COUNCIL MEETING
4th March, 2026

Present:- The Mayor of Rotherham (Councillor Rukhsana Ismail) (in the Chair); Councillors Rashid, Adair, Ahmed, Alam, Allen, Bacon, Baggaley, Baker-Rogers, Ball, Baum-Dixon, Bennett-Sylvester, Beresford, Blackham, Bower, Brent, A. Carter, C. Carter, Castledine-Dack, Clarke, T. Collingham, Z. Collingham, Cowen, Currie, Cusworth, Duncan, Elliott, Fisher, Garnett, Hall, Harper, Harrison, Hughes, Hussain, Jackson, Jones, Keenan, Lelliott, Marshall, Mault, McKiernan, Monk, Pitchley, Read, Reynolds, Sheppard, Stables, Steele, Sutton, Tarmey, Taylor, Thorp, Tinsley, Williams and Yasseen.

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

123. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor invited all present to observe a minute's silence in memory of former Mayor and Councillor Terry Sharman, who had served on the Council from 1973-2015, and former Councillor Peter Thirlwall, who served on the Council from 2002-2011. The Mayor also wished those observing Ramadan, Lent and Holi all the best.

Throughout the meeting, Members expressed their condolences to the families of former Mayor and Councillor Sharman and former Councillor Thirlwall.

124. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Beck, Knight and Ryalls.

125. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sheppard declared a personal interest in Minute No. 127 – Recommendation from Cabinet – Budget and Council Tax 2026-27 and Medium Term Financial Strategy - on the basis that there were proposals relating to Selective Licensing Areas and he lived in a Selective Licensing Area. As this was a personal interest, Councillor Sheppard took part in the debate and voted on the item.

126. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no such items that required the exclusion of the press and public from this meeting.

127. RECOMMENDATION FROM CABINET - BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2026-27 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Further to Minute No. 122 of the Cabinet Meeting held on 9th February 2026, the proposed Budget and Council Tax for 2026/27 was presented to Council for approval. This was based on the Council's Final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2026/27, budget consultation and the consideration of Directorate budget proposals. A review of the financial planning assumptions within the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) had also been undertaken.

In moving the proposals, the Leader thanked Cabinet Members, the Finance Team and the Chief Executive for their work on the budget proposals. He particularly thanked Councillor Alam for his dedication and support as Cabinet Member for Finance. He noted the difficulties the Council had faced due to austerity under the former Conservative Governments and the difficult decisions that had been taken, namely the closure of buildings, the loss of jobs and the retreating of Services.

The Leader stated that, as of March 2026, nearly one in 4 councils with Social Care responsibilities in England needed Exceptional Financial Support. Bills in North Somerset, Shropshire and Worcestershire were going up by 9%.

As part of the proposals, Council Tax in Rotherham would be increased by 3.95% (including a basic Council Tax increase of 1.95% and an Adult Social Care precept increase of 2%.) This was below the Government's cap for the seventh successive year and lower than Reform-led Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Kent, Lincolnshire, and North and West Northamptonshire's, lower than Conservative-led North Yorkshire, and Liberal Democrat-led Hull and East Riding Councils. The Leader stated that this was a responsible decision and the result of a Labour Government backing communities. Rotherham had received £14 million more than anticipated from the Government last year, with an additional £9 million more this year and a further £10 million more over the next 3 years as part of the Final Settlement.

The Leader highlighted some of the proposals within the budget, including the creation of a new team to support high street businesses, backed by £25,000 for each of Wath, Dinnington, Swinton and Maltby and the Town Centre to support promotional activities, events and locally identified needs. The next round of Shop Unit Grants would receive over £600,000 from the Local Growth Fund. The Roadside Cleaning Team would be increased again, and additional staff would be employed at Household Waste sites, supporting the on-site re-use shop and reducing the waste into landfill. The price of Household Bulky Waste Collections would be frozen.

In relation to Selective Licensing, the Leader explained that 60% of respondents to the consultation agreed that environmental issues were a problem in Selective Licensing areas. As such, a dedicated team was proposed to support these communities with such issues. A capital investment was also proposed to make physical improvements.

