

## **Background to the Budget and Financial Strategy**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Council is split into five directorates, each made up of number of services and teams. The five directorates are:
- Adult Care, Housing and Public Health;
  - Children and Young People's Service
  - Regeneration and Environment
  - Finance and Customer Services
  - Assistant Chief Executive

This appendix summarises the activity being undertaken in each Directorate in the current year and the planned activity that will be undertaken in 2025/26 as part of the proposed budget.

### **2. Adult Care, Housing and Public Health**

#### **2.1 Adult Care**

- 2.1.1 Adult Care is responsible for the provision of adult social care support and services for Care Act eligible groups of adults in the borough, including older people and adults with mental ill-health, people with a learning disability and autism and physical and/or sensory impairments. The Directorate also supports people with housing and support requirements through housing related support and vulnerable adults experiencing multiple disadvantages as well as domestic abuse. The Directorate has been and continues to be at the forefront of the Councils response to safeguarding adults, supporting hospital discharges and maximising the independence of residents with care and support needs. The Directorate also has a key role in supporting the wider health and care system and externally commissions providers such as care homes, domiciliary care, supported living and voluntary sector partners including micro-enterprises to deliver critical services to customers.

- 2.1.2 Adult Care has statutory responsibility under the Care Act 2014 for managing and delivering:

- Information, advice and guidance
- Advocacy
- Prevention and recovery
- Safeguarding
- Assessment and support planning
- Care, at home and in residential settings, including managing provider failure
- As well as statutory responsibility under the Mental Health Act for the 24 hour provision of the Approved Mental Health Professional
- Regulated services

- 2.1.3 The Directorate continues to face 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, multiple disadvantage and complexity of need for those residents who need support; and increased cost pressures for externally commissioned adult care providers driven by the current financial climate. The associated costs and increased risk faced by externally commissioned providers as a result of cost of living pressures has highlighted the need for the Directorate to respond with an aligned budget strategy to support sustainable fee increases.
- 2.1.4 The focus for 2025/26 is to continue to address the need to respond to the rising numbers of people with eligible and increasing care needs. Working with health and social care partners in the borough, to ensure the delivery of care services are personalised, responsive and cost effective.
- 2.1.5 Quality of care will continue to be a priority and improved through partnership working across the health and care system in the borough, which has strong, collaborative foundations. The Council will continue to have a key role in supporting the transition to wider system integration and respond proactively to reforms of the NHS, to ensure place priorities, population health management and tackling health inequalities remain at the heart of the local offer. These areas form the cornerstones for the regulation regime which Adult Social Care can now expect an assurance assessment by December 25 from the Care Quality Commission (CQC).
- 2.1.6 Supporting people to live well at home, for as long as possible, remains a key focus, with home first principles at the core of the delivery model. This approach improves 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 and through new technology.
- 2.1.7 Adult Social Care 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, as well as accommodation support closer to home. 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.
- 2.1.8 The priorities, as outlined, can only be achieved if there is a high quality, motivated social care workforce in place. Further refinement of the operating model is taking place, applying the learning to refine the approach and

engender continuous improvement. This commitment to ongoing change and development in the way services and resources are organised will assist Adult Care to manage and deliver the services it provides. This continues to be assisted by a comprehensive workforce development plan and robust practice frameworks, which builds skills and confidence in assessments and delivery of cost-effective strength-based outcomes.

- 2.1.9 Supporting the internal and external workforce will continue to be a key focus in the coming year 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 discharge their duties effectively and safely.
- 2.1.10 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 2024/25 and will continue during 2025/26. This includes further workforce profiling, introduction of career progression pathways including new job roles and promotion of the care sector as a career.
- 2.1.11 These priorities are designed to deliver a long term, sustainable reduction in demand pressures facing the directorate, ensure compliance with regulation standards and ensure delivery of services within the allocated budget.

