Appendix 2 : Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy - 2026 – 2032

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Forward by Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods

It is now four years since we updated our Thriving Neighbourhood Strategy (2018-2025). This set out the Council's commitment to strengths-based working at a neighbourhood level, and specifically the role that Ward Councillors play as leaders in our communities.

I am proud of how far we have come in the last seven years, and the role that this approach has played in bringing our residents closer to the Council and the services we deliver. Now, we have the opportunity to go further in this, our Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy (2026-2032). This is our plan to further empower our Ward Councillors to be at the heart of a more responsive, resident-led approach to local government.

We have worked with Councillors from all parties and officers from across the council, to develop an even more ambitious strategy; one which raises expectations of what we can achieve when we work together. Still underpinned by our Strengths-Based Approach, we are developing new practices based around a set of co-produced characteristics which we call 'The 21st Century Rotherham Councillor'.

Our work is already recognised nationally, but with the world changing rapidly, we cannot stand still. In this document we champion new ways of working; raise expectations of Councillors and officers alike; and give residents a more specific role in supporting Neighbourhood Leadership, all to ensure that our places are thriving, safe and clean and that our residents live well.

Councillor Victoria Cusworth
Deputy Leader of Rotherham Council

Our Ambition

Rotherham's neighbourhood model is already recognised nationally for its strength in supporting Ward Councillors to act as leaders, engaging with residents and ensuring that Council services respond to their needs.

This strategy seeks to build on this strong foundation to define and embed this further. It givesWard Councillors an even more enhanced role as convenors and the conduit for resident aspirations, helping the Council to more readily listen, learn and respond to the needs of residents. We defined this as 'The 21st Century Rotherham Councillor'.

The outcome of this will mean that local people feel more connected to the Council, building trust and agency in all our neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhood leadership will play a key role in addressing inequalities and improving outcomes in our most deprived communities, ensuring that resources, attention and partnership activity are focused where need is greatest.

This is an important part of our ambition to build more cohesive communities and to support our partners to work alongside us in meeting resident needs. To do this we will need to develop new ways of working, devolve budgets more effectively and ensure that Rotherham Ward Councillors have the training and support they need to work as leaders in their neighbourhoods.

The Council will ensure that neighbourhood governance arrangements remain compliant with emerging national legislation, including the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act.

Rotherham's Ward Councillors

The Council has 59 elected Councillors, representing 25 wards inside the Rotherham Borough geographical boundary.



Each of these Councillors are neighbourhood leaders and act as the bridge between the community or ward, and Council and statutory services. They serve four-year terms and are responsible for three core pillars of local governance

- representing constituents
- making policies
- scrutinising decisions

Our Councillors work with services, partners and communities to deliver on local priorities that contribute to vibrant and thriving neighbourhoods where residents feel happy, safe and proud.

For the purposes of our neighbourhood coordination, we also group wards into three geographies, north, south and central. This helps us to achieve further efficiency and impact through collaboration between Ward Councillors.

Working in Context

Neighbourhood Leadership is a vital component of how we work as a Council and as a wider system. It will play a central role in addressing **inequalities in health, wellbeing and life chances**, particularly in areas of highest deprivation.

In the Rotherham Council Plan (2025-2030) we set out our vision for the borough.

*Rotherham is our home, where we come together as a community, where we seek to draw on our proud history to build a future, we can all share. We value decency and dignity and seek to build a town where opportunity is extended to everyone, where people can grow, flourish and prosper, and where no one is left behind. To achieve this as a Council we must work in a modern, efficient way, to deliver sustainable services in **partnership with our local neighbourhoods**, looking outwards, yet **focussed relentlessly on the needs of our residents.***

Partnering with our neighbourhoods cuts across everything we do. Continuing to deliver this effectively is a continuous job, which will require ongoing adaptation, reflection and communication. We continue to work with local people to find solutions to local issues, building on our heritage and assets as well as bringing people together and supporting improved wellbeing and quality of life.

Ward-based working will be informed by data on deprivation and inequalities, ensuring that local action is targeted to those communities experiencing the poorest outcomes.

Our consultation surveys and ongoing conversations with residents tell us that, in common with the rest of the UK, trust in the Council is declining, people are not satisfied with the responsiveness of the Council, and residents often don't feel listened too. This is why the strategy is such a priority.

Delivering Against National Policy Ambitions

Neighbourhood leadership is now an important part of national ambition.

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act has introduced a new duty on all local authorities to establish "appropriate arrangements" for effective neighbourhood governance. The goal is to move decision-making closer to residents, so it is led by people who understand local needs, with Ward Councillors playing a more place-based collaborative role, beyond purely representing residents in Council meetings.