Other proposals included additional staffing to keep Rother Valley Country Park safe and in a good condition. A new fit-for-purposes building at Ulley Country Park would be in place and the running track at Herringthorpe would be replaced. £750,00 would be invested in the next phase of improvements to children's play areas. A pilot scheme would be introduced, halving the price of swimming for people aged over 65 to go swimming.

The Leader explained the proposals related to helping families and children. These included introducing thousands more universal youth work places and 10,000 more places in holiday activity clubs. An investment would be made into additional Educational Psychology Services to ensure children got access to much needed support earlier.

In summing up, the Leader stated that the choices made in the Labour Group's budget proposals had been made to ensure fairness. They were about supporting families, tackling unemployment, helping communities flourish and improving the quality of life in the Borough.

In seconding the budget, Councillor Alam, Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety, also thanked Cabinet colleagues, Members of the Budget Working Group, Councillor Steele and the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board and officers, particularly Judith Badger, Rob Mahon and John Edwards. He referenced the major reforms the Labour Government had implemented in relation to the Fair Funding Review. The revisions to the Settlement had enabled proposals which would allow for investment in communities after years of austerity imposed by previous Governments. The Rotherham Labour administration would not allow the most vulnerable to be left behind and the budget, therefore, put families first.

Referencing the budget consultation, Councillor Alam stated that this had helped decide the key priorities. These included investing in more opportunities for children and young people, thriving neighbourhoods, a cleaner Borough and nobody being left behind. Councillor Alam was also pleased that investment was proposed in Internal Audit and cyber security.

The Capital budget focused on community infrastructure, highways, better and safer roads along with facility upgrades. The Council Tax increase proposed (3.95%) was the lowest in the Yorkshire Region. Councillor Alam stated that he was proud to support a budget that brought communities together and promoted equality, opportunity and social justice.

Two notices of amendment had been received in relation to the Budget and Council Tax 2026-27 proposals.

The first was moved by Councillor Adam Carter and seconded by Councillor Tarmey on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group:

That the Budget and Council Tax 2026/27 report be accepted as proposed, with the exception of the following amendments:

COUNCIL TAX PROPOSALS

Reduce the proposed Council Tax increase from 3.95% to 2.93%, with the proposed 2.93% increase being made up of a basic Council Tax increase of 0.93% and a 2% increase through the Adult Social Care precept (ringfenced for Adult Social Care).

The reduction in the proposed Council Tax will create a funding shortfall of £1.417m in 2026/27, £1.474m in 2027/28, and £1.532m in 2028/29.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROPOSALS

1. Remove the capital investment proposal for the Strategic Acquisitions Fund, that was approved as part of the Budget and Council Tax Report 2025/26, approved at Council in March 2025, this will reduce the 2026/27 Capital Budget by £2m in total.

2. Remove the capital investment proposal for the Selective Licensing Community Impact, this will reduce the 2026/27 to 2029/30 Capital Budget by £500k in total.

PROPOSED REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS

1. Remove the revenue investment proposal for the Street Safe Team, this will reduce the Council Budget from 2026/27 onwards by £570k p.a but will require a one-off payment estimated at £87k in 2026/27 to address notice periods and redundancies for 10 FTE’s currently in post.

2. Reduce the revenue Budget for the Employment Solutions Team by £359k, this will reduce the Council Budget from 2026/27 onwards by £359k p.a but will require a one-off payment estimated at £133k in 2026/27 to address notice periods and redundancies for 12 FTE’s currently in post.

3. Remove the revenue investment proposal for the Events Team, this will reduce the Council Budget from 2026/27 onwards by £119k p.a.

4. Remove the revenue investment proposal for Selective Licensing Community Impact, this will reduce the Council Budget from 2026/27 onwards by £362k p.a.

5. The removal of the proposed capital investment for the Strategic Acquisitions Fund of £2m in total, will release revenue Budget savings of £75k in 2026/27 and £150k in 2027/28 onwards.

6. The removal of the proposed capital investment for the Selective Licensing Community Impact of £500k in total, £100k in each year of 2026/27 to 2030/31, will release revenue Budget savings of £10k in 2026/27, £20k in 2027/28, £50k in 2028/29.

7. The overall impact of these Budget proposals will create a gap in 2026/27 of £142k and surpluses of £106k in 2027/28 and £77.5k in 2028/29, overall a net surplus of £42k across the period. This net surplus be transferred to the Budget and Financial Strategy Reserve.

