

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 23 June 2026

Present:- Councillor McKiernan (in the Chair); Councillors Adair, Beck, Bennett-Sylvester, C. Carter, Castledine-Dack, Jackson, Jones, Rashid, Stables, Steele, Taylor, Thorp and Tinsley and Co-optees Mrs Kay Bacon and Mrs M Jacques.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Duncan, Garnett, Mault and Lelliott (Councillor Steele attending as substitute).

Councillor Linda Beresford - Cabinet Member for Housing
Andrew Bramidge - Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment
Sarah Clyde - Service Director of Housing
Sarah Watts - Strategic Housing Manager
Garry Newton - Housing Development Intelligence Coordinator
Martin Hughes - Head of Neighbourhoods
Chris Paddock – Interim Director of Policy, Strategy & Engagement
Kristianne Thorogood – Governance Advisor
Barbel Gale – Governance Manager

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-
<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

1. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 21 APRIL 2026

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 April 2026 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester declared an interest in Minute No.7 (Housing Strategy 2025-2030 Progress Report Year 1 (2025-26)) on the grounds that they are a council tenant.

3. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

The Chair advised that there were no members of the public or representatives of media organisations present at the meeting and there were no questions in respect of matters on the agenda.

4. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair advised that there were no items of business on the agenda that would require the exclusion of the press or public from the meeting.

5. IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION - TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Chair informed Members that the Improving Places Select Commission's Terms of Reference had been included in the agenda pack to ensure that new and returning Members were sighted on the Commission's responsibilities and that they be duly considered in relation to work programming and scrutiny activities conducted during the 2026-27 municipal year.

6. HEALTH, WELFARE AND SAFETY PANEL - REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION

The Chair sought a representative from the Improving Places Select Commission to sit as a member on the Health, Welfare and Safety Panel.

Resolved:-

That the Improving Places Select Commission appointed Councillor Thorp as its representative on the Health, Welfare and Safety Panel for the 2026/27 municipal year.

7. HOUSING STRATEGY 2025-30 PROGRESS REPORT YEAR 1 (2025-26)

At the Chair's invitation, Councillor Beresford, Cabinet Member for Housing (Cabinet Member), introduced the item and explained that the Housing Strategy (Strategy) had been approved and published in late 2025, after a period of consultation with residents, tenants, council officers, partners and Members.

The Year One progress report and accompanying presentation highlighted the progress made against key performance indicators to deliver the Strategy and improve the lives of residents across the borough.

The Cabinet Member reminded Members that the Housing Strategy was a cross-tenure strategy and that work delivered under it for was for the benefit of all Rotherham residents, whether they were council tenants, tenants of housing associations, tenants of private landlords or homeowners.

Sarah Clyde, Service Director for Housing (Service Director) took Members through the presentation accompanying the report, highlighting the following points:

Priority 1 – Building high quality, sustainable and affordable homes

It was explained that it was crucially important to have housing growth within the borough to meet current and future housing need. It was

reported that the number of residents on the housing waiting list had reduced over the last six months, largely as a result of the introduction of the new Housing Allocations Policy in December 2025. There were still 5,500 residents on the housing waiting list and many residents in the housing market looking for affordable homes to rent or buy.

One of the key performance indicators (KPIs) under Priority 1 of the Strategy, was to ensure that enough new homes of diverse and affordable nature were built. In the year 2025-26, a total of 778 new homes had been built across the borough. This did not meet the government's new target of 1,111 new homes, but the Service Director commented that current challenging market conditions meant that developers were not building as quickly. The housing targets set were very challenging, and the Service Director assured Members that the Housing team would continue to work with developers to meet housing need, whilst also ensuring a high-quality standard of build.

It was confirmed that in 2025-26, the local planning authority had approved 656 additional homes through the planning process, which evidenced a clear pipeline of sites for development. The Service Director explained that the Local Plan Review would also be carried out over the next couple of years and would form the strategic spatial development plan for Rotherham, linking in with the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA).

Another KPI under Priority 1 was to ensure that a minimum of 25% of new homes were affordable housing. The Council had over-achieved on this KPI as the percentage of new affordable homes in 2025/26 represented 34% of the total delivery. This 34% covered homes built by developer partners, housing associations and the council's own build programme.

The council had committed to delivering 1,000 new council houses by summer 2027. These would not necessarily all be new build properties, but a mix of new homes and older properties converted or brought back to use. By the end of 2025-26, a total of 788 additional council homes had been delivered. There were a further 212 required to reach the target of 1,000, but the Service Director was confident that with increasing numbers of council new-builds, the acquisition of new and existing properties into council stock and a number of new sites being developed (e.g Maltby, Eastwood, Wath & West Melton), this target would be met.

The Service Director confirmed that as well as investment from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), the council had also managed to secure £12 million of grant funding from SYMCA and Homes England to support further new build homes. Rotherham had been one of the first local authorities to draw down the new Social and Affordable Housing Programme (SARP) funding, which became available in 2026-27.

Priority 2 – Improving the safety, quality and energy efficiency of our homes

Priority 2 under the Strategy was concerned with ensuring that the existing stock within the borough (both council housing and the private rental sector) is safe, of high quality and is energy efficient.