## 2.2 **Public Health**

- 2.2.1 Public Health is an integral element of the borough's health and social care system, maintaining a focus on prevention, physical and mental wellbeing and tackling health inequalities. Working closely with commissioning colleagues the team is responsible for the commissioning of statutory public health services, including sexual health services; drug and alcohol treatment and recovery; 0-19 Public Health nursing; NHS Health Checks and Rotherham Healthwave, which comprises weight management and stop smoking services.
- 2.2.2 Alongside commissioning services, Public Health lead on the development of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which underpins the Rotherham Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board. The team plays a pivotal role in providing intelligence, evidence-based advice, advocacy and challenge to ensure that the health of residents is safeguarded and to enable all partners to meet their duties in tackling health inequalities within the borough. The Team provide specialist public health advice across the domains of Health Protection, Health Improvement and Healthcare Public Health for the Rotherham system and provide strategic leadership to maximise Public Health outcomes within the borough. This includes leadership of the Rotherham Place Prevention and Health Inequalities Group, Rotherham's Combatting Drugs Partnership, the Moving Rotherham Partnership, the Rotherham Tobacco Control Alliance, the Rotherham Food Network, the Suicide Prevention Strategic Group and the Sexual Health Partnership. Through these forums and other roles public

health advice is provided to the NHS, other Council Directorates, schools, workplaces and social care providers to support health improvement across the borough.

- 2.2.3 Life expectancy at birth in Rotherham for males is 1.8 years below the England average and for females is 2.6 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 over nine years for males and ten years for females between the borough's most and least deprived communities. The borough has higher smoking prevalence at 14.5% in adults, and lower levels of physical activity in adults at 64.1%, compared to the national average (11.6% and 67.1% respectively) 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.

## 2.3 **Housing Services**

- 2.3.1 Housing Services hold overall landlord responsibility for the management and maintenance of the borough's 20,000 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 delivering the programme of new, affordable, high quality Council homes in the borough. In addition, the service works with housing associations and housing developers to deliver a range of new homes to meet the Borough's housing needs and delivery targets.
- 2.3.2 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 20,000 council homes are maintained effectively, meet the decent homes standard and continue to deliver an ambitious programme of new homes in the Borough to meet future demands. This will be achieved by building on council owned sites and acquiring new homes from private developers through Section 106 agreements and through market acquisitions.
- 2.3.3 The General Fund budget will continue to be used to address homelessness and deliver aids and adaptations to homes.
- 2.3.4 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, the future of the repairs and maintenance service and other key landlord services is being reviewed in light of contract break clauses and new regulatory requirements.
- 2.3.5 The homelessness service has seen demand increase significantly since the Covid-19 pandemic, leading to increased hotel usage. However, successful grant funding applications and improvements in the operation of

homelessness and temporary accommodation services has successfully contributed to addressing budget pressures in this area.

### **3 Children and Young People's Services**

- 3.1 The Directorate for Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) is responsible for early help and family engagement, the youth justice service, social care services, education and inclusion. 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.
- 3.2 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. This has been mirrored by the continuing significant demands across the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) landscape, resulting in stretched resources and budget pressures nationally.
- 3.3 Against the national trend, Rotherham's improvements in social care have positively impacted on reducing the number of Children in Care (CiC), those subject to Child Protection plans and Children in Need. The reduced demand has been supported through ongoing improvements to Early Help through the Family Help Strategy, the stability and improved practice of the CSC workforce, Family Group Conferencing, Family Network meetings, a comprehensive suite of evidence based programmes and partnership working via the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and community-based teams. There continues to be a steady number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in our care system, with a higher percentage accepted via the Governments National Transfer Scheme, and the resultant implications for our Care Leaver population. There are 38 Unaccompanied Children and 59 Former UASC Care Leavers as of December 2024.
- 3.4 Rotherham continues to receive Family Hubs and Start for Life funding, and this has been extended for a further year by the Department for Education. This funding has added value to existing provision with programmes such as Solihull being introduced in the Borough. Additional collaboration and co-location across the public, community and voluntary sector in Rotherham has been enabled and is now providing swifter access to services for children and families.
- 3.5 The Department for Education is now responsible for the Supporting Families Programme and has suspended the Payment by Results scheme. All the allocated monies for RMBC will be delivered this financial year and continue to expect a focus on an outcomes framework that helps families combat problems such as financial insecurity, unemployment, risk of homelessness and educational inequality. There has been an intimation from Government that this grant will be subsumed into a consolidated "family help" grant in future, but this has yet to be finalised.