In moving the amendment, Councillor Adam Carter thanked the Council's Finance Team for their support. He stated that he was proud that the Liberal Democrat Group was once again proposing the lowest Council Tax proposal in Rotherham. With many Reform, Labour and Conservative Council's around the country failing on their promises to cut or minimise tax rises, Councillor Carter was pleased to propose the Liberal Democrat's inflation busting budget.

He stated that the proposals were simple. The Liberal Democrats did not think it appropriate for the Council to focus on more events in the Town Centre when they kept failing to empty the bins properly or on time. They did agree with the thrust of supporting young people and had, therefore, kept those proposals in their budget. Councillor Carter stated that the proposals in relation to Selective Licensing had, however, been removed in their amendment. The Liberal Democrats did not think it was fair that funding from general taxation of all residents should be used to fund this policy.

In summing up, Councillor Carter stated that the Liberal Democrats proposals were simple: cut some of the unnecessary expenditure; keep money in resident's pockets; support the most vulnerable; and make Council Tax as low as possible.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Tarmey stated that there was a lot in the Labour budget proposals that he could support. He welcomed the 3 year funding plan from Central Government but explained that more needed to be done to ensure a proper sustainable funding package that would serve the needs of local government for decades.

Councillor Tarmey was proud of the Liberal Democrat proposals to increase Council Tax by the lowest amount of the 3 groups. The proposals would continue to support the poorest families and the older people, but wasteful spending would be removed. This included the Street Safe Team who were not value for money, the investment in Selective Licensing which led to inflated rents for the poorest residents and the Employment Solutions Team which was not cost effective. He echoed Councillor Carter's view that the focus should be on the basics like emptying the bins, not a larger events team.

Members were invited to speak on the Liberal Democrat amendment.

Councillor Currie questioned the approach that the lowest Council Tax was the best option. He stated that Council Tax should be appropriate for the level of investment needed to move forward and that he could not support this amendment as it removed all of the good investment for the Town Centre and residents.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester expressed concerns that the amendment removed support for areas that most needed it and did not do right by staff. He stated that it would put extra pressure on people and make it harder for people to do their existing jobs when they needed more support. This would impact the Town Centre and have ripple effects on anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Williams stated that it felt like the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition days again with both groups proposing cuts to vital public services, making public sector redundancies and withdrawing support services. He gave his support to the Council's Employment Solutions Team which supported residents back into training and work and, therefore, benefitted the local economy. Since April 2025 to January 2026 over 500 residents had engaged with the Service. Councillor Williams was also concerned about the proposal to remove the capital investment in the Strategic Acquisition Fund as this would take money away from the Rotherham Gateway Station project. This project was vital to improve transport and wider regeneration in Rotherham, and this was reflected in the Government's recent Northern Powerhouse Rail announcement. Councillor Williams stated that he would not be supporting this amendment as he would not stand by and watch the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives cut funding away from this vital project.

Councillor Beresford rejected the idea that the poorest in the Borough were being negatively impacted by Selective Licensing. She stated that at least one of the areas covered by Selective Licensing fell into the top 10 most deprived areas in the country. The consultation showed that people in these areas wanted solutions to wider problems like anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping and the proposals to invest into enforcement would help. Councillor Beresford felt it important that the concerns raised in the consultation should be listened to and, therefore, encouraged

others to vote against the amendment which proposed removing the relevant investments.

Councillor Zach Collingham stated that it did not appear that the Liberal Democrat Group had spent much time on their proposals. He supported the restraint on Council Tax, stating that the Labour proposals were overreaching. He did criticise the lack of imagination in the amendment and stated it was just a list of cuts with no positive proposals included. Given the lack of investment, he did not think the sacking of staff could be justified. Councillor Collingham explained that initiatives such as the Street Safe Team needed to be able to run their course in order to demonstrate to the Labour Group that they had failed. This could not be done when the work had barely started.

Councillor Steele stated that he would be voting against this amendment as it would put people out of work, would not invest in the Town centre or in Rotherham businesses.

Councillor Marshall spoke in defence of the Events Team investment proposals. The contribution of tourism to the local economy continued to grow and the Rotherham Show welcomed a record number of visitors in 2025. The demand for events was growing and, therefore, funding and staffing needed to grow as well. Councillor Marshall explained that she would be voting against the amendment as it removed the investment needed in the Events Team.