The Service Director explained that the Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSMs) on council owned properties had been included in the presentation but had not been provided within the IPSC Agenda pack due to publication of the Cabinet report the day prior to the meeting.

The TSMs were reported annually to the Regulator of Social Housing and would be made publicly available on the council website. The Housing service conducted an annual survey to ask council tenants how they felt about their properties on a number of measures, for example:- how satisfied they were, how safe they felt and their views on the quality of repairs.

It was explained that when compared against the benchmarking figure in the middle column of the table on slide 6 (which represented averages across the country for 2024-25), Rotherham's scores for 2025-26, were all in the upper quartile of results. The 25/26 benchmarking would not be available until November, once all data had been collected at a national level.

The exception to this was TP09 (Satisfied with their landlords' approaches to complaints handling), which was still in the median quartile. The Service Director confirmed that this measure was an area of key focus for the Housing Service, who would be working with the Corporate team to ensure that this satisfaction measure could be improved in 2026-27.

The third column on the table represented the 2025-26 survey outcome, where some areas had been marked in red as they had slightly dipped in comparison to the 2024-25 figures, but were still benchmarking in the upper quartile against other local authorities and housing associations.

The Service Director reported that the council had increased the percentage of properties that met the Housing Regulators' Decent Homes Standard to 95.17%. The Service Director explained that the remaining 4.83% of homes that had not met the standard equated to 855 homes within the council's portfolio. There were a number of reasons why these homes had not met the standard, including work currently being carried out and difficulties in obtaining access to the properties.

The council had set a target of achieving EPC C-rating on 100% of its housing stock by 2030. The Service Director reported that at the end of 2025-26, the level of council homes with at least EPC C-rating had reached 61.6% and funding had been set aside within the HRA to meet this target and maximise opportunities to progress the Warm Homes

Programme.

With regard to the transactional and compliance Building Safety Measures which were also reported to the Housing Regulator, the Service Director confirmed that the council had achieved 100% compliance rates in 2025-26 on the following:- fire risk assessments; asbestos management surveys and inspections; legionella risk assessments; and communal lift safety checks. For gas safety checks, the council had 99.9% compliance. This equated to 13 non-compliant properties, of which 6 had appointments scheduled and 7 properties had not provided access. A court process was underway to gain access to these 7 properties to ensure that they were safe.

The Service Director explained to Members that the council had secured £8.8 million of funding via the government's Warm Homes Programme, which would assist in bringing approximately 950 properties up to EPC C-rating. The Housing team had been working closely with SYMCA, as it was understood that monies that had been previously distributed to local authorities by the government directly could in future be devolved and distributed regionally. It was hoped that future funding would enable the council to deliver energy-efficiency measures cross-tenure.

Priority 3 – Preventing homelessness and supporting our residents to live independently

Preventing homelessness and supporting residents to live independently had been an area of key focus for the Housing team in 2025-26. It was explained that significant investment had been provided to improve and increase the caretaking offer within the borough, and to provide an environmental improvement initiative in certain areas of some housing estates.

A new Homelessness Prevention Strategy had been approved and an Action Plan under this was being developed. Delivery under this Strategy would require full system approach with key partners and stakeholders to tackle homelessness and ensure that a clear prevention pathway was in place.

The Service Director outlined that in 2025-26, 3,509 people had approached the Housing Options team for help, and the council owed a duty of care to over 1,900 of those people. There were currently 173 temporary accommodation units, and the aim was to try and reduce that figure over time and continue to reduce hotel usage. The Service Director highlighted the recent development at Castle View in Canklow, which was a joint project with the Adult Social Care team, as an example of where the council had supported residents to live more independently. A range of different properties and units had been developed at this site, which demonstrated how the council was using its evidence base and information on needs requirements to ensure that the right kind of properties were developed. It was hoped this approach would keep

people in their homes for longer and ensure that housing became an enabler rather than a disabler.

As part of its Housing Acquisitions Programme, the council had looked to acquire accommodation to meet specific need, such as larger family accommodation, smaller one-bedroom properties and properties that could be adapted to meet those with specific needs.

Priority 4 – Ensuring that our neighbourhoods are safe, happy and thriving

As part of the work to ensure that neighbourhoods were safe, happy and thriving, investment of £1.9 million had been allocated through the HRA budget. Examples were provided of work which had been undertaken to improve the caretaking service and environmental improvement works, such as additional pavements at St Mary's in Munsborough.

The Service Director confirmed that there had been a focus on anti-social behaviour (ASB) during 2025-26, which had been a key area of concern when IPSC had been consulted on the Housing Strategy in autumn 2025. In 2026-27, the Housing team would be implementing a new NEC council housing system, which would be utilised to track and progress ASB cases more easily. Training had been procured for all staff on the new system, including colleagues within the Community Protection Unit, who worked closely with the Housing team in dealing with ASB. As part of the Housing Transformation Programme, it was key to ensure that there was a smooth pathway in place to accelerate ASB cases, with one key point of contact in place for each case.

