

IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION
Tuesday 1 September 2026

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Beck, Lelliott and Stables.

The following Cabinet Members, officers and partners were also in attendance:-

Councillor John Williams - Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy
Councillor Linda Beresford - Cabinet Member for Housing
Andrew Bramidge - Executive Director of Regeneration and Environment
Simon Moss - Service Director, Planning, Regeneration and Transport
Sue Procter - Interim Service Director, Community Safety & Street Scene
Martin Beasley - Head of Economic Development
Amanda Parris - Service Manager for Business Hubs & Markets
Sarah Clyde - Service Director of Housing
Louise Robson - Head of Service for Housing Improvement and Governance
Wendy Foster - Housing Improvement and Governance Manager
John Edwards – Chief Executive
Phil Horsfield - Service Director, Legal, Elections and Registration Services
Councillor Brian Steele – Chair of OSMB
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>

11. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 23 JUNE 2026

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 June 2026 be approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester declared an interest in Minute No.16 (Introducing Housing Involvement and Governance) on the grounds that they are a council tenant.

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. REVIEW OF THE ROTHERHAM INVESTMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE (RIDO) BUSINESS CENTRES

At the Chair's invitation, Councillor Williams, Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy (Cabinet Member), introduced the item and explained that the presentation would provide Members with an overview of the RiDO Business Centres (Business Centres), covering areas such as: occupancy; financial performance; market competitiveness; economic impact; and future opportunities for the service.

The Cabinet Member commented that the Business Centres played a key role in supporting start-up businesses in Rotherham. The Business Centres supported more than 180 businesses, which equated to approximately 850 jobs. This represented a significant contribution to growth in the local economy.

The Cabinet Member shared with Members that they had recently visited one of the Business Centres and had been impressed with the level of support and guidance available for local businesses, along with the high-quality buildings and facilities. The Cabinet Member expressed the view that the Business Centres were an "unsung success story" and expressed pride in what the Council delivered for local businesses.

Martin Beasley, the Head of Economic Development, took Members through the presentation highlighting the following points:-

- There were currently five Business Centres across the borough – Century Business Park 1 & 2 in Manvers, Fusion at Magna, Matrix at Dinnington and Moorgate Crofts, which was close to the town centre.
- Across the five sites there were 242 business units, including 156 offices. The Business Centres provided a mix of office accommodation, workshop units and specialist laboratory space. Two wet laboratory spaces had recently been introduced at the newest Business Centre, Century Business Park 2 in Manvers, in order to meet specific demand in that area. Co-working office space was also available at Moorgate Crofts.
- The mixed-use units available provided flexible accommodation that could meet the needs of businesses at the different stages of their growth - from a nascent entrepreneur through to businesses wanting to move out into larger premises elsewhere in the borough.

- Businesses who used the Business Centres benefitted from flexible one month licence agreements, access to administrative and digital services, experienced staff on site and direct links to the wider RiDO business support programmes.
- The importance of providing flexibility to new businesses was explained, as it would reduce risk for entrepreneurs and would allow businesses to scale up or down as required, before eventually moving on to larger commercial premises across Rotherham.
- There were 50 businesses on average who utilised the virtual office space offered by the Business Centres. This service was useful for start-up businesses who may not be able afford to rent an office space, but required a professional business address and call and post-handling services.
- It was explained that the Launchpad Programme (Launchpad), which was a South Yorkshire initiative, had been established in Rotherham for around 10 years. Each South Yorkshire local authority had been able to put their own stamp on the support offered in their area, which made it an agile service.
- Launchpad provided support to entrepreneurs looking to start up a business through to businesses with three years of trading. The co-working space at Moorgate Crofts provided a drop-in space for businesses without a dedicated office space, where Launchpad advisors were on site to provide business advice and support.
- Members were informed that Launchpad had supported 41 businesses that were created from scratch in 2025. Over the last year, Launchpad had also supported 54 new businesses to secure start-up grants and had distributed over £50,000 of grants.
- Occupancy levels across the Business Centres fluctuated but remained strong. The occupancy target set by the service was 85%, which provided a balance between income generation and sufficient space available for tenant churn. The overall aim of the Business Centres was to support businesses to grow out of the Business Centre space and on to bigger premises within the borough, hence a frequent turnover of tenants. It was noted that occupancy patterns had changed since Covid and increased hybrid working meant that some businesses had sought to downsize their space.
- It was reported to Members that the Business Centres continued to generate positive financial returns and were financially viable. During the 2025-26 financial year, the Business Centres generated £1.4 million worth of income, against costs of approximately £1.2 million, which left a revenue surplus of approximately £175,000.

- It was explained that it was more difficult to quantify the wider socio-economic benefits to the borough that the Business Centres provided, such as a platform for Rotherham residents to find gainful employment and the generation of increased business rates income.
- A number of additional services were provided to businesses via the Business Centres, such as: administrative support; use of meeting rooms; access to business support programmes and networking; supply chain opportunities; and wider engagement activities. It was reported that a new business networking group had recently been launched with the local Chamber of Commerce, to encourage more businesses to start trading locally.
- The Business Centres provided true wraparound support, acting as the first connection with wider Council services and providing key links to Council departments that would last for the lifetime of the business.
- Desk-based research on market comparators had demonstrated that the pricing of rents at the Business Centres remained competitive within the South Yorkshire market, positioned below a number of local premium serviced office providers. This allowed RiDO to support business growth, whilst ensuring that the Business Centres remained commercially attractive and accessible to small and growing businesses.
- It was confirmed that the Business Centre buildings were well maintained, with a full and frequent schedule of required compliance checks. However, it was acknowledged that the older buildings would require ongoing maintenance investment. Members were informed that Century Business Park 1, which was 25 years old, required full roof replacement at a cost of £927,000, and that work was due to start on this imminently.
- It was acknowledged that a key area of improvement identified by the service was to strengthen marketing activity to promote the Business Centres. RiDO currently does not have a dedicated marketing resource within the service. Ways to support and enhance marketing activity within the existing staff profile were being explored, with a view to increasing awareness and strengthening digital promotion.
- Formal tenant satisfaction surveys had paused during COVID and had not been reinstated. However, qualitative feedback on tenants' experience at the Business Centres was routinely collected via one-to-one business growth discussions and exit interviews. Businesses largely left the Business Centres for the positive reason of being successful enough to move on to bigger premises. It was

confirmed that the service would look to re-introduce the tenant survey to improve additional intelligence and help identify future opportunities.