Councillor Baum-Dixon stated that the amendment was a list of reductions without a clear strategy for how the Borough should move forward. However, due to the smaller Council Tax rise and the removal of wasteful spending, he did feel that it was an improvement on the budget Labour had proposed.

Councillor Baker-Rogers explained that Council Tax should be set so that it was affordable, prudent and allowed for an improved quality of life for residents. She stated that residents in Band A properties would get an extra 25 pence a week under the Liberal Democrat proposals as opposed to the Labour proposals and she questioned what could be done with that, saying that it was short-sighted. She also criticised the proposals to remove the Employment Solutions Team, questioning why the Liberal Democrats wanted to make people redundant when they were helping those furthest from the employment market into training and employment.

Councillor Alam spoke in support of the Street Safe Team, stating that they were already delivering tangible results across the Borough. He stated that it was a vital service that needed to be supported, not removed. As such, he would not be supporting the amendment.

In opposing the amendment, Councillor Read stated that footfall in the Town Centre was up by one million visits in the last 2 years. This was in part due to regeneration activity, the increase in events, and in recent

months, the Street Safe Team who worked to make it a better and safer environment. He listed some of the work that had been undertaken by the Street Safe Team and stated that sacrificing that for 25 pence per week was not acceptable.

Councillor Charlotte Carter spoke in support of the amendment. She stated that the Employment Solutions Team cost the Council an astronomical amount and that if it was such a good scheme, Central Government would have invested in it. The Liberal Democrats did not believe that pretend police with no powers were the solution. Councillor Carter disagreed with Councillor Collingham that projects should be given time to fail in order to teach Labour a lesson. She stated this was a waste of residents' money. Further, she stated that Selective Licensing had failed for 10 years and given the Council's poor track record; it should not be investing more money from general taxation. In relation to events, Councillor Carter agreed that events were good for Rotherham but stated that the basics, like emptying bins, had to come first.

Councillor Jones did not support the amendment due to the removal of investment in Selective Licensing enforcement. He stated that this was much needed in order to stop residents being exploited. He also supported further investment in the Events team which would increase footfall and, therefore ,support local businesses. Councillor Jones questioned how the Liberal Democrat proposal to make 12 people unemployed would help reduce unemployment as stated. He also stated that the Street Safe Team acted as a deterrent which would help safety.

Councillor Cusworth spoke about a number of successful events that had been held in Rotherham such as the Royal Horticultural Society Flower Show at Wentworth Woodhouse in 2025, the Reytons Concert in 2024 and the Women's Euros in 2022. She also spoke about a number of free local events for families and young people. Councillor Cusworth explained that she was very proud of these events and of the proposals to invest further. As such she would be voting against the amendment.

The second amendment was then moved by Councillor Zach Collingham and seconded by Councillor Baum-Dixon on behalf of the Conservative Group:

That the Budget and Council Tax 2026/27 report be accepted as proposed, with the exception of the following amendments:

COUNCIL TAX PROPOSALS

Reduce the proposed Council Tax increase from 3.95% to 3.00%, with the proposed 3.00% increase being made up of a basic Council Tax increase of 1% and a 2% increase through the Adult Social Care precept (ringfenced for Adult Social Care).

The reduction in the proposed Council Tax will create a funding shortfall of £1.320m in 2026/27, £1.372m in 2027/28, and £1.427m in 2028/29.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROPOSALS

1. Increase the Pride in Place (PIP) Programme by £1.188m for 2026/27 to provide further investment into areas of the Borough that are not covered by the 2 Government PIP programme funds. This increased financial investment will be funded by £721k of surplus Recovery Grant Uplift funding announced within the Final Financial Settlement, borrowing requiring £27.9k per annum of revenue to cover the financing costs and £188k savings generated from these Budget proposals.

2. Increase the Roads, Footways and Highway Drainage Repairs to 2029 programme by £1m to provide further investment in the Borough's Roads and Footways for 2026/27. This increased financial investment will be funded by borrowing requiring £75k per annum of revenue to cover the financing costs.