It was reported that the council continued to work on bringing empty homes back to use, with a proactive Empty Homes Officer in place. A case study example was provided to Members of an empty, privately-owned property in Swinton which was purchased by Action Housing, a supported housing provider, who worked to convert the property into four one-bedroom affordable, supported living homes for young adults with learning disabilities. This case study demonstrated how the Housing team had worked with partners and stakeholders to deliver improved housing for residents in need, fulfilling all priorities under the Strategy.

Looking forward to 2026-27, the Service Director confirmed that meeting the target of 1,000 new council homes by summer 2027 remained a key focus, and that a further 150 homes were due to be delivered within the financial year 2026-27. With regard to the government's new homes target for the borough, a Housing Growth Framework was being developed, and the Housing team would continue to work with developers to ensure that there was a pipeline of development sites coming forward.

With regard to existing housing stock, a programme of stock condition surveys would continue and inform longer-term investment plans for council houses. An options piece of work would be carried out on the

future of the council's repairs and maintenance contract, as the current one was due to come to an end in 2030. It was planned that a report would be brought to Cabinet in Spring 2027 outlining the options available. Collaborative work would be undertaken with tenants to understand what was important to them with regard to repairs and maintenance.

The Service Director confirmed that a Strategic Housing Market Assessment would be carried out to provide an updated picture of the housing need requirements across the borough, from both a general needs and a supported needs perspective. A Supported Housing Strategy was also being developed to inform plans for future specialist and supported accommodation.

An Energy Crisis Fund had been made available over the last quarter of 2025-26. The council had made a commitment to deliver this kind of funding all year round and as a result, the Crisis Resilience Fund had been recently launched. The Service Director reported that the council had already helped 353 people to make claims, with almost £50,000 allocated.

The Service Director reminded Members that the Housing team was in the middle of a transformation programme, with the aim of ensuring that the council had a fit for purpose service which would deliver against the Housing Strategy and fulfil the goal of being the best council housing provider. As part of this, the Housing team wished to work more closely with tenants to ensure that exemplar status from the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) could be secured.

The Chair thanked officers for the report and presentation and invited Members of IPSC to raise questions and queries on the Housing Strategy 2025-30 Progress Report Year 1 (2025-26), and in the ensuing question and answer session the following points were raised:-

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester asked a question around the issue of under-occupancy across the council housing portfolio. For example, where there were large family homes occupied by only one or two people who would be better suited to a bungalow or retirement accommodation but there was no incentive for them to move. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester asked whether the council planned to tackle the issue of under-occupancy across council housing by creating more quality retirement accommodation or accommodation better suited for people with disabilities.

In response, the Service Director acknowledged that developers often got things wrong and did not necessarily build what residents needed. For example, bungalows were popular but not a favourite of developers due to the "land hungry" nature of them. More money could be made by developers from building flats or smaller properties on the same site.

The Service Director confirmed that in the next tranche of the council's own build programme, there would be a further 500 homes coming forward and a Strategic Market Assessment would be carried out to fully understand what residents want and need from council housing. The market would not deliver everything so it would be the council's job to use the evidence base to fill in the gaps in housing need.

Further, the Service Director explained that the new Housing Allocations Policy was stricter and would not allow people to bid on properties that were larger than their need. There needed to be incentives in place to encourage people to downsize and accommodation available that was attractive enough for people to make the decision to move before it became a crisis situation.

The Service Director commented that when building homes, the council and housing associations needed to lead the way and show developers what residents actually needed to enable them to stay in houses longer-term. For example, factoring in easier adaptations at build stage that would save money later on, such as plumbing in place for level access showers, larger toilet arrangements and accessible and manageable garden space.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Bennett-Sylvester asked about the distribution of workload between Housing Officers and whether there was enough support for them to have sufficient staff on the ground getting to know an area and its residents deeply, given that they were the first port of call for residents.

In response, the Service Director explained that the Housing transformation programme referred to earlier, would involve a review of Housing Management teams and agreements that were in place with the Neighbourhoods teams to deliver additional resources to support, via the HRA.

The Service Director commented that the role of the Housing Officer had changed significantly in recent years, with a lot of time now taken up with dealing with ASB and a small percentage of residents. A lot of other local authorities had started to separate ASB from the Housing Officer's role in order to provide a more streamlined service. If ASB issues could be escalated to a separate team this would free up the Housing Officer's time and enable them to be more visible and spend more time on day-to-day issues on their estates, whilst preserving trust and rapport with residents.

With regard to tracking ASB, the Chair asked whether with improved tracking systems, service anticipated a spike in homelessness figures where repeat offenders had run out of chances with the council and had effectively become homeless due to persistent ASB.

In response, the Service Director commented that there needed to be a balance between supporting people to sustain their tenancies but also

taking enforcement action against those who persistently breached their tenancy agreements. Residents who had reported ASB needed to be assured that action would be taken in order to have faith in the system.

However, the Service Director was keen to stress that any council tenants who were evicted due to ASB would continue to be given support by the council in seeking alternative accommodation via the Homeless team. Whilst there may be an increase in homelessness due to enforcement in ASB issues, the Housing team was also proud of the levels of tenant sustainability and also of the support available to try and prevent homelessness, which would always be a last resort.