- An internally conducted SWOT analysis was shared with Members, which identified the current strengths and weaknesses of the RiDO team. Significant strengths were highlighted to be strong occupancy levels; an experienced team with an established reputation; the diverse range of accommodation on offer; and close integration to Council support services, which would not be available in the private sector.
- Areas for improvement highlighted included; marketing capacity; ageing property assets; a need to strengthen customer feedback; and improved business engagement activity to follow up with businesses once they leave the Business Centres.
- Future opportunities had been identified to grow the offer via improved marketing utilisation, and possible use of a CRM system. Expansion of the Business Centre offer could be possible via future developments within the borough, such as Rotherham Gateway. It was acknowledged that there were also challenges that could threaten these opportunities, such as increased competition in the public and private sectors, rises in operation costs and uncertainty around the availability of future funding.
- In summary, the Head of Economic Development commented that the Business Centres remained a valuable and successful component of the Council's economic development offer, generating positive economic and financial outcomes whilst supporting local business growth, job creation and wider investment across the borough.

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

Councillor Jones commented that problems with marketing resources appeared to be a common theme across the Council and enquired what steps the Council was taking to try and enhance delivery of marketing across different Council services.

Simon Moss, the Service Director of Planning, Regeneration and Transport (Service Director) responded, acknowledging that marketing activity tended to be managed centrally via Corporate resources across Council services. However, that was always paired with input from the departments where the relevant expertise sat.

It was explained that over the period of austerity, where local authority finances had been constrained, marketing budgets had been affected.

The Council had, however, found new ways of collaborative working to continue with marketing activity, which had achieved positive results. It was acknowledged that more resources for marketing would be welcome, but that the strengths at the Business Centres, such as positive tenant engagement and links with programmes such as Launchpad, contributed to wider marketing activity for the service.

In a follow on question, Councillor Jones asked for confirmation of the target audience of tenants for the Business Centre and where approaches usually came from?

The Head of Economic Development confirmed that the target audience for Business Centre tenants was new entrepreneurs looking to start a business. It was explained that RiDO was sector agnostic, which meant that specific sectors were not targeted. The Business Centres would be available to anyone who was looking for support and wanted to start a business in Rotherham.

It was explained that it could be challenging to target someone who was at the early stage of starting a business as they would not yet be active and advertising. This emphasised the importance of the Launchpad programme, which sat alongside the Business Centres, as that represented a known brand with a wider promotional reach.

Amanda Parris, the Service Manager for Business Hubs & Markets (Service Manager) confirmed that a lot of enquiries and referrals came via word of mouth, and that the RiDO website also produced a high level of enquiries. The Business Centres were advertised on placards placed on roundabouts across Rotherham but other than that, very little active advertising was routinely done.

The Chair asked whether RiDO engaged with the local Chamber of Commerce, as that would be an obvious starting point for someone wanting to launch a new business. The Service Manager confirmed that RiDO had strong connections with local business support agencies and the local Chamber of Commerce and frequently received referrals from the Chamber of Commerce.

Councillor Thorp commented that occupancy levels at the Moorgate Crofts Business Centre had consistently been lower than the other Business Centres and enquired as to the reasons behind this site being less popular with tenants.

The Head of Economic Development confirmed that the lack of parking available at Moorgate Crofts was the biggest barrier to higher occupancy levels there. Most tenants were looking for affordable rent and available parking for their business, but the parking offer was very limited at Moorgate Crofts, due to the town centre position.

The Service Manager added that Moorgate Crofts also only offered office space, rather than the mix of office and workshop space offered at the other locations, which also had an impact on the attractiveness of the site to tenants.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Thorp enquired whether the limited parking and more limited offer of business space at Moorgate Crofts meant that it was a viable Business Centre? In response, the Service Manager commented that Moorgate Crofts provided good opportunities for businesses that wanted office space close to the town centre and confirmed that occupancy rates had risen recently.

The Chair asked whether, given the parking issues, there were any plans to redevelop the site at all or change its use from purely office space. The Head of Economic Development confirmed that Moorgate Crofts remained dedicated to office space only, but that co-working space had recently been introduced as part of the Launchpad scheme, and this could be more attractive to people coming into the town centre via public transport. The Launchpad Hub was also based at Moorgate Crofts, where Business Advisors were available on a drop-in basis. The numbers of people that used this drop-in service were not included in the occupancy figures but did represent other frequent users of the Business Centre.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester noted the comment on the SWOT analysis slide of the presentation (page 41 of the Agenda Pack) around the *“centres operating within Council governance, procurement and financial frameworks, which provide important controls but may limit flexibility compared with some private sector competitors”*. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester enquired whether Council use of the sites could dilute the commercial identity of the Business Centres and whether there were any Council services currently using space at the Business Centres.

The Service Manager explained that at the inception of the first Business Centre in 2000, the Council was acutely aware of the importance of not filling the spaces with Council departments, but to keep them available to encourage new business growth in the borough. This had been maintained as the Business Centres had grown, and therefore, Council use of the Business Centres was not currently an issue.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Bennett-Sylvester noted that an affordability analysis against local competitors had been carried out but enquired whether there was any scope to provide more flexible terms or rates for those Business Centres with lower occupancy rates, in order to attract tenants.

The Service Manager confirmed that at Moorgate Crofts, a reduction of 20% on rents had been offered on the ground floor units which had been slower to rent. This flexible approach had proved to be successful as the units were now full.

Councillor C Carter asked a further question on the limited parking situation at Moorgate Crofts and enquired whether any options had been explored to provide users of the centre with discounted parking elsewhere in the town centre, as an incentive for them to use Moorgate Crofts.