Ideas of local leadership are also promoted in "Protecting What Matters", the Government's action plan for community cohesion. This moves beyond traditional integration by focusing on three core pillars: Confident Communities, Cohesive Communities, and Resilient Communities. The first of these pillars embeds neighbourhood leadership and local action as a means of creating more confident and enabled communities.

Other partners and institutions are also moving towards a principle of locality and subsidiarity. The NHS 10-Year Health Plan aims to shift care from hospitals to local

communities by creating a "neighbourhood health service". This provides further opportunity for Ward Councillors to play an enhanced role at the heart of their neighbourhoods, something which is already embedded in ‘A Decade of Opportunity’, the ten-year plan for our wider partnership (including, health, police, business and voluntary sector), Rotherham Together.

We are fortunate that we have an established, well-resourced neighbourhood model; the challenge is to build upon this, deepening impact and becoming an exemplar for other councils regionally and nationally.

How we will Work: A Strengths-Based Approach to Neighbourhood Leadership

Our approach to supporting Neighbourhood Leadership is underpinned by the Council's commitment to **strengths-based working**.

This recognises and builds upon the skills, resources, knowledge, experience and heritage of our communities, and that of our voluntary, community and faith sector. It is a positive approach, focusing on local assets whilst recognising and responding to **structural inequalities and disadvantage** experienced by some communities. This includes supporting early intervention and prevention activity aimed at reducing long-term demand on public services, particularly in areas of higher need.
Whilst Councillors still play a vital role in responding to crises, this strategy positions them as leaders, with the agency to maximise their skills, expertise and knowledge to:

- Enable and empower communities to do things for themselves
- Support people from different backgrounds to get on well together
- Build trust and pride
- Promote early intervention and prevention thus reducing reliance on public sector services, allowing resources to be used more effectively
- Improve services that are personalised and flexible

We seek to enable Councillors to empower residents to find creative solutions to the local issues that matter most to them and help create vibrant communities in which people feel happy, safe and proud.

This is not just about how Ward Councillors work, it applies to the whole organisation. As part of a strengths-based approach, Rotherham Council will:

- Place communities at the heart of everything we do
- Always ask and listen to ensure we are addressing the things that matter to residents
- Be innovative in how we involve residents so that it maximises their skills and knowledge
- Problem solve collaboratively with communities
- Be 'working with' our communities and not 'doing to' them
- Identify and support the motivation to act within communities
- Nurture relationships within neighbourhoods
- Build the capacity and resilience of the community and local community organisations

The Role and Expectation of Councillors

To work well in a strengths-based system, it is important that we define the expectations we have of Councillors and the specifics of the role they will play as community leaders over the next six years. These are defined by the Nolan Principles and our new definition of the 21st Century Rotherham Councillor.

The Nolan Principles

People who represent and work for the Council are expected to follow the seven Nolan Principles of Public Life. These help ensure decisions and the allocation of public money are fair, honest, and in the public interest and that high standards of behaviour from those serving the community are maintained.

1. **Selflessness** - Putting residents first and making decisions to benefit the community, not for personal gain.
2. **Integrity** - Doing the right thing and avoiding situations where personal interests could influence decisions.
3. **Objectivity** - Being fair and impartial and making decisions based on evidence and clear criteria, not favouritism or bias.
4. **Accountability** - Being open to scrutiny and prepared to explain decisions and actions to residents and others.
5. **Openness** - Being transparent and sharing information where possible so people understand how decisions are made.
6. **Honesty** - Telling the truth and declaring any interests that could affect their role.
7. **Leadership** – Promoting the organisation's values and encouraging others to follow them.

Ten Leadership Characteristics of the 21st Century Rotherham Councillor

In a rapidly changing world, with a range of highly specific local issues and opportunities to consider, the role of a local Councillor is always shifting. Increasingly, this has a greater emphasis on neighbourhood leadership, multi-agency partnership working and engaging and empowering communities.

In undertaking their Neighbourhood Leadership role, Councillors will be supported to challenge and influence service performance, ensuring that Council and partner activity is aligned with locally agreed ward priorities.

Councillors will have access to clear escalation routes where services are not responding in a timely or effective manner.

To reflect this evolution, Ward Councillors have been engaged to coproduce a definition of what a Rotherham Councillor should be for the duration of this strategy:

1. **Visible and Accessible -** Approachable, easy to contact, open to conversations, and responsive to the community. Present in the neighbourhood, known to residents and active locally.

2. **Trusted Listener -** Listening carefully to residents' experiences, needs and ideas before acting. Absorbing challenge whilst remaining neutral and fair.