Councillor Steele commented that it would be difficult to manage the situation if Housing Officers were asked to dedicate more time to dealing with ASB, particularly given that many estates now had a mix of council tenants and homeowners. The Service Director clarified that service would actually be looking to take the pressure of dealing with ASB away from Housing Officers. Service was looking at working more closely with the CPU team, who currently took on escalated ASB issues, to form a combined team of specialist delivery. This would provide consistency in contact and reporting mechanisms for residents.

The Service Director commented that enhanced cross-directorate working would be required to ensure that the right resources were in the right places to tackle ASB and that HRA money was spent appropriately to support both council and private tenants and homeowners on estates.

Councillor Steele commented that they had seen the difference that could be made on an estate when a good Housing Manager and a good Neighbourhood Coordinator worked together. However, this could be a difficult balance and in a further question, Councillor Steele asked how cross-directorate working would be built in and encouraged when dealing with ASB.

The Service Director responded, commenting that a clear joint policy and pathway would be key, with good understanding of the processes, the escalation routes and the enforcement options. If the ASB process was streamlined, with a dedicated team looking after it, this would free up Housing Management teams to undertake work on building relationships with residents on the ground. The Housing team were working closely with the Service Director of Community Safety & Street Scene and the CPU team to understand how to create a dedicated, cross-tenure resource to ensure that the council had one, consistent approach to ASB.

The Chair asked whether there was a clear exit plan in place to reduce reliance on hotel use as temporary accommodation. Whilst the figures for hotel use had decreased, it still remained high.

The Service Director responded, stating that the number of temporary accommodation units had increased to try and avoid having to use hotels.

However, service also needed to be mindful of the amount of time people were staying in this “temporary” accommodation. One of the delivery plan targets for the year ahead was to ensure that nobody stayed in temporary accommodation for longer than six months. Otherwise, the knock-on effect was that other people could become homeless due to the unavailability of temporary accommodation.

The Service Director confirmed that a current focus was to address those that had been in temporary accommodation for longer periods of time and free up the accommodation that had been unavailable which in turn, should reduce hotel usage. Last year, there had been 6,000 days’ worth of hotel stays used across the council’s Rough Sleeper initiative. The council would also need to make sure that there were enough decant properties available – for example, in emergency situations such as fire – so that these residents were not moved into hotels.

In a supplementary question, the Chair commented that residents had complained when the same houses were consistently used as temporary accommodation as neighbours bear the brunt of the constant change of people living in them. The Chair enquired whether there was any plan to address this and consider rotating the use of properties as temporary council accommodation.

The Service Director confirmed that the temporary accommodation was well dispersed across the borough but acknowledged that where there had been specific issues, the council had taken property back or had looked to reallocate individuals who had been in the property for a longer period of time.

The Housing team intended to significantly reduce the current 173 temporary accommodation units down to a more manageable level as a full-time job member of staff was required to manage these properties, whereas the focus should be moving people on to something more permanent.

Councillor Jones commented that he agreed that it would be appropriate to have a separate ASB team. This would help to improve the public perception that when complaints around ASB are reported, they did not get escalated quickly enough.

In an additional question, Councillor Jones asked whether under the plans for new house building, any thought had been given to the concept of a “cradle to grave” community, whereby suitable housing stock was provided within the same estate for all stages of life. Councillor Jones mentioned empty and disused areas of land within existing housing estates where bungalows could potentially be built.

The Service Director referred again to the planned Housing Needs Assessment and that a survey would be carried out with residents to help the Housing team to understand what residents really want from housing.

A review of council-owned garage sites across the borough would also be conducted to ascertain whether any had reached the end of their usable life and the land they sat on could be used for future building. A call for suitable sites for building would also be made as part of the Local Plan process.

The Service Director commented that on all housing sites coming forward, the council would try and provide a mix of accommodation types, to try and encourage long-term sustainability to the sites. It was stressed that the council should only look to build what the market hadn't already. Developers could build larger family accommodation cheaply and the council should fill in the gaps in availability and provide the smaller, adapted and bungalow-type accommodation that developers generally don't build.

Councillor Thorp asked for confirmation as to the process by which properties are identified for energy efficiency works to get them up to EPC C-rating – whether they would be looked at individually or assessed as a block and works carried out regardless.

The Service Director explained that a programme of stock condition surveys was currently underway on all council properties, with approximately 6,500 carried out in the last year. As part of these surveys, an EPC assessment would be carried out routinely which would identify areas where properties needed work to bring them up to EPC C-rating. Around 61% of housing stock was currently at EPC C-rating. The council had £8.8 million of funding available under the Warm Homes Scheme to assist with energy efficiency improvements. The surveys would also identify where there were opportunities to future-proof properties, such as by adding external wall insulation.

The Service Director explained that the council had to report to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) under the Warm Homes Programme on the works that had been carried out on each property. An assessment would be carried out at the start and the end of any retrofit by a qualified assessor.