The Service Manager explained that every tenant at Moorgate Crofts had one car parking space allocated per unit. Visitor car parking was also available on pay and display spaces and the nearby multi-storey car parks, such as at Wellgate, were promoted. The Service Manager confirmed that possible discounts at local car parks had been discussed with tenants but that to date, no one had taken this option any further. On the whole, tenants wanted parking to be as close to their office as possible.

In an additional question, Councillor C Carter asked whether work was done as a matter of course within the Council, to engage and connect local businesses with RiDO when they first came into contact with other Council services.

The Head of Economic Development confirmed that they also oversaw Business Support and Employment Skills service and that all staff who engaged with local businesses were fully briefed to provide information on the range of local business support available from the Council, as well as regional and national programmes. It was explained that there was also a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system in place, which enabled staff to log in and track any interactions with businesses and referrals made.

In a supplementary question, Councillor C Carter asked what work was being done to reach small businesses in parts of the borough that were not near a Business Centre. In response, the Head of Economic Development reflected that it was a challenge to support businesses that were not near a Business Centre. This had been highlighted as a gap, and service intended to explore potential funding opportunities with the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) to provide more support to potentially “hidden entrepreneurs”.

The Service Director commented that there was a good geographical spread of Business Centres across the borough and reminded Members that over the past year, a team of High Street Advisors had also been established to help businesses access premises on High Streets and other commercial areas across Rotherham.

Councillor Taylor referred to the required roof repair and other maintenance issues at Century Business Park 1, at a cost of approximately £1.2 million. Councillor Taylor enquired how these repairs would be funded and whether any of these costs would be passed on to tenants

In addition, Councillor Taylor asked whether, considering the ages of

some of the other Business Centres, there was a strategy in place to address any projected maintenance requirements and repairs.

The Service Manager responded, confirming that the Business Centres did make a surplus profit, which would go back into the wider Regeneration & Environment Directorate budget. When funds were required for major repairs, such as the roof, RiDO would bid for capital funds. There were also dedicated budgets which covered the ongoing maintenance requirements of the buildings. It was important that maintenance and regulatory compliance was routinely carried out to ensure that the Business Centres remained of high standard and attractive to tenants.

The Service Director added that any costs of maintenance and repairs would not fall on the tenants directly but would flow through the Council's internal budgeting processes. It was explained that the Business Centres were managed as part of the Council's wider operational estate and that regular maintenance and condition checks were undertaken in line with appropriate corporate processes. The Business Centre team was timely in reporting issues and liaising with Property Services where repairs and improvements were required. There was a planned programme of improvements and modernisations at the Business Centres, such as energy efficiency improvements and boiler replacements, and there would occasionally be the need for one-off costly repairs, such as the roof at Century Business Centre 1.

In response, Councillor Taylor commented that, given the age profile of some of the Business Centres, they would have expected the Council to have taken a more strategic approach rather than on a case-by-case basis.

Phillip Horsfield, the Council's Monitoring Officer (Monitoring Officer) explained that the Council was currently undertaking a wholesale review of repairs and maintenance with respect to the Council's property portfolio, with a view to becoming more proactive in identifying repairs further in advance. This would enable the Council to plan and manage cash flow within budgets that were ring-fenced for larger capital costs. Where certain costs could not be managed within existing budgets and cash flows, Members would be consulted with regard to the prioritisation of project and repairs.

The Chair enquired whether the planned programme of projects referred to for the Business Centres equated to a five-year or longer-term plan. The Service Director explained that projects were identified through collaboration with the Property Services team, who would conduct condition surveys and regular checks to determine which projects should be prioritised. The roof requirement had been identified as part of a five-year programme of works for Century Business Park 1. This programme was now in year 4 and the cycle would commence again soon.

Councillor Steele, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board (OSMB), added that OSMB had asked Property Services to conduct a review of all Council owned properties to assess what repairs were required and the potential costs of such repairs. This report could be consulted if helpful.

The Chair asked whether the costs figure of approximately £1.2 million at page 35 of the Agenda Pack included maintenance and staffing costs, and whether a more detailed breakdown could be provided.

In response, the Head of Economic Development confirmed that a more detailed financial overview could be provided outside of the meeting. The Service Manager explained that regular, smaller maintenance costs and ongoing staffing costs related to the service were included in the costs figure, but that larger maintenance costs (such as the roof) were not.

Councillor Jones commented that the two objectives of the Business Centres were to incubate new businesses, whilst bringing in income to the Council. With this in mind, Councillor Jones commented that they would have expected a lifetime investment profiling exercise to have been carried out for each building. The level of overall profit reported would not cover larger scale investments, when needed.

Councillor Jones enquired whether any work had been done to look into possible investment from SYMCA regarding solar panels and other energy efficiency measures that could reduce the operating costs of the Business Centres.

The Head of Economic Development explained that it was a challenge to identify funding for solar panel installation, as a lot of initiatives were aimed at SMEs rather than the public sector.

The Head of Economic Development asked Members to be mindful of the fact that the initial build cost of the Business Centres had largely been covered via external funding. Therefore, they represented cost-effective assets for the Council over their lifetime as there had been little initial outlay for the Council. Members were reassured that RiDO was constantly “horizon scanning” and seeking out opportunities for additional external funding streams to complement the current offer. The wider contribution to the local economy that the Business Centres made was not as easily quantifiable but arguably represented economic benefit to the borough.

The Service Manager added that the option of adding solar panels to the roof repair at Century Business Park 1 had been explored but unfortunately, had not been possible due to the structure and positioning of the building.

The Monitoring Officer commented that for future reports to Scrutiny Commissions, it would be useful for Officers to make early enquiries with Property Services to ensure that detailed information on specific property

maintenance costs was available. This would provide assurance to Members that plans and ongoing programmes of works were in place.

The Monitoring Officers also asked Members to consider that where projects such as the RiDO Business Centres were set up to achieve a wider social and economic development outcome, they would not necessarily appear to be profit-making on the surface. It was important that Members could make the budgetary decisions that were required of them every year and were provided with enough information to enable them to assess how much such projects would cost local taxpayers.