- 3.6 In 2025/26 the Directorate priorities are to continue to sustain improvements across Children's Services, through ongoing development and implementation of the new Family Help services, supporting children and families from the earliest point of need in conjunction with partners through to the most specialist services when required; to continue building in-borough capacity for Children in Care through the ongoing Residential Care Home programme and Foster Care offer; additional provision for children with learning difficulties and disabilities; and to continue to further develop interventions and services designed to better support children and families earlier.
- 3.7 The new education and inclusion skills service operating model is now embedded which incorporates key strategic education forums and boards and groups including Schools Forum, School Leaders boards and groups and the Rotherham Area SEND and Alternative Provision Partnership Board and SEND Executive Board. School facing services will be reviewed to ensure that they are efficient and effective, whilst continuing to improve educational outcomes, particularly at Key Stage 4 and for children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities SEND.
- 3.8 An Area SEND Inspection took place in September and October 2024, which evaluated the progress made by the system since the previous Inspection in 2021 and the subsequent Written Statement of Action. It is very pleasing to report the Inspection determined that the local area partnership's special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership is taking action where improvements are needed. This is the highest possible grading, and reflects the hard work of all colleagues involved, focused on achieving the best possible outcomes for children. There were two actions resulting from the Inspection (improvement of Education, Health and Care Plans and improvement of waiting times for some health services) and these will be incorporated in the new SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy due to Cabinet in February 2025.
- 3.9 Work continues to manage the High Needs Budget within the constraints of the Safety Valve Agreement, which is now showing a projected overspend at the end of March 2026 of £2.2M. Despite close alignment to the milestones of the Agreement, including the recent commitment of tripartite funding to enhance the provision at Newman Special School, the nature of the national SEND system and the increasing number of EHCPs awarded to children has meant that the original financial projections can no longer be met. Investment in SEND Sufficiency continues to enhance SEND education provision and support transformation across the borough as evidenced in the Inspection outcome, and this includes continued focused investments, creating additional SEND places in Rotherham which enhance education outcomes for this cohort.
- 3.10 Savings have been delivered in relation to movement of staffing resource into areas of service where needed, as both Children in Care and Child Protection numbers have continued to reduce over the year. Focus is now

on step down plans to support children in care to move to permanent care arrangements, return home safely or transition into independent provision as Care Leavers. Work will now move to the Family Help area of the service, where new arrangements are due to be put in place following the design phase of the Family Help Strategy and the new policy paper from Government, Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive. This will include a focus on kinship care arrangements and further exploration of regional initiatives.

- 3.11 Between April 2024 and September 2025, the Department for Education (DfE) will introduce 30 hours of free childcare for children over 9 months old with working parents. This change will significantly increase the workload for local authorities, who will need to support the sector's expansion and manage funding payments, estimated at around £30 million annually.
- 3.12 Additionally, the Government is investing £289 million over two years to expand wraparound childcare for primary school-aged pupils, providing access from 8am to 6pm. This programme aims to be self-sustaining after the initial setup or expansion phase. The Council will receive £2.3M (in 2024/25) in programme funding to distribute to providers for setting up or expanding provision, and £0.5M in capital funding to support both early years expansion and wraparound provision.
- 3.13 The continued favourable comparison of numbers of children in care to statistical neighbours is linked to the impact of the Demand and Market Management Strategies. The challenge from a budget perspective is the increasing cost of individual placements, especially for those children and young people with complex needs.

