Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Public Report
Improving Places Select Commission

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting
Improving Places Select Commission – 01 December 2026

Report Title
Thriving Neighbourhoods Annual Report 2025/26

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?
No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report
Jane Maxwell – Director for Policy, Strategy & Engagement

Report Author(s)
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Ward(s) Affected
Borough-Wide

Report Summary
Progress on the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy (2018-2025) and the Neighbourhood Working model

Recommendations
That the Select Commission note the progress of the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy (2018-2025) and the Neighbourhood Working model

List of Appendices Included
Appendix 1 – Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy (2018 – 2025)
Appendix 2 – Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy (2026 - 2032)
Appendix 3 – Neighbourhoods Performance Indicators
Appendix 4 – Ward Priorities summary (2024-26)

Background Papers
- Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy (2018-2025)
- Refresh of Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy cabinet report – 21 November 2022
- Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy (2026 - 2032)
- Rotherham Council Plan 2025-2030: Forging Ahead
- Rotherham Council Year Ahead Delivery Plan 2025/26

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel
No

Council Approval Required
No

Exempt from the Press and Public
No

Thriving Neighbourhoods Annual Report 2025/26

1. Background

1.1 This annual report focuses on the municipal year May 2025 to May 2026 but also provides a summary of any significant activity up to and including November 2026.

1.2 Cabinet approved the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy (2018-2025) in November 2018 following the introduction of the new neighbourhood working model in May 2017. The Strategy was refreshed and agreed by Cabinet in November 2022 (see Appendix 1). An updated Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy is due to be produced in 2027.

1.3 The Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy aims to achieve –

- Neighbourhoods that are safe and welcoming with good community spirit.
- Residents are happy, healthy and loving where they live.
- Residents have the opportunity to use their strengths, knowledge and skills to achieve what is important to them

1.4 The Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy helps to deliver the Council's vision under the 'Places are Thriving, Safe and Clean' strategic outcome within the Council Plan (2025-30) - *'Our people and neighbourhoods are important to us and are at the heart of everything we do. Through the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy, we have already come a long way, and we continue to work with local people to find solutions to local issues, building on our heritage and assets. Alongside this, we are delivering events and activities that bring people together, reducing social isolation and enabling people to have an active cultural life. This is a crucial part of transforming our communities, creating a sense of cohesion, belonging and pride.'*

1.5 The 'Places are Thriving, Safe and Clean' theme within the Council's Year Ahead Delivery Plan includes the following priorities that the Council focused on throughout 2025/26 –

- Helping people to feel safe in their community
- Creating vibrant communities – which includes specific activity relating to the delivery of ward plans and the refresh of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy
- Better public places
- Revitalising the town centre

1.6 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report, which was presented to cabinet in September 2023, provided positive feedback on the Council's neighbourhood working model stating – '*The Council's Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy aspires to strengthen the role of ward Councillors as community leaders who can work with their communities, their partners and those delivering service in communities to bring about the changes that communities want to see. The peer team was impressed by the exemplary approach to community engagement at ward level, where dedicated and well-supported Ward Councillors take the lead*.'

2 Key Issues

Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy (2018-2025)

2.1 A refreshed version of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy (2018-2025) was approved by Cabinet in November 2022 (see Appendix 1).

2.2 An updated Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy will be produced for Spring 2027. It is anticipated that this will illustrate how we work across services and organisations in places to respond effectively to residents' priorities and improve outcomes. It will consider local assets and ways of working, social capital and people getting along well together, and how partners can operate in a more joined-up way. It provides the opportunity to join up other strategic approaches to service delivery, such as NHS Neighbourhood Working, and programmes, such as Pride in Place.

2.3 Delivery of the strategy is done via the 25 ward plans. Councillors and the Neighbourhoods Teams review and update these plans monthly. Councillors present ward reports to Council to illustrate progress against their ward priorities. The current cycle of reports to Council commenced in July 2025 and will end in November 2027.

2.4 A range of Neighbourhoods Team Performance Indicators are recorded throughout the year. The figures from 2021 – 2026 are attached as Appendix 4. The positive impact in neighbourhoods of the activities and interventions are captured through case studies and stories, that are included in the Councillors' ward reports, ward e-bulletins and other media channels.

Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy (2026-2032)

2.5 The neighbourhood leadership role of the Councillor has now been captured in the new Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy (2026-2032), which was approved by cabinet in July 2026 (see Appendix 2) and is currently being designed.