Councillor Adair referred to an offer that had been available at Rotherham Youth Enterprise Treeton Community Resource and Business Centre, where occupancy was set at a 12-month period and enquired whether the same criteria was in place at the Business Centres.

The Service Manager confirmed that there was no fixed term of occupancy in place at the Business Centres as the main aim of the service was to provide adequate business support to tenants to enable them to move on as quickly as possible, usually within six months. However, it was noted that it could occasionally be challenging to find tenants suitable alternative accommodation within these timescales, and therefore, some tenants remained in the Business Centres for longer.

Councillor Thorp asked whether service could provide a more detailed breakdown of the costs of each Business Centre on an individual basis, as the costs and profit breakdown had been presented as a total for all units. It was therefore difficult for Members to assess whether any of the Business Centres were essentially unprofitable. Officers agreed to provide this follow-up information outside of the meeting and confirmed that each Business Centre operated on different costs centre.

In a further question, Councillor Thorp asked whether, when Exit Surveys were conducted with tenants, issues with the buildings had come up as a reason for them leaving. The Service Manager confirmed that tenants did not generally report issues with the buildings as a reason for leaving and explained that it was usually because tenants had run out of space due to their business expanding. Some areas at Century Business Park 1 had been closed off due to water ingress from the recent roof issues, but this had not adversely affected any tenants, and it was reported that work on the roof would commence within the next few weeks.

Councilor Jackson enquired how RiDO helped tenants with negotiations with private landlords, and potentially the Council, to move into different commercial premises, and gave the example of a number of empty shop units available in their ward of Wath. Councillor Jackson asked how the Council encouraged tenants to consider moving to empty shop units across the borough.

The Head of Economic Development explained that there was a property

database embedded into RiDO's website and Officers liaised with property agents on a regular basis to identify potential units and signpost RiDO tenants to different premises across the borough. The Head of Economic Development confirmed that work was also being done with the new team of High Street Advisors to provide information on empty units that could be suitable to tenants moving out of the Business Centres.

The Chair commented that in their view, any initiative that supported businesses and made even a pound of profit was a worthwhile endeavour for the Council. The Chair enquired what the plan for the next five years looked like for the Business Centres, as changes in working patterns have changed space requirements for tenants.

The Service Director agreed that RiDO had experienced real success in supporting local businesses and maintaining relatively high occupancy rates in the post-Covid workplace environment. It was confirmed that there were currently no firm proposals to expand and develop any more Business Centres. However, as they had proved to be a successful and resilient model, this would be considered in the future, subject to available funding.

As mentioned previously, the geographical spread of the Business Centres could be widened and there could be opportunities to explore this further with future planned developments at Rotherham Gateway and the Don Valley Corridor project with SYMCA. There was also a clear need for more medium-sized office space for emerging businesses, which could be factored into future plans.

The Chair commented that in future, the Business Centres could consider providing other types of unit space, such as laboratory kitchens, to widen the offer to new business owners. The Service Director agreed and offered Members the opportunity to undertake a site visit to Century Business Park 2, as this Business Centre provided the widest mix of units and demonstrated the eclectic and diverse mix of new businesses which were using the Business Centres.

The Chair asked if any Members wished to suggest any specific recommendations in response to the presentation. Councillor Jackson requested that the new High Street Advisor team return to IPSC with an update on how successful they had been in their work of mapping out empty shop units across the borough and making connections to fill them. IPSC Members voted in favour of this recommendation, subject to confirmation on appropriate timescales with Officers.

The Cabinet Member reminded Members that the establishment of the High Street Advisor team had been approved by Members via the budget process. Member engagement was key to the success of this scheme and the Cabinet Member expected that the Neighbourhoods team would help to establish working relationships between the High Street Advisors and Members.

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

Resolved:-

- 1) That the contents of the presentation be noted;
- 2) That a visit be arranged for IPSC Members to a selection of the RiDO Business Centres to improve Members' knowledge of the range of facilities and support available to local businesses;
- 3) That a briefing note providing a detailed breakdown of the costs and profitability of each Business Centre be provided to IPSC; and
- 4) That the new High Street Business Advisor team attends IPSC within the next 12 months to report on the success of the scheme to provide support to businesses across the Borough's High Streets.

16. INTRODUCING HOUSING IMPROVEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

At the Chair's invitation, Councillor Beresford, Cabinet Member for Housing (Cabinet Member), introduced the item and explained that the Housing Improvement and Governance Team (HIG) had been created in response to the regulatory requirements introduced by the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023.

The aim of HIG was to ensure that the Council monitored and complied with the statutory Consumer Standards. This activity would be reported into the Housing Regulation Assurance Board (HRAB).

Louise Robson, Head of Service for Housing Improvement and Governance (Head of HIG) took Members through the presentation accompanying the report, highlighting the following points:

- HIG had been established by the Council following the implementation of the new Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (Act), which made the provision of social housing a "regulated" service following the tragic events of the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017.
- This meant that all social housing providers would be subject to an inspection by the Regulator of Social Housing every four years, with the Council's Housing Service due its first inspection under this regime within the next 12-18 months. Once inspected, the Council would receive a grading between C1 to C4, where C1 would be the top grading and a grading of C4 would require significant improvements to be made.

- Five Consumer Standards had been introduced under the Act:
 1. Safety and Quality;
 2. Transparency, Influence and Accountability;
 3. Neighbourhood and Community;
 4. Tenancy; and
 5. Competence and Conduct (in force from October 2026)

There was also the Rent standard, which ensured that the Council was charging tenants the correct level of rent.