3. **Advocate -** Speaking up for all residents' concerns and aspirations at every level of the Council, championing issues that matter locally and standing alongside residents when it counts.

4. **Empower -** Enabling residents and community organisations to be at the heart of decision making and providing opportunities for them to take control of the things that matter to them.

5. **Bridge Builder -** Providing the link between residents and the Council to ensure local voices shape decisions.

6. **Champion -** Promoting pride in place, strengthening community voice, and supporting local community organisations to thrive.

7. **Communicator -** Making sure residents are aware of things that are happening or may impact in their neighbourhood through multiple channels and explaining why decisions have been made.

8. **Responsible Representative -** Using power transparently and ethically on behalf of all residents and acting with integrity, fairness and accountability.

9. **Connector -** Developing effective relationships between Council services, partners, community groups and residents to achieve shared priorities and outcomes.

10. **Problem Solver -** Working with the community to resolve local issues by navigating systems, influencing decisions, mediation and unlocking solutions.

These provide the basis for this strategy but will change over time and will be reviewed within and at the end of the strategy period.

How we enable Neighbourhood Leadership

Supporting neighbourhood leadership will be delivered through six areas of action:

1. **Ward Priorities and Plans** - Providing evidence and insight to enable Ward Councillors to have information, to complement their local knowledge, to support leadership ambitions and plans.
2. **Devolved Neighbourhood Budgeting** – Optimising the local budgets which can be made available to Ward Councillors and residents to respond to local need.
3. **Leadership in Support of Council and Partner Services** – Developing new protocols and working arrangements to enable all Ward Councillors to be able to shape services specific to their area.
4. **Ongoing Support and Leadership Development –** Supporting Ward Councillors to evolve as leaders.
5. **The Role of Residents in Neighbourhood Leadership** – Supporting Ward Councillors to encourage residents to get proactively involved and have greater influence and agency in their area.

6. **Measuring Impact and Feeding Back -** Better measuring the impact of the Neighbourhood Leadership and Neighbourhood Coordination functions. Enabling more frequent and centrally collated resident feedback to provide further influence over the core functions of the Council.

Action Area 1: Ward Priorities and Plans

A foundation of Rotherham's approach to Neighbourhood Leadership, is the creation of ward priorities and plans. These provide the structure around which Ward Councillors deploy their role as, **bridge builders**, **champions**, **connectors** and **problem solvers**. A key outcome for the Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy, is ensuring that these are given more visibility and prominence, bringing residents' needs and aspirations even closer to Council services.

Following their election, all Ward Councillors are supported to engage and work collaboratively with local residents and community groups, Council services and partners (such as the Police, NHS and Parish Councils), considering local evidence to identify ward priorities that are then developed into ward action plans.

The ward priorities and plans are reviewed and refreshed two years after the elections. This provides an important opportunity to review and target activity and support (across services) for the most deprived neighbourhoods and estates, where outcomes are poorest.

Common themes for ward priorities include:

- Community Safety & ASB
- Streetscene & Public Realm
- Environment, Parks and Green spaces
- Transport, Roads and Road Safety
- Health & Wellbeing (including health inequalities).
- Children, Young People & Families
- Cost-of-living
- Economy and Employment
- Culture, Art and Heritage
- Building community resilience

Ward Priorities and Plans provide the basis for:

- Local collaborative partnership working
- Development of community projects and initiatives
- Investment - including the Councillors' devolved ward budgets and external funding
- Targeting existing resources
- Scrutinising the local delivery of services and escalating issues of concern
- Informing and influencing future Council decision making around policy, strategy and resource allocation

To evolve ward priorities and plans further, the Council will provide enhanced provision of local data and evidence, to ensure that plans can remain agile to ever changing local, regional and national priorities. In addition, new working protocols will support closer links between ward plans and Council service delivery.

Action Area 2: Devolved Ward budgets

Providing budgets over which Councillors and residents can have direct influence is a vital way in which we can support community power, giving people direct influence over positive activities in the places in which they live. This is critical to the role of Councillors as **advocates**, who **empower** and create trust with residents.

Currently, Councillors have access to several different devolved ward budgets which they can use to fund local community groups, projects, activities and additional services that can help tackle their ward priorities. These include:

- Community Leadership Fund: a small individual budget allocated to each Councillor to fund local community organisations or projects, provide additional activities or put on events.
- Ward Capital Budget: allocated to each ward and used to purchase physical assets or equipment.
- Ward Housing Budget: allocated to each ward for environmental improvements that directly benefit Council tenants.
- Community Infrastructure Levy: money generated from new developments that is allocated to wards that do not have a Parish Council. It is primarily used to reduce the demands a development could place on the neighbourhood.