## **4 Regeneration and Environment**

- 4.1 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 continuing to secure and deliver significant external funding, linked to the priorities and building upon the Council's own investments. A key part of the work for 2025/26 and into future years is to deliver these projects and programmes as well as delivering services for residents, businesses and visitors.
- 4.2 The Directorate has a broad portfolio of responsibilities including:
- Community safety
  - Environmental protection
  - Licensing
  - Waste collection, management and disposal
  - Street cleaning and grounds maintenance
  - Parks, countryside and green spaces
  - Leisure, sport and physical activity
  - Tourism and visitor economy

- Culture and events
- Children's Capital of Culture
- Heritage, museums, arts and archives
- Libraries and neighbourhood Hubs
- Planning and Building Control
- Regeneration and Economic Development
- Transport and highways
- Emergency Planning, Business Continuity
- Council-wide Health and Safety
- Passenger Transport and Fleet Services

- 4.3 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.
- 4.4 The adopted Town Centre Masterplan is being implemented, with a number of streetscene (Public Realm) improvements completed including Bridgegate, College Street and Frederick Street. Council-led housing developments are now completed within the town centre, establishing the market for future private-led schemes. The town's landscape is continuing to change, with the Forge Island leisure development now completed, with Arc Cinema and Travelodge open, and a portfolio of restaurants and cafés opening soon.
- 4.5 Work is also well underway on the £40m redevelopment of the Markets and a new Central Library. The former Wilko unit was purchased and demolished and 3-7 Corporate Street buildings have also been purchased and demolished in preparation for future development.
- 4.6 2023/24 saw the completion of the Ickles Lock flood alleviation scheme, which is a key addition alongside the new Canal Barrier and links to the Councils wider approach to flood mitigation which will see further schemes brought to a 'shovel ready status' by the end of the 2024/25 financial year. Further funding has been made available by the Council to support delivery and construction of some schemes and further investigation work into potential mitigation for the Catcliffe area following the devastating impacts of Storm Babet in October 2023.
- 4.7 The Council now operates 5 successful business centres, following the opening of the £5.4m Century 2 Business Centre in Manvers. In total across the 5 hubs we now offer 156 office, 84 workshops, 12 meeting rooms, and 2 lab spaces. The centres are strategically located across the borough and are really successful, with over 150 businesses, supporting over 800 jobs. Around 80% of our businesses survive at least 3 years, with over 40% of businesses graduating out to occupy local commercial space. The Swinton regeneration scheme has seen the redevelopment of the Civic Hall and the opening of the new library, with new homes being built. Rotherham, as part



of the South Yorkshire MCA, were part of the Country's first Investment Zone which will see an additional £160m investment into the region from April 2024.

- 4.8 Projects have progressed as part of the £31.6m that was secured from the Towns Fund to carry out ambitious regeneration projects across the town centre, Parkgate/Eastwood and Templeborough. Major regeneration projects are in development in Dinnington and Wath Town Centres, totalling just under £20m. This is in addition to the £39.41m secured via the Government's Pathfinder programme, further bolstering the town centre regeneration programme as well as developing the leisure economy and skills. These include investments which have started on site at Rother Valley Country Park, Wentworth Woodhouse, Magna Science Centre, Maltby Academy and Gulliver's Valley resort. New Changing Places facilities were opened at Clifton Park Museum, Grimm and Co, Magna, Thrybergh Country Park, Rother Valley Country Park, and Wentworth Woodhouse, ensuring that disabled people have significantly improved access to our cultural and leisure assets.
- 4.9 The in-house Highways Service has made huge progress in improving the roads via the "£24 million to 2024" roads programme, which will complete delivery in 2024/25 and has been followed by a further £12m investment going forwards. Work has progressed on a number of Transport schemes (especially cycle and bus) with progress on projects at Sheffield Road, Wellgate/Broom Rd, Wath/Mavers and the Maltby Bus Corridor. The Towns and Villages Fund has seen a number of projects completed during the year and each Ward has a project that is either completed, on-site or in the design stage. The end of October 2023 saw a new contract for the Council's HWRC's which includes a move towards an in-house operation from year 3 as well as new investment at each site. The contract has delivered well within the first year, providing enhanced reuse by working closely with local voluntary, charity and community organisations.
- 4.10 The Council's cultural and leisure sites and venues continue to be popular with residents and visitors alike, reaching over 4m visits and with customer satisfaction ratings averaging over 90%. This year, Waleswood Caravan and Camping site was in the Top 3 best campsites in the country, Clifton Park Museum won awards for its welcome to visitors and Aston Leisure Centre was a runner-up in the most improved and best leisure centre APSE awards.
- 4.11 The Council was successful in delivering the annual Rotherham Show over two days in September, reaching over 45,000 people despite the poor weather. Events such as Uplift skate and arts festival, Plug In and Play, and the Christmas Lights Switch-On brought in over 55,000 visitors to Rotherham town centre.
- 4.12 The Council and its partners successfully launched Children's Capital of Culture, in collaboration with local young people. The first season got off to a flying start with events such as Otherham, Signals and Roots Street Carnival. The programme includes a diverse range of activities in primary, secondary and special schools, a traineeship programme which has worked