- Alongside evidence required to demonstrate compliance with the Consumer Standards, the Council was required to conduct an annual tenant satisfaction survey, abbreviated as TSMs (Tenant Satisfaction Measures). The Council's tenants were asked how satisfied they were with Housing services provided and how well the Council handled any complaints.
- The Inspector would consider how well the Council had complied with the Housing Ombudsman's Handling of Complaints Code, alongside compliance with response times for urgent maintenance issues under Awaab's Law.
- It was explained that the majority of the functions within HIG were already in existence, but that they had been fragmented under different Heads of Service. This had not been conducive to the best experience for tenants and staff and meant that there had been no clear accountability for ensuring compliance with the new regulations.
- HIG would sit alongside the existing teams within Housing Services - Repairs & Maintenance, Asset Management, Housing Estate Services, Housing Income and Allocations – and would ensure that processes were streamlined to deliver the best service for tenants, whilst meeting the regulatory requirements.
- The tenant journey, from initially accessing Housing services to moving into their home and living well in that home, was of paramount importance. This journey could be improved by a “one team” approach with more coordinated, efficient and accessible systems.
- The functions of the four different teams that sat under the HIG umbrella were summarised as follows:

1. Governance

The Governance Team would be responsible for coordinating compliance with the Consumer Standards and would provide the link to the Regulator of Social Housing. The Governance team would also provide assurance to senior staff and the Cabinet Member via reports delivered to the HRAB, which was chaired by

the Chief Executive.

Examples were provided of how the HRAB provided valuable challenge to the Housing service, such as requests to run an independent mock inspection, to initiate a review of complaints handling and to accelerate additional resources to key areas such as compliance.

The Governance Team were tasked with coordinating the Council's "readiness" for the impending inspection by ensuring that all required documentation was in place and uploaded to the relevant system.

2. Business Development

The Business Development Team would be responsible for service planning and policy and strategy development and would listen to the voice of tenants and feed that into areas where improvements were required.

An example of how this had worked in practice was provided, where a more coordinated policy for accessing tenant's properties had been put in place across Housing services. This had resulted from feedback from tenants and staff that the previous process had been inconsistent.

This team would also be responsible for the analysis of feedback from the TSMs and provided monthly updates on tenant feedback which fed directly into service improvements. This work enabled the Council to fully understand who their tenants were and how services could be tailored to help them live comfortably in their homes.

3. Programme Management

This team would work closely with the Business Development team. It was explained that a Diverse Needs Programme had recently been introduced, which aimed to improve ways in which the Housing Management System stored and could record key information from interactions with tenants. For example, if a tenant informed service of mobility issues, this would be noted on the system and flagged up with any contractors due to visit the property. A new CRM system had also been set up to provide a more holistic view of tenants and their needs.

4. Housing Transformation

The Housing Transformation Programme sat within HIG and was a two-year initiative designed to fundamentally shape the way in which Rotherham delivered Housing services. The ambition was to be a "best in class" social housing landlord and to achieve a C1 or C2 rating when inspected.

It was reported that the Transformation Programme was being delivered in response to increasing pressure on the regulatory landscape. In addition, a number of internal reviews had been recently undertaken which had highlighted the importance of ensuring that Housing was primarily an enabling service for tenants, helping them to live happily and for longer in their homes

The Housing Transformation Programme sought to create greater consistency across organisational structures, including team sizing and grading arrangements. This would ensure that the Housing service had the right range of employees equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge and the best and most efficient use of resources to deliver excellent customer service and value for money for tenants.

- It was explained that tenant engagement was key to the HIG team and that meaningful engagement opportunities were offered to tenants to help shape the way in which Housing services were delivered. The Council had a “Connectors Pool” of approximately 200 tenants who were unable to attend regular focus groups and panels but would engage on specific topics and respond to surveys. The Housing Improvement Panel looked at performance, and the Tenant Scrutiny Panel scrutinised different areas of the Housing service.
- A “Tenant Screen Team” was also in place which checked the accessibility of the language and images used in the Housing teams’ communications with tenants. This included new policy documents, online communications and checking the magazine which was sent out to tenants every three months. A quarterly tenant engagement round up was also produced and sent to all tenants and made available online.
- Examples of where tenant engagement had shaped delivery were provided, such as: the co -creation of a new Tenant Engagement Framework; consultation on policies and strategies; and the design of a Housing Performance scorecard which was displayed on the Council website.
- The Tenant Scrutiny Panel had recently carried out an internal review, in conjunction with the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS). One issue which had been identified by this review was that the timing of the reports on Tenant Scrutiny activity to IPSC was not ideal. It had been proposed that Tenant Scrutiny report to IPSC every six months and provide a retrospective review on actions implemented, without waiting until they had all been completed. This had been agreed with senior leadership and the Chair of IPSC.
- Following a recent assessment, the Council had received TPAS

exemplar accreditation. This was a nationally recognised accreditation and was only awarded to organisations that demonstrated the highest standard of tenant engagement and a strong commitment to involving tenants in shaping services. It was reported that there were only five other local authorities that had achieved this accreditation and that the Housing team was very proud of this accolade.

The Chair thanked Officers for the report and presentation and invited Members of IPSC to raise questions and queries on the item and in the ensuing question and answer session the following points were raised:-

Councillor Duncan referred to the significant amount of responsive repairs and maintenance work that was outsourced by the Housing service and carried out by contractors. Councillor Duncan asked how the introduction of stronger regulations had impacted on arrangements with contractors. Had KPIs under contracts been adjusted and would this impact on how the Council looked to outsource these services in the future?

Sarah Clyde, the Service Director for Housing (Service Director), confirmed that the increased regulatory requirements had impacted on the Council's repairs and maintenance contracts with Mears and Equans. It had been necessary to bring in additional resource to ensure that the requirement to complete emergency works within the 24-hour turnaround period set out under Awaab's Law were met. With Phase 2 of Awaab's Law due to come into force in October 2026, the Council continued to work closely with contractors to make necessary adjustments to existing contractual arrangements. It was reported that Mears and Equans had been very flexible in their approach to this.

The Service Director referred to the Consumer Standard of Competence and Conduct and explained that the Housing service was looking to develop a Code of Practice which would sit underneath the Council's Code of Conduct for staff, and would be extended to cover external stakeholders, such as contractors. This Code of Practice would set out qualification expectations which would be routinely checked and verified.