3. Deliver the Ward Road Safety Plans investment of £160k all in 2026/27, rather than across 2026/27 and 2027/28. This proposal brings forward financial investment funded by borrowing, a year earlier than planned, as such there is an additional revenue impact of £8k in 2026/27 over the position within the existing Budget proposals.

4. Increase the proposed investment in the Transportation Minor Works Programme Extension by £81k per annum from 2026/27 to 2028/29. This increased financial investment will be funded by borrowing requiring £8.1k in 2026/27, £16.2k in 2027/28 and £24.3k in 2028/29 of revenue to cover the financing costs.

5. Increase the Pedestrians Crossings Programme by £268k for 2026/27. This increased financial investment will be funded by borrowing requiring £26.8k per annum of revenue to cover the financing costs.

6. Increase the Structures 2026/27 Maintenance Programme by £300k to allow for a feasibility study and delivery of a solution to be undertaken for options to address flooding at the Wickersley underpass. This increased financial investment will be funded by borrowing requiring £22k per annum of revenue to cover the financing costs.

7. Provide £50k of capital funding in both 2026/27 and 2027/28 for a Community CCTV Fund to finance community bids for the installation of CCTV in villages, towns and urban districts to meet demand from communities, alone or on a match-funded basis. This increased financial investment will be funded by borrowing

requiring £7.5k in 2026/27 and £15k per annum of revenue to cover financing costs from 2027/28 onwards.

8. Earmark £2m of the Council's Budget and Financial Strategy Reserve to create a new Strategic Acquisitions Fund Reserve. This will provide greater capacity to make key strategic acquisitions for regeneration across the Borough as required.

9. Remove the Selective Licensing Community Impact Capital Budget. This will reduce planned borrowing by £100k each year from 2026/27 to 2028/29 and £200k in 2029/30. This will reduce borrowing costs by £10k in 2026/27, £20k in 2027/28, £50k in 2028/29.

PROPOSED REVENUE BUDGET INVESTMENTS

1. Earmark £165k in 2026/27, £163k in 2027/28 and £141k in 2028/29 to cover the financing costs of the proposed increases to the Capital Programme as referenced above Capital section.

2. Reduce the revenue investment proposal for Supporting Our High Streets by £119k from 2026/27 onwards, reducing the volume of officers proposed from 3 to 1. Rename the proposal Supporting Rotherham Business, with the 1 officer to provide targeted support specifically to small and medium-sized businesses, such as those operating from the Borough's industrial estates in Dinnington, North Anston and on Greasbrough Road.

3. Reduce the revenue investment proposal for Expanding the Healthy Holidays Programme by £263k from 2025/26 onwards, reducing the number of additional placement to 2,500.

4. Remove the Over 65's Discounted Swimming revenue investment proposal. This will release a saving of £200k in 2026/27.

5. Reduce the revenue Budget for the Employment Solutions Team by £359k, this will reduce the Council Budget from 2026/27 onwards by £359k p.a. but will require a one-off payment estimated at £133k in 2026/27 to address notice periods and redundancies for 12 FTE's currently in post.

6. Remove the Community Wealth Building revenue budget investment agreed as part of the 2024/25 Budget and Council Tax Report. This will release savings of £120k from 2026/27 onwards.

7. Reduce the £360k Baby Packs revenue budget investment agreed as part of the 2024/25 Budget and Council Tax Report by half to £180k and remove the £50k increase to this Budget proposed in the Budget and Council Tax Report 2026/27. Together this reduces the Councils Budget by £230k per year from 2026/27 onwards.

8. Remove the Selective Licensing Community Impact revenue budget investment proposal. This will release savings of £362,000 from 2026/27 onwards.

9. Remove the Household Waste Recycling Centre Investment (HWRC) revenue budget investment proposal. This will release savings of £129k per year from 2026/27 onwards.

10. Reduce revenue expenditure on subscriptions across the Council by 15%; £37k from 2026/27 onwards.

11. Increase the Budget in Property and Facilities Services by £50k per annum to support the recruitment of a dedicated officer to directly project manage the future of the Bailey House building and the former Regal Cinema on Corporation Street.