Ward budget statements are published annually to illustrate how Councillors have invested in their neighbourhoods to tackle their ward priorities.

Councillors will continue to look for opportunities to maximise the potential of their devolved ward budgets through match or seed funding, **connecting** with other partners to achieve this. In addition, they will be supported to evolve the way in which residents are engaged and **empowered** in the decision-making process, testing and scaling new approaches to involvement and participatory budgeting.

As the strategy evolves the Council will work with partners to explore opportunities to pool a broad range of budgets at a ward level. Learning from our two Pride in Place areas, we will look at the potential for more significant resident representation in shaping the service budgets which are most relevant to them and their area.

Action Area 3: Leadership in Support of Council and Partner Services

A critical aspiration of this strategy is to ensure that the services that the Council and its partners deliver are more visible and locally impactful for residents. This will mean establishing new, stronger links between Ward Councillors and services which are delivered borough wide.

This is inherent in the role of a neighbourhood leader. As **trusted listeners** and **advocates**, the Council will enhance support for Councillors to act as **bridge builders** to the services. Achieving this will require the evolution of the existing neighbourhoods team and enhanced support for Councillors in their role as **connectors** to a wider local partnership.

Neighbourhoods Team

Rotherham Council already invests significant resource into its Neighbourhoods Team, who work alongside Ward Councillors to provide the interface between local issues and Council services. The team provides the day-to-day support which enables Councillors to act as neighbourhood leaders by:

:

- Identifying and tackling ward priorities via services, interventions, projects and initiatives.
- Allocating devolved ward budgets
- Co-ordinating collaborative and integrated partnership working across Council services, partners, Parish Councils, local communities and other key stakeholders
- Taking a strengths-based approach within communities, ensuring residents and local community organisations can get involved and have a say in the things that matter to them
- Using a variety of communication channels to ensure residents are kept informed about what is happening within their neighbourhood
- Advocating on their behalf with Council services and other partners and stakeholders and ensure a timely response if required
- Convening monthly ward briefing meetings which provide the time and space to have conversations with services and partners, plan ahead, reflect on progress, and take any necessary corrective action

Partnership Working

As Neighbourhood Leaders, Ward Councillors are **connectors**, spearheading the development of effective relationships between Council services, partners, community groups and residents to achieve shared priorities and outcomes.

This will be supported through further empowerment and recognition to ensure that Ward Councillors are provided with:

- Early notification of planned activity within a neighbourhood or ward
- Improved communication and joint working between Council services, partners and Ward Councillors

- Named contacts for neighbourhood-based services that are committed to getting involved
    - The ability to identify and communicate incidents of silo-working
- Better forward planning and agreeing service delivery requirements
- Agency and support in taking a problem-solving approach
- Swift response from Council services and partners on issues raise by Councillors on behalf of their constituents.

Community Action Partnerships (CAPs) will continue to be delivered in all wards, with Ward Councillors providing a key role as **advocates** for residents. Focused on tackling community safety and ASB, they are led by the Ward Councillors and include representatives from South Yorkshire Police, Housing, Community Protection Unit & Environmental Health, Neighbourhoods and other services or agencies dependent on local or emerging issues.

<u>Strengthening Service Accountability and Escalation</u>

As **advocates**, **connectors** and **problem solvers** Councillors should have the ability to support and influence services in their locality. To enable this, services will be expected to provide greater accountability and responsiveness, committing to:

- Providing named service leads for each ward
- Attending relevant ward briefings and partnership meetings
- Responding to Councillor and neighbourhood coordinator enquiries within agreed timescales
- Demonstrating how service activity aligns with ward priorities

Neighbourhood Leadership will be embedded into a clear escalation framework, whereby Ward Councillors will be able to address issues where services are not responding adequately.

Action Area 4: Ongoing Support and Leadership Development

To assume the ten attributes of the 21st Century Rotherham Councillor, Councillors will need support. This will include a mix of day-to-day resource through the Neighbourhoods Team and specific training and development for Councillors, to help them broaden the focus of their day-to-day work.

New ways of working will be developed and promoted acrossthe Council, partners and communities. This enhanced support for Ward Councillors in their neighbourhood leadership role will help the Council to become more responsive to the needs of residents, build more cohesive communities and continue to build trust.

Rotherham's Ward Councillors will have access to any development opportunities and support they may need to work as leaders in their neighbourhoods, as will the Neighbourhoods Team that provides their primary support in that role.