The Service Director informed Members that the Council's repairs and maintenance contract would be up for renewal within the next couple of years and work was ongoing with external and internal stakeholders to consider options for the future of repairs and maintenance within the Housing service.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Duncan asked what the financial impact had been of the additional resource requirements referred to. The Service Director explained that under Awaab's Law, any urgent gas repairs needed to be completed within a 24-hour time period. Previously, the contractual arrangements had been that works were to be carried out by the end of the following day. It had therefore been necessary to work with contractors to increase the amount of resource available to meet

these statutory timescales. Three additional gas fitters had been recruited, and the Council would cover the cost of this, as per the terms of the contract.

Where repairs were required to be done within a five-day timescale, that work and expense would be covered under the “price per property” arrangements in place with the contractors. The Service Director commented that the Council received quite a lot of social value under the repairs and maintenance contracts as the contractors worked closely with Housing colleagues on awareness campaigns around damp and mould. The contractors would be working with tenants around keeping their homes warm and preventing damp and mould issues as winter approached.

Councillor Thorp asked whether the new staffing structure that had been established represented a duplication of any existing roles and whether it had created another layer of management. Councillor Thorp asked for assurance that the four different teams under the HIG umbrella would feed into each other effectively.

The Service Director clarified that HIG was not a support function but represented a function in its own right as there had not previously been a team which had overseen Housing governance and regulation. HIG would enable the Housing service to meet its regulatory requirements and would work very closely with senior management and all seven Heads of Service within Housing. The HIG team would be able to carry out work that the frontline operational staff across the Housing service would not have the time or resource to do and could develop and deliver projects and programmes from the information and intelligence provided by the specialist operational staff.

The Service Director explained that the HIG team had been integral to the recent improvement work to core functions within the Housing service, such as the new CRM system, a new Corporate Complaints policy and process and essential planning for Phase 2 of Awaab's Law. The HIG team had enabled the Housing service to better identify its strengths and weaknesses and put in place Action Plans to move the service forward.

In a follow-on question, Councillor Thorp commented that the structure appeared to be very management heavy and asked whether this stronger tier of management would put an end to some tenants' reported experience of conflicting information being provided by different Council teams and departments.

The Service Director explained that the Housing Transformation Programme should iron out any such discrepancies. Part of the programme would be to strip the customer journey and experience back in order to better understand where there were any gaps in early intervention and prevention and where additional resources could be required. There would be improved consistency in processes and procedures to avoid

confusing situations for tenants.

Work on a number of the key priorities under the Council's Housing Strategy, with the support of HIG, would enable Housing Management Officers to concentrate on their core function of being visible on the ground and providing crucial support to tenants. Work on the Housing Transformation Programme was a huge task but was reported to be well underway. The Service Director expressed the opinion that HIG was an integral and crucial part of the management structure that would support and enable this transformation, for the benefit of Rotherham council tenants.

The Chair enquired whether the staff set out in the HIG Staff Structure chart (at page 62 of the Agenda Pack) were existing Council Officers or had been recruited to create the new team.

The Service Director confirmed that it was a mix, with a new Head of Service but a number of staff within the HIG team who were already working on other projects within the Council, such as the NEC IT system for Housing. Significant effort had been made to bring the right people together with the right skills to provide more coordinated ways of working and links to other service areas in the Council.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester commented that the increased level of regulation in the social housing sector was a welcome development and, in response to Councillor Thorp's earlier questions, expressed the view HIG appeared to be achieving success in getting teams working together more effectively.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester asked a question around tenant participation and how the Council ensured that the pool of Tenant Connectors was representative of tenants from more deprived areas of the borough where less volunteers usually came forward.

The Head of HIG agreed that more work needed to be done to increase engagement from tenants within Rotherham's more deprived communities. The tenants had also identified this weakness themselves in the development of the Tenant Engagement Framework. It was confirmed that work would be undertaken with the Neighbourhoods team to understand what the barriers to engagement were and information from the Tenant Connectors would help to identify gaps in tenant representation. The Housing service intended to develop more localised events and had recently run a trial tenant involvement event in Dinnington, with mixed results, as it was the already engaged tenants who had attended.

In a supplementary question, Councillor Bennett-Sylvester enquired how the Council would ensure that there was sufficient "critical friend" challenge on the HRAB. The Head of HIG confirmed that the current "critical friend" on the HRAB was the Cabinet Member. However, it had

recently been recommended that two further members should be co-opted onto the HRAB, one a tenant member and one an independent member, to broaden the range and depth of knowledge and experience on the Board.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester further asked whether the Council had scope to tailor the Consumer Standards to the borough's needs and requirements or whether the Act was prescriptive on what the Standards must cover. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester gave the example of increased maintenance of green spaces and use of play areas within housing estates to encourage exercise and use of play areas to tackle health inequalities.

The Service Director confirmed that the Regulator of Social Housing was not prescriptive on how the Council met the Consumer Standards but would require comprehensive evidence and assurance that standards around safety and quality were being met. The Service Director was confident that the Council could demonstrate that it had a good relationship with its tenants, understood them and cared about their welfare. The fact that the Chief Executive and the Cabinet Member sat on the HRAB showed that this was embedded at the highest levels of the Council.

The Service Director explained that due to the diverse demographic across Rotherham, it would be possible to focus on certain aspects of support in different areas, dependent on the needs of residents. For example, the Crisis Support Fund and support around fuel poverty. The Council was in the middle of a comprehensive stock condition survey which would provide crucial intelligence to prioritise where council-owned housing required improvements. Each local authority would take a different approach to the Consumer Standards, but all would need to meet the Regulator's expected outcomes and demonstrate that the voice of the tenant was being listened to.

Councillor Steele praised Officers for the content of the report and presentation and commented that they had been clear in setting out the aims and aspirations of HIG, whilst acknowledging where further development and progress would be made.

The Chair commented that there were a number of other Housing Associations within Rotherham and asked whether the Council was required to link up to these external housing providers.

The Service Director confirmed that all sufficiently sized registered social housing providers would be subject to the new requirements and could expect an inspection from the Regulator of Social Housing. The Housing arm of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (Berneslai Homes, an arm's length organization (ALMO)) went through the inspection process a couple of years ago and Doncaster City Council (also an ALMO) was due to be inspected imminently.