In moving the amendment, Councillor Zach Collingham stated that the Conservatives were offering a budget that benefitted every resident in the Borough; respected the taxpayer whilst protecting the genuinely vulnerable and invested in the fundamentals such as roads, town and communities rather than posts and programmes with no clear outcomes. The Conservative amendment proposed to reduce the Council Tax burden; accelerate regeneration and investment across the Borough; and move further and faster on road safety and infrastructure. It would restore balance between supporting the vulnerable and respecting taxpayers whilst focussing spending on results rather than bureaucracy.

He stated that it was imperative not to add to the burden caused by the cost of living crisis. It was therefore proposed that a 3% Council Tax increase be approved, as opposed to the 3.95% proposed by Labour. This would be a signal to residents that the Council understood the pressures faced. Councillor Collingham explained that the Pride in Place programme funding would be increased by over £1million to support areas not covered by the Government's scheme. £2million of the reserves would be earmarked for a wider Strategic Acquisition Fund which would provide greater capacity to make key strategic acquisitions for regeneration across the Borough as required. The Selective Licensing investments would be removed as Selective Licensing was designed to pay for itself. Councillor Collingham criticised the slow stewardship of certain piecemeal projects.

Road Safety was a key priority in the Conservative amendment. This included infrastructure, potholes, broken pavements and dangerous crossings. A further £1million would be invested in this work under the Conservative proposals. Councillor Collingham called for the Ward Safety Plans to be fast-tracked, enabling road safety schemes across the borough in one year rather than 2. Funding was to be doubled for minor works over the next 2 years and for pedestrian crossings.

The Conservative proposals suggested changes to schemes to target the most vulnerable as opposed to universal offerings. Healthy holiday placements would be extended but proportionately. Baby packs would continue to be provided but only to those who really needed them. Councillor Collingham did not believe that the Council could afford to subsidise swimming for the over 65's, at a cost of £200,000, particularly when they were, on balance, better off than any other demographic in the Borough.

Councillor Collingham was critical of the Street Safe Team, stating that they cost over £500,000 to carry the elderly's shopping. He also criticised the proposal regarding business officers and why that was need. The previous round of the Shop Grants Scheme had been run by one person and there was no need to change this. Instead of the 4 Business Support Officers, the Conservative amendment proposed employing one targeted officer who would support small and medium-sized businesses. Additionally, they would employ one officer to take charge of the Bailey House and Regal Cinema plans.

In summing up, Councillor Collingham stated that the Conservative proposals made different choices. It was about the Council delivering the simple things, treating residents with respect, fixing the roads, streets and neighbourhoods and avoiding flashy initiatives with no clear outcomes.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Baum-Dixon stated that it invested in the Borough whilst keeping more taxpayers' money in their own pocket. It was better for taxpayers to spend money with local businesses, in local services and communities rather than it coming into the Council and being lost in programmes, initiatives and teams that delivered little in return.

Councillor Baum-Dixon criticised the proposals relating to the new business advisors, stating that businesses did not need a small army of Council appointed advisors, who had never run a business themselves, telling them what to do. The Council should instead work at removing the barriers that obstructed businesses. He explained that small and medium sized enterprises on industrial estates and trading parks were the real engines of growth and jobs and that was where the Council needed to focus. Further, he expressed concerns regarding Community Wealth and Employee Ownership as this was particularly complex.

Instead of these schemes, Councillor Baum-Dixon believed that the Council should be focussing on the basics such as road safety, potholes, dangerous crossings and broken pavements. Works such as these kept getting held up with reviews, consultations etc. It was time to stop waiting and start fixing.

Further, Councillor Baum-Dixon was critical of the proposals relating to Household Waste Recycling Centres, stating that residents did not need recycling shops or greeters. This would slow everything down, increase queues and cause traffic.

In conclusion, Councillor Baum-Dixon stated that the Conservative amendment focused on practical outcomes rather than expanding bureaucracy. It replaced delay with action and bureaucracy with delivery and results.

Members were invited to speak on the Conservative amendment.

Councillor Williams stated that it was the same old Conservative ideas: cutting funding; cutting and scaling down services; and cutting support from children and families. He referenced the cuts to the Healthy Holiday programme and the Baby packs scheme along with the cuts to the Employment Solutions Team and High Street business support. Councillor Williams stated that the amendment would negatively impact children, newborns, families, the unemployed, high street businesses and the over-65's.