with 110 young people to date and an Arts Award programme which has enabled 235 young people to achieve accreditation which helps with accessing university, further training or employment.

- 4.13 Libraries welcomed increasing numbers of new customers to courses, clubs and classes, including at the new Swinton Library which opened its doors in the summer.
- 4.14 Green Spaces secured 4 Green Flags for parks at Clifton, Greasbrough, Rother Valley and Ulley. Visitors to parks continued to enjoy these important local habitats as well as participate on many nature-themed workshops and other events from the National Open Water Swimming Championships to Bonfire Night.
- 4.15 The Museums Arts and Heritage Service has engaged with new communities through its temporary exhibitions programme, commemorating 40 years since the Miner's Strike and celebrating our local natural habitats through Our Habitats, Our Home. Waterloo Kiln was restored with support of a grant from Historic England. This site was home to the world-famous Rockingham Pottery and improved access and interpretation for visitors. Consequently, it has been removed from the national 'Heritage at Risk' database.

## **5 Corporate Support Services**

- 5.1 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.

## **6. Finance and Customer Services**

- 6.1 The Directorate provides services in the following four areas:
  - 1. Financial Services
    - i. Finance, Accounting, Insurance
    - ii. Local Taxation, Housing Benefit, Income Collection and Financial Assessments for care services
    - iii. Procurement
  - 2. Legal Services
    - i. Legal
    - ii. Elections
    - iii. Registration and Bereavement
  - 3. Customer, Information and Digital Services

- i. ICT
    - ii. Customer Services
    - iii. Information Management
  - 4. Property and Facilities Services
    - i. Property Services
    - ii. Facilities Management
    - iii. Catering & Cleaning, School Crossing Patrols
  - 5. Internal Audit
- 6.2 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]). With Property and Facilities Services transferring to the directorate during the last year, there is also now a responsibility within the directorate for health and safety compliance in relation to Council buildings and this has been a significant focus over the last few months of the year.
- 6.3 The work of key directorate professional support services has been critical to supporting the Council in the delivery of a number of major housing and regeneration projects including the Forge Island development as well as capital investments in schools, children's homes and other assets.
- 6.4 The department has also continued to directly support households through delivery of various financial support schemes such as the energy crisis scheme and the Council Tax Support top up scheme whilst the faster payment arrangements that were put in place for local businesses, ensuring their cash flows continue to be supported during the current difficult economic times has remained in place to support businesses whilst the volatility in the economy remains.
- 6.5 Following on from the many online processes developed in recent years, improving Customer access to services continues to be a priority. The investment that was made in customer services telephone staffing has enabled a continued and significant reduction in call wait times to an average of 6 minutes in 2023/24 further reducing to well under 4 minutes during 2024/25. It is now proposed to invest further to enable an ongoing reduction in call wait times ensuring that residents are responded to quickly when they need to contact the Council. The delivery of increased online access to services will also remain a key focus for the year ahead to ensure an ongoing improved customer experience overall.
- 6.6 The Revenues and Benefits service have once again maintained strong comparative performance against other local authorities despite the challenges facing many Rotherham residents whose household finances have been stretched and this supports the Councils budget overall given the

significant inflationary impact on budgets. The delivery of Council funded support schemes and the careful and strategic use of various Government Grants over the last few years has enabled funding to be earmarked for over 14,000 households to once again receive additional Local Council Tax Support as the proposed budget continues this, providing much needed financial support to those households on the lowest incomes.