The Service Director expressed the view that Rotherham was in a position of strength to work with stakeholders and partners, as Housing services sat within the local authority, with established ways of working across the Council and external stakeholders. For other registered housing providers or ALMOs, it could prove more difficult to make those connections. It was reported that a Strategic Housing Forum was in place that met quarterly and brought all local Rotherham housing providers together to discuss issues and share experience and know-how. Networking also took place with colleagues at neighbouring local authorities.

In a follow-on question, Councillor Duncan made the observation that some of the other registered social housing providers were quite small in size and the increased regulatory requirements could be overwhelming for them. As these housing providers were also responsible for providing safe homes for Rotherham residents, was the Council, as a much larger organisation, required to provide support to them to fulfil their statutory obligations.

The Service Director explained that there was a threshold under the Act, and that if a registered housing provider had less than 1,000 homes, it would not be subject to the same rigorous inspection process but would be expected to work with the Regulator in other ways. A number of Housing Associations in Rotherham worked on a national footprint so had more resources available to them.

The Service Director confirmed that the Council was committed to working closely with local partners as a key priority under the Housing Strategy. This was essential to ensure that the Council could deliver enough social and affordable housing across the borough to meet the needs of residents. This would inevitably involve working with other registered housing providers and attracting new ones to consider building within Rotherham.

The Service Director confirmed that the Housing teams also worked closely with the Housing Directors at SYMCA to share best practice and collaborate in submitting funding bids through the National Housing Development Programme and Homes England. It was key that housing providers across South Yorkshire worked together to ensure that there was sufficient and sustainable housing available in the areas people wanted to live.

The Chair asked Members to approve the recommendations set out within the report and set out a further recommendation that service provide a brief summary of the work of HIG in each Annual Report presented to IPSC on progress under the Housing Strategy. Members agreed to this additional recommendation.

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

Resolved:-

- 1) That the contents of the report and presentation be noted;
- 2) That IPSC agrees to the proposed changes to reporting arrangements for Tenancy Scrutiny reports; and
- 3) That IPSC requests that a section be included in each annual Housing Strategy Update Report to IPSC summarising the work of the HIG and the HRAB and how they have contributed to delivery under the Strategy and the Housing Transformation plan.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester declared an interest in Minute No.16 (Introducing Housing Involvement and Governance) on the grounds that they are a council tenant.

17. IMPROVING PLACES SELECT COMMISSION SCRUTINY REVIEW – SCHOOL ROAD SAFETY

The Chair introduced the item and asked the Governance Advisor to explain to Members the governance process and next steps for the School Road Safety Review (Review).

The Governance Advisor explained that once IPSC Members had approved the recommendations set out within the Review Report, the Report would then go to OSMB for approval at its October 2026 meeting, with a recommendation to progress to Cabinet in November 2026. Once Cabinet had received the Recommendations, it would have 2 months to respond to them, as per the Council's Constitution. A report would then come back into Cabinet setting out its formal response to the Review Recommendations.

Councillor Tinsley, as Chair of the Review Group, explained that the Review had originated from a motion presented to Council in 2023, which sought to address ongoing issues relating to road safety around schools. In particular, the motion looked to examine four key areas: crossing operative safety around schools; parking and zigzag enforcement; initiatives such as School Streets; and the development of school Active Travel Plans.

The Review Group had taken part in a series of meetings and research exercises over the nine-month period of the Review. The Review had drawn on a wide range of frontline expertise – from officers at the council and Sheffield City Council, along with partners at SYMCA. Feedback from elected members and local schools regarding issues experienced in their areas had also been considered.

Councillor Tinsley explained that from the information gathered, the Report and recommendations within it came under five key pillars that

Members considered key to future progress with regard to school road safety:

- Improved Cross-Directorate Working – a “one Council” approach, with better data sharing across council services.
- Data, Monitoring and Strategic Alignment – enhanced data gathering and monitoring, with recommendations for a comprehensive borough-wide survey of schools, more robust tracking of near misses and the alignment of local interventions and strategies with broader regional transport strategies.
- Funding Development – explore opportunities to maximise on external funding opportunities via SYMCA and potential Active Travel grants.
- School Engagement & Active Travel - further investment in this area would help to embed Active Travel initiatives and promote positive behavioural change.
- Enforcement and Crossing Patrol - targeted enforcement and increased technical investment, alongside stronger support for frontline school crossing patrol operatives to tackle illegal parking and inconsiderate driving outside schools.

Councillor Tinsley stressed that it had become apparent to Members in the course of the Review that a holistic approach would be required to drive meaningful improvements in school road safety. None of the key pillars could work in isolation – for example: enforcement technology and mobile CCTV would mean little without safe infrastructure; travel plans would fail without dedicated Active Travel Officers supporting schools; and survey data would only be useful if cross-directorate teams collaborated under a unified School Road Safety Strategy.

Councillor Tinsley took the opportunity to publicly thank all of the Members involved in the Review, all of the officers that provided information and support, and the Governance Advisor in supporting the work of the Review Group.

Resolved:-

- 1) That the contents of the report be noted; and
- 2) It is agreed that the following recommendations be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board for consideration and onward endorsement to Cabinet:
 - a) **Improved Cross-Directorate Working**
 - i) Develop a cross-directorate map of roles and responsibilities

(e.g. highways, school engagement, enforcement, crossing patrol) to establish and embed stronger partnership working across Council services, including improvements to internal reporting and decision-making systems and processes aligned across directorates.