In a follow-on question, Councillor Thorp asked whether reports that the council was removing all gas fires from properties were accurate. The Service Director confirmed that gas fires may have been removed from certain properties if they needed to be upgraded and that any new build properties could no longer be built with gas fires in. It was a government requirement to build with more sustainable energy options, such as air source heat pumps and solar panels. There was no active programme to remove all gas fires and, in some circumstances, gas boilers were being replaced as part of the Decent Homes Programme.

Councillor Jackson asked in relation to Priority 3 (Preventing homelessness and supporting our residents to live independently) whether there had been discussions with NHS partners and social care

regarding the shortage of adapted properties and the cost implications of providing additional care, particularly for people with acute brain injuries.

The Service Director explained that the needs assessment previously referred to, would incorporate the requirements of support and specialist care and that the government had asked councils to produce a Supported Housing Strategy, on which the Housing team would work with Adult Social Care to develop.

The Service Director confirmed that the Housing team worked closely with Occupational Health and Adult Social care to try and match specific needs to specific properties and would look for properties suitable for adaptation when looking to acquire properties from the market. It was acknowledged, however, that there could always be more work done between services to support residents with specific needs.

The Chair asked for more information on future plans for the Repairs & Maintenance contract, which was due for renewal, and whether the council had considered bringing the service back in-house rather than outsourcing it.

The Service Director explained that a report had gone to Cabinet in 2025 that took the decision to extend the current contract with external providers to 2030. However, a review of future options was currently ongoing. The council had engaged an external company, Lumensol, who were specialists in this sector, to assist with this work and engagement with tenants was underway to understand what was important to them with regard to repairs and maintenance. It was hoped that a report would go to Cabinet in Spring 2027, setting out all of the possible options, one of which could be bringing the work back within the council.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester referred to the issues around under-occupancy of council properties discussed earlier in the meeting and asked IPSC Members to consider making a recommendation asking for a service to provide an update, following the first year of the new Housing Allocation Policy, on whether there had been any impact on levels of under-occupancy. The Chair asked Members to vote on this proposed additional recommendation, and it was approved.

The Chair thanked officers for their input and Members for the questions asked.

Resolved:-

- 1) That the progress made in delivering the priorities and actions set out in Rotherham's Housing Strategy 2025-30 be noted;
- 2) That IPSC agrees to continue to receive annual Housing Strategy Progress Reports;

- 3) That IPSC agrees that future Housing Strategy Progress Reports will be reported to the Improving Places Select Commission in September each year, to ensure that all data is available (for the reasons set out in Section 1.5 of the Report); and

As a further recommendation, the Improving Places Select Commission requested:-

- 4) That an update be provided to IPSC in 6-12 months' time regarding the issue of under-occupancy in council-owned properties and whether implementation of the new Housing Allocations Policy has had an impact on levels of under occupancy.

(Councillor Bennett-Sylvester declared an interest in Minute No.7 (Housing Strategy 2025-2030 Progress Report Year 1 (2025-26)) on the grounds that they are a council tenant.)

8. NEIGHBOURHOOD LEADERSHIP STRATEGY

At the Chair's invitation, Chris Paddock, Interim Director of Policy, Strategy & Engagement (Interim Director) introduced the item and explained that the former Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy had reached the end of its lifespan (2018-2025), which provided an opportunity to review the council's approach to neighbourhood working and how best to make residents feel more connected to council services.

The former Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy had created a new model of working and had enabled Councillors to play a more prominent role in their localities, to have more control over ward budgets and to exert more influence over the local provision of services.

This model of neighbourhood working had been praised in a 2023 Local Government Association (LGA) peer review and recognised as an example of best practise nationally.

The Interim Director explained that the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act had introduced a new statutory duty on local authorities to establish appropriate arrangements for effective neighbourhood governance. The aim of this was to move decision making closer to residents so that it would be led by the people who most understand local needs.

From this position of strength and proven good practice, the council had decided to develop two strategies to sit alongside each other to support neighbourhood working. A new iteration of the Thriving Neighbourhood Strategy would be presented to Cabinet in December and would set out more wide-ranging plans for how the council intended to work with partners to deliver greater impact in neighbourhoods. The Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy would be introduced first and was due to be presented to Cabinet in early July 2026.

The council had worked with Councillors from all parties and officers across the council to develop a more ambitious strategy which would place Councillors, in their role as local leaders, at the heart of a more responsive, resident-led approach to local government.

The Interim Director explained that, to underpin this strength-based approach, a set of characteristics of the “21st Century Rotherham Councillor” had been co-produced. Ward priorities, local budgeting process and Neighbourhood Coordinators would continue to be in place but would be informed by better evidence. Councillors would be given more opportunity to advocate for their residents and communicate local sentiments to the council to enable council services to be more responsive. All Councillors who wanted to participate would be supported to maximise their role as neighbourhood leaders, to help places thrive and to support Rotherham’s residents to live well.

The Interim Director took Members through the presentation on the Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy 2026-2032 (Strategy), highlighting the following points:-

Co-Production

- The Strategy had been developed via co-production with Councillors and officers. A workshop had been held with Members of IPSC and OSMB in April 2026 to obtain their views and opinions on what the Strategy should cover.
- The views of officers across all services at the council were also sought to create the framework for the two strategies and to consider the relationship between Councillors and council services and how they can work together to respond better to local needs.
- There was reported to be strong support for the Neighbourhoods Team and the role that Neighbourhood Coordinators play in supporting Councillors. However, there was a feeling that more could be done to support Councillors to have influence over services, both internally and externally. The top area of priority would be improved communication between departments within the council and also, between specific services and Councillors. It was hoped that the Strategy would help to address this.
- In line with government sentiments, it was clear that Councillors wanted to put residents at the heart of this work and that this would be key to the successful operation of the strategy.