- 6.7 Within Property and Facilities Services, a significant amount of work has been undertaken to review health and safety and compliance arrangements within Council owned buildings to ensure that both Council used operational buildings and Council owned community assets are safe and fit for purpose. Alongside ongoing compliance work, this year's Budget proposes an increase in capital funding over the next two years for community facilities that are already in use but would benefit from investment to sustain and increase the participation, community activities and engagement within those facilities.

## **7 Assistant Chief Executive's Directorate**

- 7.1 The Directorate has six distinct areas of responsibility:

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

- 7.2 The Directorate has continued to provide support to services across Council directorates, including facilitating the delivery and monitoring of Council priorities as set out in the Year Ahead Plan 2024/25, and extensive work to consult on and develop a new Council Plan from 2025.

- 7.3 During 2024/25, the directorate has continued to play a pivotal role in the Council. Key deliverables include:

- Providing a reliable source of information to the public and the workforce in different formats, including regular neighbourhood e-bulletins.
- Continuing to take a lead role in the implementation of key strategic documents including the Council Plan and Year Ahead Delivery Plan, Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, Social Value Policy, Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and Rotherham Together Partnership Plan.
- Supporting the delivery of the Council Plan's priorities through an internal, cross-council delivery programme and taking a lead role on a number of cross-cutting workstreams.

- Providing high quality data reporting on a monthly and quarterly basis, providing essential information to inform decision making and progress monitoring.
- Continuation of effective and accountable democratic decision making.
- Following the all-out elections in May 2024, supporting new and returning ward members to act as community leaders so they can initiate and fund activity to support local vulnerable people and deliver ward priorities.
- Implementation of the Workforce Plan that aims to position the Council as an 'employer of choice', improving our attraction, retention and engagement methods and focuses on an engaged, diverse and skilled workforce.

7.4 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 ward plans. The Directorate has also continued to facilitate partnership working and development of key policy areas including social value, asylum and resettlement, crisis support, community cohesion and equalities. During this year, the Council achieved 'Gold' Status for the Employee Recognition Scheme which sets out the Council's commitment to support the Armed Forces Community and their families.

7.5 The directorate has also worked closely with all directorates to monitor and deliver the Council Plan for 2022-25, including delivery of the Council's priorities. This has included consulting extensively and developing a new Council Plan to commence from April 2025, at the expiration of the current plan. Through this process almost 2,000 short interactions have been undertaken to inform the new plan.

7.6 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 residents, partners and the workforce.
- Provide oversight and quality assurance on progress against the new Council Plan priorities through effective reporting and monitoring of the Year Ahead Delivery Plan.
- Work with partners to implement the new partnership social value action plan, once approved, to maximise the impact of our collective spending power.
- Continue to progress on the Council's journey to 'excellent' against the Equalities Framework for Local Government by embedding equalities, diversity and inclusion commitments into Council activity, refreshing its strategy and taking forward learning and recommendations from this year's assessment by Doncaster City Council.

- Update the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and continue to support Members in their Community Leadership role and build on our neighbourhood working model to develop a clearer and shared understanding of integrated locality working across the public sector.
- Champion and promote the council's strengths-based approach when working with communities, including the delivery of a staff learning and development programme.
- Seek to build on the current neighbourhood working model through more integrated, place-based working across Council services in localities.
- Enhance partnership working to achieve better outcomes across the borough through the ongoing delivery of the Rotherham Together Plan.
- Continue to develop and support the workforce, enhancing skills and knowledge across the organisation.
- Continue to support all Members following the All-Out Elections in May 2024 and ongoing support via a supplementary Member Development Programme to ensure and support 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 and improving services for customers.
- 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.

7.7 In the coming 12 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.