- ii) Consider the feasibility of establishing a cross-directorate working group (that meets regularly, with clear terms of reference and a governance structure) to oversee school road safety in Rotherham. The aim of this working group would be to drive and coordinate delivery and provide increased accountability and visibility.
- iii) Any established school road safety working group should be launched as the front-facing, main point of contact for collaboration with residents, schools, Councillors, and partners related to school road safety, to ensure the Council's commitment to school road safety is both visible and accessible. Consider the creation of a dedicated section of the Council website on school road safety to support this.
- iv) Work together with ward Councillors to progress the development of ward-specific road safety plans, each to contain a section on road safety issues around local schools. These plans would inform each ward's CAP development plans.
- v) In the spirit of the new Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy, council services should endeavour to keep Councillors regularly informed on any new plans relating to transport and school road safety and/or works due to be carried out within their wards at the earliest possible opportunity.

b) Data, Monitoring and Strategic Alignment

- i) Take steps to improve baseline data collection around schools (e.g traffic, parking, reported incidents, travel behaviours). Establishment of centralised, cross-directorate incident reporting and escalation processes would help to identify areas of concern and need, which in turn, would inform the prioritisation of potential projects and pilot school locations.
- ii) Develop a coordinated, borough-wide School Road Safety Strategy, to be aligned with SYMCA's regional action plans and travel strategies – such as the new South Yorkshire Transport Strategy and the Walking, Wheeling & Cycling Strategy.
- iii) Explore what regional support may be available via the Safer Roads Partnership and the Active Lives & Safer Roads teams at SYMCA, for example, access to shared data mapping tools/systems and funding opportunities.

- iv) Consider the coordination of projects with neighbouring local authorities via SYMCA, which would provide opportunities for enhanced economies of scale.

c) Funding Development

- i) Establish a defined and protected allocation for school road safety projects within wider capital transport funding to ensure longer-term funding streams that can support the shift to a more proactive and co-ordinated approach.
- ii) Use the recommended enhanced data collection models to strengthen the evidence base to support future funding bids. Develop a clear pipeline of projects to maximise use of Transport for City Regions and Integrated Settlement Active Travel funding via SYMCA to support school road safety.
- iii) Work with SYMCA to explore how Rotherham could benefit from the government's new Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy and the projected £4.5 billion of investment to be made available over the next 5 years.
- iv) Develop a balanced programme of low-cost interventions (signage, markings, speed reduction measures) and targeted higher-cost schemes, using the suggested enhanced data collection models to provide evidence to inform and justify the prioritisation of certain schools and schemes.
- v) Develop a funding stream to support opportunities for increased work with and support for schools across the borough (see d) School Engagement & Active Travel below).
- vi) Strengthen existing work with the Planning team to ensure early identification of any potential section 106 developer funding for specific road safety improvements/schemes.

d) School Engagement & Active Travel

- i) Urgently undertake a borough-wide survey of all schools to better understand their concerns and needs regarding school road safety.
- ii) Using the results of the survey and enhanced data mapping models (alongside existing knowledge and data), identify a priority list of schools in the borough for targeted intervention (e.g. top 10/20/30).
- iii) Give consideration to the provision of additional dedicated School Engagement Officers/Active Travel Officers to

strengthen trust and engagement with school leaders and governors. Such officers would be able to support enhanced engagement activities, such as assemblies, parent consultation and the promotion of Active Travel initiatives. This in turn, would help to encourage overall behaviour change from both pedestrians, drivers, and other road users around schools.

- iv) Consider the creation of a borough-wide “Junior Road Safety Officer Programme” to allow schools and their pupils to lead on initiatives appropriate to their school settings. This would engage and benefit pupils in taking ownership of schemes to support their schools.
- v) Conduct a full exploration of the different Active Travel schemes that are available (e.g Mode Shift Stars) and identify which schools already have an Active Travel Plan in place. Schools need support in applying for accreditation to such schemes and in implementing them, which should form part of the role of any additional School Engagement/Active Travel Officers.
- vi) Identify any schools which may be suitable for the establishment of a School Streets pilot scheme, bearing in mind the fact that any School Streets scheme would need to be supported by proven prior active travel initiatives, and an engaged and committed senior leadership team and parent community.
- vii) Work towards coordinating any existing initiatives (e.g Bikeability) into a single, coherent offer, introducing more child-centred, “fun first” campaigns. Invite external experts and teams from SYMCA and neighbouring local authorities to share best practice and success stories.

e) Enforcement & Crossing Patrol

- i) Establish better cross-directorate data-sharing systems (as per a) above), to ensure that data collected by the Crossing Patrol and Parking Enforcement teams regarding incidents/near-misses and offences are monitored and used to inform decisions on priority sites and projects.
- ii) Consider opportunities for the pilot use of body-cameras by crossing patrollers, giving due regard to safeguarding and data protection concerns.
- iii) Conduct a detailed feasibility review into wider camera enforcement rollout of redeployable/static ANPR cameras, including a cost-benefit analysis and identification of suitable pilot locations.

- iv) Consider further investment in roaming CCTV vehicles to support compliance and enforcement for parking offences around schools. Capacity for enforcement is currently limited to one CCTV van for all 200+ schools in the borough. A lack of a regular presence leads to inconsistent and ineffective enforcement.
- v) Explore the potential for increased engagement with South Yorkshire Police, including a possible joint approach to promoting local anti-parking campaigns and joint responses at problem locations.
- vi) Monitor and review forthcoming government guidance on footway parking powers. Consider any opportunities to tie the local enforcement approach into any future RMBC Pavement Parking Policy.

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

The Governance Advisor referred Members to the Work Programme included in the Agenda Pack and drew Members attention to the following:

- **Street Lighting Column Review – OSMB/IPSC**

This review had been undertaken jointly by Members of OSMB and IPSC following a Notice of Motion approved by Full Council in April 2026, concerning the impact of structural testing requirements on community initiatives such as hanging baskets, festive decorations, remembrance displays and CCTV installations. The review examined the balance between public safety requirements and the financial and operational impact on Parish and Town Councils. Evidence was gathered from officers, Parish Councils, survey responses and examples of practice from other authorities.

Evidence gathering, stakeholder engagement and the development of agreed findings and recommendations had been undertaken between May 2026 and July 2026. The Review Group considered evidence through a series of meetings, briefing reports, stakeholder feedback and benchmarking information from other local authorities.

It was reported that the findings and recommendations of the Review Group were due to be presented to OSMB on 8 September 2026, with a recommendation to progress to Cabinet in October 2026.

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.

19. URGENT BUSINESS

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