Vision & Ambition

- The Strategy would seek to build on the already strong foundations of neighbourhood working in Rotherham. It would give Councillors an enhanced role as conveners and conduits for residents’ aspirations, helping the council to be more ready to listen, learn and respond to residents’ needs.
- The anticipated outcome of this would be that people felt more connected to the council, building trust and agency in all of

Rotherham's neighbourhoods.

Key Changes

- The new Strategy would provide a more distinct focus on the role of Councillors, not just within Rotherham, but also within the regional context. In designing the Strategy, the council had consulted with SYMCA, who confirmed that they also wanted to work towards a position where local Councillors had a distinct role within the regional system.
- Fundamental to the success of the Strategy would be a stronger and more responsive connection between neighbourhoods and council services.
- To enable Councillors to succeed as neighbourhood leaders, more support would be provided to help Councillors to develop their skills. Stronger arrangements for monitoring and tracking success under the Strategy would also be developed.

The “21st Century Rotherham Councillor”

- Councillors and officers had worked together to come up with a list of characteristics and attributes that they felt defined the “21st Century Councillor” from a Rotherham-specific perspective. These 10 characteristics were set out in the Strategy itself and were provided in the presentation at page 58 of the Agenda pack.

Action Areas

To deliver on the aims of the Strategy, six action areas were identified, as follows:-

1. Ward Priorities and Plan

The intention was to continue the commitment to produce ward priorities and plans every two years, but to improve and enhance the data and evidence used to do that. Alongside this, new protocols would be developed to link the enhanced evidence base to future service delivery and future tracking of impact.

2. Devolved Ward Budgets

A number of different funds were already devolved to wards, but it was intended to enhance ward budgets via more intensive support around seed and match funding. This could offer Councillors the opportunity to explore possible new approaches in engaging residents in funding decisions.

3. Leadership in Support of Council and Partner Services

It was considered fundamental to establish stronger links between neighbourhoods, residents and council services. This would also apply to external services such as the police, health partners, the voluntary and community sector and educational partners. The intention would be to empower the Neighbourhoods Team to have greater influence over the way that council services were delivered and to have strong expectations of quicker and definitive

responses and routes of escalation.

4. Leadership Development

Ongoing support for Councillors around leadership development would be required. Leadership training and coaching was being developed with the Democratic Services and Member Support teams. It was hoped that a stronger team mentality could be developed between Neighbourhood Coordinators and Councillors so that they could support each other in their roles.

5. The Role of Residents in Neighbourhood Leadership

The aim would be for residents to feel that Councillors and Neighbourhood Coordinators were working to provide them with a stronger sense of influence and agency within the areas they live in. Work was underway with colleagues in Communications to support delivery of this message and to consider how best Councillors could best feed residents' views back into service delivery.

6. Monitoring Impact and Feeding Back

This had been identified as a weakness in the previous strategy. As a result, part of the early stages of delivery of this Strategy would be to build stronger structures and processes to supportively reflect on performance and incorporate feedback from residents to support improvement.

The Chair thanked officers for the presentation and invited Members of IPSC to raise questions and queries on Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy, and in the ensuing question and answer session, the following points were raised:-

The Chair asked how the council would ensure that the Strategy delivered tangible outcomes and not just improved processes. In response, the Interim Director explained that the ward plans and priorities would be key in mapping out local need and aspiration. These would also provide key indicators against which tangible outcomes could be assessed. The Interim Director commented that it was hoped that increased trust from residents in the council, democracy and their representation at local level would be a broader tangible outcome.

The Chair commented that outcomes under the Strategy were of crucial importance and asked how the council would ensure that all officers across the council, not just the Neighbourhood Coordinators, would pay heed to the aims of the Strategy.

In response, the Interim Director confirmed that improved processes of escalation and methods of capturing feedback would be implemented to support delivery. Martin Hughes, the Head of Neighbourhoods (Head of Neighbourhoods) further commented that once the Strategy had been approved by Cabinet, service would immediately embark on setting up the

protocols and frameworks to support delivery of the Strategy. For example, meetings with senior leadership across all Directorates would be planned over the summer months, with a view to filtering information regarding the Strategy down to all teams across the council. The Head of Neighbourhoods reminded Councillors that a new Director of Policy, Strategy and Engagement had started at the council that week, but it was hoped that this would not adversely affect the timelines for implementation of the Strategy.

In a further comment, the Interim Director confirmed that the Strategy had already been discussed with the Senior Leadership Team at the council and the expectations on council services under the Strategy had been made very clear.

Councillor Beck commented that whilst the new Strategy represented a good aggregation of existing good practice in neighbourhood working in Rotherham, it didn't demonstrate a huge evolution from the previous strategy. Councillor Beck did acknowledge that the development might become more evident once delivery was underway.