2.6 The Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy sets out the future vision and ambition for neighbourhood working –
'Rotherham's neighbourhood model is already recognised nationally for its strength in supporting Ward Councillors to act as leaders. This strategy seeks to build on this strong foundation to define and embed the model further. It gives Ward Councillors an enhanced role as conveners and conduits for resident aspirations, helping the Council to more readily listen, learn and respond to local needs. We define 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'

2.7 Key features of the Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy include –

- The 21st Century Rotherham Councillor
- Support available for Councillors within their wards
- A stronger connection between neighbourhoods / wards and services
- Strengths-Based Working

- Stronger arrangements for monitoring issues and tracking success

Thriving Neighbourhoods Programme Board

2.8 The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report (2023) included a recommendation to '*Develop a clearer and shared understanding of integrated locality working*' and suggested that '*Integrated locality working through increased co-design and co-production of solutions and services alongside partner organisations can deliver enhanced outcomes for residents through improved services and solutions which are tailored to their needs*.'

2.9 In response to this a Board made of senior council officers from across the Council, South Yorkshire Police and the NHS was established in June 2024. This has recently been renamed the 'Thriving Neighbourhoods Programme Board'. The Board is responsible for the development and the implementation of the new Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy, which will be completed by Spring 2027, and will oversee the implementation of the Neighbourhood Leadership Strategy (2026-32).

2.10 The Board supports the North, Central and South Locality Managers Groups, which comprise of area managers from council services and partners that deliver on that particular footprint - such as Neighbourhoods, Housing, Environmental Enforcement, Community Protection Unit, Street Scene, Early Help, Adult Care and South Yorkshire Police. The Groups are responsible for identifying and maximising opportunities to connect and integrate public sector and VCS service delivery across the North, Central or South Locality Areas, in line with the ambitions set out in the Council Plan, the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and the ward priorities. The Locality Managers Groups also oversee the delivery of the Selective Licensing Neighbourhood Improvement Plans.

2.11 Over 2025/26 other specific activity that the Thriving Neighbourhoods Programme Board have focused on includes -

- Exploring solutions to tackle the complex challenges in Eastwood Village
- Embedding a Strengths-Based Working approach within the Council via training and the development of a Community of Practice.

Councillors as Neighbourhood Leaders

2.12 Councillors are at the centre of Rotherham's neighbourhood working model, which supports them to maximise their role as neighbourhood leaders.

Development and Support

2.13 Councillors are supported on a day-to-day basis by the Neighbourhoods Team. During 2025/26 the Neighbourhoods Team facilitated 255 ward member briefings. These ward briefings are fundamental to the neighbourhood working model as they provide Councillors with the opportunity to review their ward priorities, plans and budgets, engage with various partners and services, consider any emerging issues, take a lead on any projects or initiatives, and discuss how to involve and work with the local community.

Ward Priorities and Plans

2.14 Following the May 2024 elections and the completion of the ward inductions, the Neighbourhoods Team supported new and returning Councillors in the identification of their new ward priorities. Councillors were provided with ward data, input and advice from council services and partners and local community intelligence, including the results from any recent consultation exercises. The new ward priorities were published on the Council's website in October 2024. A summary is included as Appendix 4. A mid-term review of the ward priorities took place in Summer 2026 and have been published.

2.15 Councillors continue to work with a range of council services, local communities and numerous partners to develop projects and improve local services to tackle their ward priorities. Details of this activity is captured in the individual ward plans, included in the monthly ward e-bulletins and summarised in Ward Councillors' reports to full Council.

2.16 Councillors' reports to Council include numerous stories and case studies, illustrating the impact of neighbourhood working, their role as neighbourhood leaders and progress on ward priorities. The current cycle of reports to Council commenced in July 2025 and will end in November 2027. All ward reports are published on the ward webpages once presented.

2.17 As well as forming the basis for local action, the ward priorities and plans are used to inform Council decision making - the Council Plan, policies, strategies, service plans and resource allocation.

Devolved Ward Budgets

2.18 In 2025/26 Councillors had access to the following devolved ward budgets -

- Community Leadership Fund (CLF) - £1,584 per individual Elected Member (revenue). A total budget of £93,456.
- Ward Capital Budget - £7,120 for two member wards £10,680 for three member wards. A total budget of £210,040.
- Ward Housing Budget (WHB) - £4,000 base budget for each ward with an enhancement dependent upon the number of Council homes in the ward. A total budget of £216,000.
- Local Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – 15% of the total CIL paid to the Council retained in any ward not covered by a Parish Council. The budget available to Councillors is dependent on the level of development in the ward, land values and the payment schedules.
- In 2025/26 a total of £1,299,032 was available for Councillors to spend in their wards.

