitment and deployment of Neighbourhoods staff.

9 Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 The outcomes within the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy supports the delivery of the Council Plan themes 'Every Child Able to Fulfil Their Potential' and 'People Are Safe, Healthy and Live Well'.
- 9.2 The ward priorities illustrate where Elected Members are targeting resources towards Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults. This includes new or additional activities, improved facilities or improved access to services. The majority of the wards also have priorities which try to mitigate against the 'Cost-of-Living' crisis.

10 Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 The neighbourhood working model enables the Council to respond to the specific needs of Rotherham's increasingly diverse communities. Engagement with residents takes into account the strengths, assets and needs of different communities of interest, which differ in each neighbourhood and ward. Neighbourhood working allows the flexibility to respond to these needs.
- 10.2 The ward priorities and ward budget statements published on the website illustrate how Elected Members have targeted activity, services and resources toward communities with protected characteristics. Case studies and stories on ward webpages, e-bulletins and the Ward Members' reports to Council illustrate the impact being made.
- 10.3 Over the next 12 months the Neighbourhoods Team will continue to work with Elected Members to provide more opportunities for communities with protected characteristics to get involved in local consultation, activities and co-produced community action.

11 Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 A number of ward priorities and plans have specific references to green initiatives, such as tree planting, wildflower meadows, recycling and active travel, that would positively contribute to tackling this agenda within these wards. The development of projects and awareness raising through e-bulletins and other engagement methods will encourage resident participation.

12 Implications for Partners

- 12.1 Multi-agency working is covered in paragraphs 2.32 to 2.45 of this report. This illustrates the importance of partners (from the public, voluntary and private sector) and Parish Councils in the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy. The ward priorities and plans are informed by the experience and intelligence from these partners, which encourages the establishment of shared priorities and goals.

13 Risks and Mitigation

13.1 Risks relating to the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy are captured in the Assistant Chief Executive Directorate Risk Register.

14 Accountable Officer(s)

Martin Hughes, Head of Neighbourhoods

Approvals obtained on behalf of:-

	Named Officer	Date
Assistant Chief Executive	Jo Brown	25/11/2024
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	N/A	Click here to enter a date.
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	N/A	N/A
Assistant Director of Human Resources (if appropriate)	N/A	N/A
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)	N/A	N/A

Report Author:
Martin Hughes, Head of Neighbourhoods
martin.hughes@rotherham.gov.uk

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