The Interim Director agreed that the Strategy set out the aspirations and that that the improved outcomes would be evident via the delivery. The Interim Director further explained that the second part of this approach, the new Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy, would provide more detail on how Councillors and council services should deal with specific issues within Rotherham neighbourhoods.

The Chair commented that one change that had been recommended in the Member Workshop on the Strategy was that a casework-type system be introduced for neighbourhood issues, which would represent a development from previous practice.

The Head of Neighbourhoods commented that as the council was starting from a position of strength with regard to neighbourhood working, the Strategy sought to take the next steps to build on this. A key area of development which had come out of the Member Workshop and survey, was a strengthened role for Neighbourhood Coordinators to be advocates for Councillors and to be able to push for rapid responses on issues. To assist with this, service would look to implement a casework-type system to more easily track and escalate issues. This would support the Strategy's aims of increased communication and joint working.

The Head of Neighbourhoods explained that it had not been possible to share the full draft Strategy with Councillors prior to the meeting, due to the timing of the publication of the Cabinet Report (Members had been provided with a paper copy of the Strategy in the meeting). The Strategy set out an increased expectation on council services to communicate with Councillors on issues/events/planned works affecting their wards. It also provided for deeper engagement with residents and for wider promotion and understanding of the role of a Councillor, within communities and the

council itself, via internal and external communications campaigns. Further detail on the content of the Strategy could be found within the Cabinet report.

Councillor Thorp commented that whilst they agreed with the aims and aspirations set out within the Strategy, they were of the opinion that more work needed to be done by the council to involve Councillors with the development of strategies at an earlier stage. Councillor Thorp mentioned a number of recent strategies that had been put before Cabinet without any prior consultation with Members.

The Interim Director confirmed that the success of the Strategy would, in part, depend on changes in behaviour and established systems. It was hoped that the introduction of a casework-type system and clearer routes of escalation would help with this, but the Interim Director acknowledged that this could be challenging.

In response, Councillor Thorp expressed the opinion that for the Strategy to be successful, there needed to be a culture change from the top down i.e from Cabinet and the Senior Leadership team within the council. The Interim Director pointed out that the attributes of the “21st Century Rotherham Councillor” would apply to Cabinet members as well.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester agreed that the Strategy was evolutionary rather than revolutionary but acknowledged that neighbourhood working in the last 10 years had vastly improved from the days of Area Assemblies. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester raised the issue of resource to fund the aspirations of the Strategy, given that ward budgets had not increased and in real terms, were decreasing year on year. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester expressed frustration with the way that funding flowed out to services disproportionately between wards and suggested that Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) monies could be better used towards neighbourhood needs.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester complimented service on the strengths-based working training that had been delivered in 2025 and requested that this be revisited as it would help Councillors to understand how, as neighbourhood leaders, they could help to empower and enable residents to feel confident to do things for themselves.

The Interim Director responded on the resourcing pressures and agreed that for some wards, the funding would not be enough. The primary mechanism under the Strategy would be to enable services to be more responsive and for every pound to be wisely spent in the right localities due to better information, better communication and better processes.

The Head of Neighbourhoods confirmed the council’s ongoing commitment to the development of staff with regard to strength-based working. A community of practice for council officers had been established, which included going out to wards and talking to Councillors

about strength-based working. Online resources were also available to support staff to utilise strength-base working in their every day practice.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester was encouraged that strength-based working was becoming part of the working culture and commented that all services across the council needed to have bought into the concept for it to be fully effective.

Councillor Tinsley reflected that, as a member of the Member & Democratic Panel, it was disappointing that the level of take-up for training offered to Councillors remained low. Councillor Tinsley asked whether any customised training was being considered to encourage Councillors to participate more.

The Interim Director confirmed that further conversations were needed with Councillors to tailor a training offer that worked best for them. It was hoped that by offering something more akin to Leadership Support, which was a valuable transferable skill, this would encourage Councillors to engage. However, the intention was to create a supportive environment that Councillors wanted to engage with and not make training compulsory.

The Head of Neighbourhoods added that service would explore different shared development opportunities to engender a “team mentality”. Joint Member-Officer development and training would help to understand each other’s roles and the challenges faced. Such training could be tailored to each ward’s priorities and specific issues, as appropriate.

Councillor Jackson commented that overall, the Strategy represented a good development from a place of strength. However, Councillor Jackson felt uncomfortable with the suggestion within the Strategy that Neighbourhood Coordinators be changed routinely at every all-out election (every 4 years). In Councillor Jackson’s view, there was significant value in the longevity of relationships between Councillors, officers and local groups within each ward that took time to develop.

The Head of Neighbourhoods explained that it had been the intention since the inception of this model of neighbourhood working, that Neighbourhood Coordinators be rotated on a periodic basis. Due to a variety of reasons, such as the pandemic and a change of ward boundaries, that had never been put in place, but the relevant Cabinet Member remained keen to do so.

The Head of Neighbourhoods further commented that the reason why it was felt appropriate to rotate Neighbourhood Coordinators was to maintain the consistency of professional and personal development and that all Councillors were provided with support and experience from other areas. It was acknowledged that there would be some impact from the loss of initial information and contact due to handover periods.