Neighbourhood Coordination

Key to the implementation of this strategy is the evolution of the Council's Neighbourhood Coordination function. This requires us to create a 'team-mentality' where Ward Councillors work closely with Neighbourhood Coordinators. The Neighbourhood Coordinators themselves, form a team which will provide collective support for Councillors. This includes:

- Pairing of wards that have a synergy with one another which benefit from one full-time Neighbourhood Co-ordinator covering both.
- Understanding likely demands and issues across neighbourhoods within wards, targeting resource to respond to this.
- Matching existing skills and knowledge with priorities and issues faced in various wards.
- Spreading knowledge, experience and good practice across all wards.

To ensure consistency and quality across the borough, the Council will establish a clear framework for neighbourhood working, including defined standards for the role of Neighbourhood Coordinators, expectations around responsiveness and delivery, and regular performance oversight.

Within the strategy period, the 2028 local elections 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.

This approach will be supported by a borough-wide competency framework and consistent management oversight to ensure that all wards benefit from a high-quality and proactive neighbourhood coordination function.

Member Support and Development

Through the evolution of the existing member support and development programme, Ward Councillors will be given access to support aligned with the characteristics of the 21st Century Rotherham Councillor. This will include specific training to understand the breadth of Council services, development of facilitation skills and targeted leadership coaching where this is required.

Action Area 5: The Role of Residents in Neighbourhood Leadership

A strength-based model of neighbourhood leadership is dependent upon providing for communities to get involved in things that matter to them. This recognises residents themselves as important assets in their neighbourhoods, and that creating greater involvement will be good for the Council and the borough.

Part of the identified role of the 21st Century Rotherham Councillor is to **communicate, connect** and **empower** but it also needs residents to get proactively involved - providing information and ideas, co-producing solutions and seizing the opportunity to do things for themselves thus becoming more resilient.

Communicate

Councillors will continually promote their Neighbourhood Leadership role to increase understanding and will endeavour to keep residents informed about how ward priorities are being addressed. This is critical to Councillors remaining **visible and accessible** and currently takes place through several channels, including:

- Monthly ward e-bulletins
- Social media
- Ward webpages
- Traditional media - such as printed newsletters, flyers, posters and press releases.

As means of communication evolve, Councillors will be supported to engage with new technology and media.

Connect

Councillors will provide regular opportunities for residents and community organisations to raise issues, have their say and get to be more involved in things that are important to them. They will also endeavour to bring people together to celebrate and have fun! This currently takes several forms, including:

- Surgeries and submitting casework
- Attending community or Parish Council meetings
- Drop-in sessions
- Walkabouts
- Online surveys
- Public meetings
- Community events

As the strategy is delivered, Councillors, supported by Neighbourhood Coordinators, will be enabled to target engagement in the ways which are most effective in their wards, creating **responsible representation**.

Empower

Councillors will continue to create an environment of trust that will provide the space for communities to develop, grow and increase in confidence so that they can take

the lead within their own neighbourhoods thus identifying issues early and having the ability to respond quickly. Councillors will:

- Support ideas - encourage community-led projects and give people confidence to try new things, and scale this where it works.
- Remove barriers - help with allocations of ward budgets funding, seeking out permissions or providing advice.
- Share skills and knowledge – link in with Council services or partners and signpost to training and support.
- Champion local aspirations - Speak up for local priorities and help communities influence Council decisions.

Action Area 6: Measuring Impact and Feeding Back

Strong Neighbourhood Leaders will be **problem solvers**, which will require Ward Councillors to be agile to respond to the changing priorities of residents and the external pressure which impacts on their daily lives. To do this, they will need a better understanding of what is working well and stronger evidence to complement the information and insight they collect as **trusted listeners**.

This strategy seeks to create a supportive environment where Councillors can assess their own performance against the attributes of the 21st Century Rotherham Councillor.

Going forward the Ward Plans will evolve to have more robust quantitative and qualitative performance indicators that will illustrate the impact that local action is having within the ward and neighbourhoods. These will be targeted, dependent on the nature of the individual ward priorities but could include:

- Feedback from residents on:
  - influence and sense of control
  - levels of trust
  - how they feel about the area
  - what is going well or not
  - specific projects and initiatives
- Data – Crime, ASB, Health, Local Economy, Participation, Young People.
- Levels of reporting or taking up of a service
- Outcomes from Casework
- Attendance figures for events and/or subscription figures for ward e-bulletins
- Ward budget summaries

Progress against the ward priorities will be reflected back to residents through various communication channels, such as the ward e-bulletin, the publication of annual basis performance figures and public reports.

As **advocates**, **champions** and **responsible representatives**, Ward Councillors will also have a role (supported by Neighbourhood Coordinators) to provide vital local information and sentiment into the Council, ensuring services and activities are as responsive as possible to local needs and aspirations.