	Budget	Spent	Balance
CLF	£130,546	£94,025	£36,521
Capital	£373,990	£149,873	£224,116
WHB	£354,433	£155,226	£199,207
CIL	£440,063	£117,506	£322,557
Total	**£1,299,032**	**£516,631**	**£782,401**

2.19 CLF and Ward Capital Budgets –

- These budgets have a roll forward provision, with any funding unallocated in a specific year rolling forward into the following year, up to 2027/28.
- In 2025/26 Councillors allocated £243,898 to projects, services and activities tackling their ward priorities. £94,025 from CLF and £149,873 from the Ward Capital Budget.

2.20 Ward Housing Budget –

- The £216,000 annual Ward Housing Budget is made available each year to support projects and investments around our council housing estates, to address ward priorities and issues of concern for council tenants and residents.
- The budget had previously been administered by the Housing & Estates Service. Administration of the budget moved to the Neighbourhoods Team in April 2024 to better align with CLF and Ward Capital Budgets
- This budget also has a roll forward provision, with any funding unallocated in a specific year rolling forward into the following year, up to 2027/28.
- During 2025/26 a total of £155,226 was allocated to support the delivery of local projects that directly benefitted council tenants.

2.21 Community Infrastructure Levy –

- A charge that Councils can apply to new developments to raise funds for local infrastructure.
- Wards that are not covered by a Parish Council retain the Local CIL or 'Neighbourhood Portion'. This equates to 15% of the total CIL.
- The budget available to Councillors is dependent on the level of development in the ward, land values and the payment schedules. There is no deadline to spend CIL monies.
- CIL has been made available to Councillors in non-parished wards since April 2022.
- At the beginning of 2025/26 £440,063 of Neighbourhood CIL was available to 12 of the non-parished wards. During 2025/26 a total of £117,506 was allocated to support the delivery of local projects.

2.22 £110,603 (21.4%) of the devolved budgets was invested directly into the Voluntary and Community Sector, supporting a total of 221 community organisations. £156,245 (30.2%) went into the public sector for additional activities, services or equipment. The remaining £249,783 (48.4%) was used to purchase items/equipment from the private sector to improve community assets and or support community activities, such as play equipment.

2.23 In total, Councillors allocated £516,631 on projects and services in line with their ward priorities during 2025/26. The remaining £782,401 was carried over

into the next financial year. Summaries of the allocations made in each individual ward in 2025/26 were published on the Council website in August 2026.

Communication and Community Engagement

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

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

2.26 Following the recommendation from the Improving Place Select Commission in January 2026, future annual reports will be accompanied with an easy to read, accessible summary document for public consumption which will provide a summary of the impact of neighbourhood working across the borough. The first of these will be published in summer 2027.

Website

2.27 The Neighbourhoods home webpage includes information on the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy, an interactive map of all the wards, details on how to apply for devolved ward budgets, links to the Parish Councils section of the Council website and links to all 25 ward pages. In 2025/26 there were 3,864 unique views of this webpage.

2.28 The 25 ward webpages include Councillors details, a link to subscribe to the ward e-bulletin, and useful links to other websites. They also allow people to access the ward priorities, ward data profile, annual ward budget statements and the Councillors' report to Council.

Ward E-bulletins

2.29 Each ward produces and circulates a monthly e-bulletin. The wards that cover Rawmarsh and Swinton issue a joint e-bulletin. These are written in consultation with Councillors and provide local information and numerous stories illustrating the progress made in tackling ward priorities and the impact of neighbourhood working within the ward.

2.30 At the end of 2025/26 there were 12,041 subscribers to the ward e-bulletins. Over the last 12 months the Communications Team have undertook a review to check the accuracy of the subscription figures. This identified a large number of subscribers had not indicated a ward preference and, therefore, had not been receiving any e-bulletins. These individuals were contacted periodically over the year to encourage them to select a ward e-bulletin to receive. Those that chose not to do this were removed from the subscribers list to ensure GDPR compliance. This review shows that the total number of unique subscribers is

now 7,087. There could be up to 700 more unique subscribers to add to this total, but it has not been possible to confirm this as some subscriber email addresses are anonymised.

2.31 Each ward e-bulletin is sent on a monthly basis, which equates to approximately 275 editions issued throughout the year. Many individuals subscribe to multiple ward e-bulletins. As a result, 22,300 ward e-bulletins are received by subscribers each month. The engagement rate (the percentage of bulletins opened and read) is 74%. A high rate considering the number of ward e-bulletins issued. This appears to indicate that the content is of interest and useful to the reader.