In response, Councillor Jackson appreciated the arguments for the

rotation but felt that the value of good personalities working consistently well together would be of more benefit to communities.

Councillor Jones asked what would happen in a ward with inactive Councillors who did not engage with their community? This would lead to an instant failure of the system of communication that the Strategy relied on. Councillor Jones also commented that there were frequent breakdowns in communication between Councillors and officers within certain departments at the council. Councillor Jones suggested that each ward should have its own up to date plan, with data from different directorates, that would keep Councillors informed on when works were due to take place, service delivery schedules etc. This would prevent Councillors being too reliant on case work or knowing which particular officer to contact. It would also help to provide a personal touch to residents.

The Interim Director acknowledged that there would always be some inactive Councillors and that ultimately, the success of the Strategy was dependent on Councillors wanting to engage with it. However, the Neighbourhoods Team worked hard to engage with all Councillors. If this was unsuccessful, there were formal processes to explore but it was acknowledged that this could compromise successful delivery of the Strategy in that area.

With regard to Councillor Jones' comment on more ward-specific data, the Interim Director agreed that in order to achieve a more responsive structure, more service data needed to be filtered down to ward level. This would take time to put in place but was an aspiration of the Strategy.

The Chair commented that this particular issue demonstrated why it was good to have at least two Councillors in every ward.

Councillor Steele commented that he was in agreement with Councillor Jones on the importance of Councillor engagement and stressed the point that, as elected members, Councillors were ultimately responsible for their wards and for taking the time to meet with their residents to understand what Councillors could deliver for them.

Councillor Steele also expressed support for Councillor Jackson's earlier view regarding the rotation of Neighbourhood Coordinators. Councillor Steele hoped that all Councillors and Officers would work together in a professional manner and did not agree with the suggestion that Neighbourhood Coordinators be moved routinely at election time.

The Interim Director commented that one of the Strategy's aims was to set clear expectations of levels of communication between Councillors and council services. This, together with improved processes, would allow Councillors to get to a quicker, more definitive answer to provide to residents.

Councillor Beck commented that as a number of Members had expressed concern about the proposed rotation of Neighbourhood Coordinators, IPSC should consider making a recommendation to that effect. The Chair asked if other Members were supportive of a recommendation to Cabinet against this rotation. Councillors Thorp, Stables, Tinsley and Steele expressed their support for making such a recommendation. Members commented that the sudden loss of longstanding working relationships and local knowledge at election time, when there was the potential for political change and an influx of new Councillors, could be damaging to communities and lead to instability.

The Interim Director urged Members to exercise an element of caution in relation to such a recommendation, commenting that Councillors would not want to undermine the delivery of service. It was important that the Neighbourhoods Team had the ability to move staff about to suit service need and capacity and to benefit officers' personal development.

Both Councillors Beck and Jackson stated that if Neighbourhood Coordinators needed to be moved for professional development/employment reasons then Members would not wish to interfere with service's ability to take these decisions. However, Members were against the arbitrary, cyclical rotation of Neighbourhood Coordinators at election time, as currently set out within the Strategy.

The Chair asked Members to vote on a recommendation to Cabinet asking them to remove the routine rotation of Neighbourhood Coordinators at election time and Members voted in favour of this.

The Chair thanked officers for their input and Members for the questions asked.

Resolved:-

- 1) That the presentation in relation to the development of the Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy be noted; and
- 2) That the following matter be referred to the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Management Board for presentation to Cabinet, on behalf of the Improving Places Select Commission, when Cabinet considers the Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy on 6 July 2026:-
 - a) That Cabinet consider the removal of the following text under "Action Area 4: Ongoing Support and Leadership Development" of the Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy:-
"Within the strategy period, the 2028 local election will be used to reallocate Neighbourhood Coordinators to new wards to ensure Councillors have access to new skills and perspectives. This will be repeated in future electoral cycles."

IPSC Members felt strongly that the proposed introduction of a cyclical rotation of Neighbourhood Coordinators at local elections could be detrimental to neighbourhood working and the aims of the strategy, as significant local knowledge, connections and stability could be lost at a time of potential political change.

9. IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION - WORK PROGRAMME 2026 - 2027

The Chair introduced the work programme report and drew Members attention to the following points:-

- **Work Programme for the new municipal year**

The work programme attached in the Agenda Pack showed the indicative programme for the upcoming municipal year.

The Governance Manager confirmed that any suggested items for scrutiny sent by Members to Councillor Steele, would be reviewed and considered by the OSMB Steering Group at a meeting on 29 June 2026.

- **School Road Safety Review**

The Chair informed Members that a meeting had been set up for the Group to consider their draft recommendations, and a report would be written up for consideration for IPSC at a future meeting, prior to onward presentation at OSMB and then Cabinet.

Resolved:-

- 1) That the current IPSC work programme be noted; and
- 2) That the Governance Advisor be authorised to make any required changes to the work programme in consultation with the Chair/Vice Chair and will report any such changes back at the next meeting for endorsement.

10. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring the Commission's consideration.