In relation to his portfolio of Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, Councillor Williams was critical of the proposals to remove support for local high streets in Swinton, Wath, Dinnington, Maltby and the Town Centre, instead replacing that support with one officer to support the thousands of Small and Medium Enterprises across the whole Borough. He asked how that was practical and expressed his pride in the Labour proposal to provide dedicated support backed by £25,000 for each area. Regarding the Pride in Place scheme, Councillor Williams explained that it was the Conservative Government that set the boundary for what areas would be included. He asked what steps the Conservative Councillors had undertaken to raise their concerns then. A decade of investment was underway in relation to roads across the Borough and the Labour proposals included £2.75 million to support this.

Councillor Lelliott objected to the assumption that the business advisors would not know how to run a business. Whilst she supported the suggestion of an officer for Small and Medium Enterprises, she stated that that should be in addition to the advisors, not in place of them. In relation to the discount for over-65's swimming, she explained that the state pension was £230 per week and after rent, bills, food and other essentials that did not leave a lot for recreational activities. She stressed the importance of activities such as swimming for both mental and physical health. Councillor Lelliott disagreed with always focussing on money rather than social value, which she stated could be seen in the Conservative proposals for reducing the Baby Pack Scheme and Healthy Holidays clubs. Expanding the clubs would only result in benefits for children and young people. Councillor Lelliott encouraged Conservative Councillors to visits the clubs and see the good work that was being done and to talk to residents who struggled to afford such things.

Councillor Sheppard did not support the amendment and claimed it was short-sighted. The Baby Packs Scheme would cost more to administer if it was not a universal offering. A new team would have to be established to administer this process which would go against the Conservatives claims that they did not want to create extra teams. He was also critical of the proposals to remove investment from the Household Waste Recycling Centres, stating that it was a good investment for the environment and for the pockets of residents.

Councillor Clarke was critical of the proposals to slash the expansion of the Healthy Holidays programme by 75%. She spoke of her personal experience of visiting these clubs and seeing the benefit it brought to young people. She stated that expanding the scheme was not a fanciful waste of money but a worthwhile investment that delivered evidenced based public health benefits for families.

Councillor Cusworth explained that Labour in Rotherham were committed to giving every child in Rotherham the best start in life. She stated that the Conservative amendment would not help all, but just some. She explained the benefits of the Baby Pack Scheme, particularly how the pack connected families to support. The Universal nature of the scheme meant families did not fall through the cracks, there was no stigma and it reached families that might not otherwise engage.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester agreed with some of the points made by the proposer and seconder of the amendment. He agreed that there was a cultural problem at the Council regarding the excessive time taken to deliver projects. He agreed that the Pride in Place scheme was divisive and left out areas that needed help and support. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester agreed that over-65's should not be the priority for discounted swimming, and he was concerned this was done by Labour simply to appeal for votes in the 2028 elections.

However, Councillor Bennett-Sylvester did not support the cuts to holiday clubs, stating that demand was outstripping support. Cuts to schemes such as this would have a real long term negative impact and as such, he could not support the amendment. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester did thank the Conservatives for proposing different ideas for debate rather than just cuts.

Councillor Currie echoed the comments made by Councillor Clarke in relation to the holiday clubs. He stated that he could not support an amendment that proposed cuts to this scheme or to the Baby Packs scheme. Councillor Currie did support some of the inclusions in the amendment but felt they could be additions rather than replacements. Overall, however, he felt that the amendment was an attack on the vulnerable and an attack on helping people be healthy and having a good start in life.

Councillor Tarmey questioned who the amendment was actually helping. He stated that £500,000 was being taken away from the Borough's children and from the over-65's. He stated that the Conservatives were opposed to Labour's business advisors offering advice to high street shops but supported having an officer providing advice to Small and Medium Enterprises that had not asked for that advice.

Councillor Marshall spoke in support of the proposal to give over-65's discounted swimming. She stated that the pilot scheme would initially run for one year and would aim to improve activity levels, reduce loneliness and reduce some of the demand on Adult Social Care Services. Regarding Household Waste Recycling Centres, Councillor Marshall stated that the investments would reduce the need for agency staff and provide new opportunities for upcycling.