2.32 It was anticipated that the Neighbourhoods and Communications Teams would conduct a survey with e-bulletin readers in 2026 in order to find out what they liked about the e-bulletins and how they think they could be improved. This has yet to happen but will now take place in early 2027. Once completed it will be followed up by a campaign to increase subscribers.

Supporting Community Organisations

2.33 Supporting local community groups who run activities and services that help tackle ward priorities, is a core function of the Neighbourhoods Team.

2.34 In 2025/26, the Team supported 341 individual community organisations with general advice, funding, volunteer recruitment and linking them into various partnerships and services. This figure includes the establishment of 11 new community organisations. This work was alongside and sometimes in addition to the ward budget funding which was awarded to 221 community organisations.

Community Events

2.35 The Neighbourhoods Team continue to work alongside Councillors to bring communities together through a range of enjoyable, cultural and social activities and events, which promote cohesion and inspire hope and pride in local communities across the Borough. 322 community events were arranged or supported by the Team in 2025/26.

Consultation

2.36 The Neighbourhoods Team continue to advise and support Council services and partners who wish to consult within wards and neighbourhoods. This is in accordance with the Council's Consultation and Engagement Framework.

2.37 Councillors often initiate specific and/or local consultation exercises on proposed developments within their neighbourhoods, such as a new play area. These consultations are supported by the Neighbourhoods Team and other relevant council services.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

2.38 The Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy emphasises the need to promote and provide opportunities for all communities within the Borough. In 2025/26, Councillors and the Neighbourhoods Team supported 204 activities, projects or initiatives that promoted communities with protected characteristics. These include consultation exercises, support/funding for community groups and community events.

2.39 Over the next 12 months the Neighbourhoods Team will continue to work with Councillors on community cohesion projects and provide more opportunities for communities with protected characteristics to get involved in local consultation, activities and co-produced community action.

Partnership Working

Ward Priorities

2.40 The priorities within ward plans form the basis of local projects, partnerships and networks which are supported by the Neighbourhoods Team and Councillors. These priorities are shared across all Council services and partner agencies to help inform strategies, service plans, the allocation of resources and the delivery of services. A summary of the ward priorities is included as Appendix 3.

2.41 Work continues to increase the visibility of the ward priorities to all staff across the council. This includes ward priorities being considered during service planning and strategy development. In addition, the priorities are included in regular discussions with various management teams across the council and as part of the annual programme of neighbourhood tours for all staff.

Neighbourhood Partnerships and Networks

2.42 A range of neighbourhood-based partnerships and networks have continued to meet or have been established in order to tackle the priorities within the ward plans. This includes the Community Action Partnerships (CAPs) which operate in all 25 wards and provide a vehicle to tackle community safety related issues.

2.43 In 2025/26 the Neighbourhoods Team co-ordinated 700 neighbourhood partnership and network meetings. These have been a mix of in-person and online Teams meetings.

Parish and Town Councils

2.44 Parish and Town Councils are key to local partnership and neighbourhood working. The Parish Council & Neighbourhoods Liaison Officer is a unique post and illustrates the importance the Council places on these positive relationships. Parish Councils recognise this as a model of good practice.

2.45 Over the last year the Parish Council Liaison Officer has worked alongside the Parish Councils to –

- Monitor and promote the Joint Working Agreement with the Council
- Meet with each other, council services and partners on a regular basis via the Joint Working Group, Parish Councils' Network and the Clerks' meetings.
- Link into Ward Councillors and key council services to address local and/or emerging issues.
- Hold events and celebrations – including early preparation with council services for events such as Remembrance Sunday
- Create and distribute a Parish Councillors handbook
- Promote the role of the Parish Councillor across the parishes
- Access learning and development opportunities.
- Recruit Parish Council representatives to various Boards and Groups, such as the Transport Advisory Group

2.46 The Parish Council & Neighbourhoods Liaison Officer co-ordinates the Parish Council and RMBC Joint Working Group, Parish Council Network, Clerks meetings and joint learning and development sessions. During 2025/26, 25 of the 31 Parish and Town Councils in Rotherham were involved in one or more of these meetings.

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

Rotherham Town Centre

2.48 The Neighbourhoods Team has the lead role in promoting a placemaking approach within Rotherham town centre by bringing all key stakeholders together to achieve common goals and ensure the town centre becomes a desirable place to live, work and visit.

2.49 The Town Centre Community Co-ordinator is an integral link between those involved in the economic regeneration of the town centre, various council services, local businesses, the VCS, residents and visitors. The performance figures attached as Appendix 4 illustrate that ASB, Community Safety and Street Scene related issues is where most of the demand lies, followed by support for businesses, events, community engagement and regeneration projects.

2.50 Particular achievements for the Town Centre Community Co-ordinator during 2025/26 include –

- Forge Island – maintaining relationships with existing and new businesses and early identification of any emerging site issues.
- Riverside Gardens / Corporation Street – engaging businesses impacted by the ongoing works and liaising with other services to reduce disruption.
- Supporting new and existing local businesses - providing advice, support and signposting as well as encouraging working together to maximise footfall and opportunities.

- Vacant buildings – working with potential investors who are interested in long-term empty buildings and signposting to specialist advice.
- Events - engaging with businesses and council services, before, during and after the events. The highlight being the Reytons meet and greet event at ARC Cinema and the Number 1 album announcement at All Saints Square.
- Community Safety & Street Scene – leading on weekly partnership walkabouts with council services and partners and co-ordinating actions to address any issues identified
- Communication and Engagement – identify good news stories and Town Centre related content to promote the town centre and drive up footfall.

2.51 The Town Centre Strategic Group, chaired by the Executive Director for Regeneration & Environment, oversees a Town Centre Year Ahead Plan (2026/27). The Plan pulls together and steers work relating to the town centre. The actions are organised thematically and demonstrates how services and partners are working collectively to achieve the desired objectives. These themes are -

- Placemaking
- Connectivity
- Housing & Communities
- Services & Facilities
- Safety & Street Scene
- Culture & Leisure
- Business Support & Growth
- Marketing & Communications

2.52 The Town Centre Strategic Group is responsible for producing a new Town Centre Masterplan in 2027. Engagement activity with key stakeholders commenced in autumn 2026.

2.53 The Town Centre Operational Group meets on a monthly basis to ensure there is joint-working and co-ordination of services and partners in the town centre. The Operational Group progresses the actions identified in the Town Centre Year Ahead Plan.

3 Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 The report presented is for information.

4 Consultation on proposal

4.1 The report presented is for information.

5 Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 The report presented is for information.

6 Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

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

7 Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 There are no direct legal implications.

8 Human Resources Advice and Implications

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

9 Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 The outcomes within the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy and the Neighbourhood Working model support the delivery of the Council Plan's strategic outcomes around 'Children & Young People Achieve' and 'Residents Live Safe, Healthy and Independent Lives'

9.2 The ward priorities illustrate where Councillors are targeting resources towards both Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults. This includes new or additional activities, improved facilities or improved access to services. Most of the wards also have priorities that try to mitigate against the 'Cost-of-Living' crisis.

10 Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 The neighbourhood working model enables the Council to respond to the specific needs of Rotherham's increasingly diverse communities. Engagement with residents takes into account the strengths, assets and needs of different communities of interest, which differ in each neighbourhood and ward. Neighbourhood working allows the flexibility to respond to these needs.

10.2 The ward priorities and ward budget statements published on the website illustrate how Councillors have targeted activity, services and resources toward communities with protected characteristics. Case studies and in ward e-bulletins and the Councillors' reports to Council illustrate the impact being made.

10.3 Over the next 12 months the Neighbourhoods Team will continue to work with Councillors on community cohesion projects and provide more opportunities for communities with protected characteristics to get involved in local consultation, activities and co-produced community action.

11 Implications for CO_2 Emissions and Climate Change

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

12 Implications for Partners

12.1 Integrated partnership working is covered in paragraphs 2.40 to 2.53 of this report. This illustrates the importance of partners (from the public, voluntary and private sector) and Parish Councils in the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy. The ward priorities and plans are informed by the experience and intelligence from these partners, which encourages the establishment of shared priorities and goals.

12.2 Partners will be directly involved in the new Thriving Neighbourhood Strategy that will be developed in early 2027 and presented to cabinet in April 2027.

13 Risks and Mitigation

13.1 Risks relating to the delivery of the Thriving Neighbourhoods Strategy are captured in the Policy, Strategy & Engagement Directorate Risk Register.

14 Accountable Officer(s)

Martin Hughes, Head of Neighbourhoods

Approvals obtained on behalf of:-

	Named Officer	Date
Director of Policy, Strategy & Engagement	Jane Maxwell	23/11/26
Service Director, Financial Services	Rob Mahon	23/11/26

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This report is published on the Council's website.