Councillor Ball spoke in support of the amendment. He stated that over-65's did not need discounted swimming as they got enough exercise taking their bins in and out. He explained that the amendment was about reducing the proposed Council Tax increase from 3.95% to 3% and shielding hard working families from unnecessary burdens and investing where it counted. This included investing in roads, footways, Ward safety plans and pedestrian crossings. Investments would also be made in drainage to prevent flooding in places like Wickersley. An investment of £50,000 in community CCTV would make communities safer.

Councillor Reynolds stated that national Government and local government could not create jobs. They could create the right atmosphere and environment to help, however, he was critical of the approach to Baby Pack funding.

Councillor Hughes stated that the Conservative Group operated with an "I'm alright Jack" attitude and they did not care about issues that did not impact them. She explained that it was for individual families to register for a Baby Pack, not for Councillors to decide who was worthy of getting one. It was about collective responsibility and looking after those in society that needed it. Councillor Hughes said the amendment was an attack on the most vulnerable.

Councillor Baker-Rogers highlighted that, of the 11 bullet points under the heading "proposed revenue budget investments" in the amendment, 9 started with either remove or reduce. She stressed the health benefits of the discounted swimming proposals, and she questioned the sense in cutting the Employment Solutions Team.

Councillor Read referenced Councillor Baum-Dixon's comments regarding the re-use shop at Household Waste Recycling Centre's slowing down traffic. He stated that this had not been a consideration because handing-down items and upcycling, was an important part of how the world worked and it should be encouraged. He criticised Councillor Collingham for belittling the Street Safe Team for helping the elderly carry their shopping.

Councillor Read also disputed Councillor Collingham's comments that the Council had found itself with some funding. He stated that this did not happen by accident and was about choices. He did not believe that the choices the Conservative Group had made in their amendment were good enough for Rotherham residents.

Councillor Steele stated that he would not be supporting the amendment. He said that the Conservatives did not help anyone but themselves and this had been throughout history. Councillor Steele said the proposals took away instead of helping.

As per the Council's Constitution, the votes on the amendments took place in reverse order of receipt.

The first vote was on the Conservative amendment. On being put to the vote, it was lost.

The Liberal Democrat amendment was then put to the vote and was lost.

As no amendment had been carried, the substantive motion submitted by the Labour Group was opened for debate.

Councillor Williams, Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, stated that he was proud of the positive commitments and investments in the Labour proposals. He referenced the £80,000 of funding per year for 2 years to develop Road Safety Plans for every Ward. £260,000 would support the Council's Pedestrian Crossing Programme alongside the pieces of work already underway to design five additional pedestrian crossings. Councillor Williams highlighted the work to improve Treeton Crossroads, and this had been a road safety concern for some time.

Councillor Currie was supportive of the investments in litter picking and he asked how litter picking volunteers could be brought together. He also referenced the combination of The Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Recovery Improvement Grant, Local Stop Smoking Services Grant, Individual Placement and Support Grant and the Swap to Stop programme into one Public Health Grant. Councillor Currie welcomed the investment in the Housing Revenue Account but queried what could be done regarding parking on grass verges. He also expressed his support for the Town Centre events and requested that Rotherham By The Sea be brought back.

Councillor Ball stated that this was not a Labour budget as it did not protect working people from higher taxes. He stated that Sir Kier Starmer had said Council Tax would not increase but the Rotherham Labour group was proposing a near 4% increase. Councillor Ball said the Conservative amendment was about support without excess whereas Labour's budget broke promises. He questioned why taxes had to go up when more

funding had been received. Councillor Ball objected to Asylum Seekers being given gym memberships and tax payers money being used for this.

Councillor Thorp did not think the business advisors were needed or wanted and he questioned the numbers around the discounted swimming proposals.

Councillor Marshall, Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Green Spaces, highlighted various proposals relating to her portfolio. This included the replacement of Herringthorpe Athletics Track, upgrades to the building at Ulley Country Park and roadside cleaning. She encouraged all to attend the St George's day event in Clifton Park in April.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester responded to the comments made by Councillor Ball and stated that if he wanted people, such as Asylum Seekers, to integrate into society, you had to give them access to society. In relation to the budget proposals, Councillor Bennett-Sylvester referenced the upkeep of communal areas on Housing Revenue Account land. He stated that the upkeep was funded by the HRA but many residents that benefitted from these services no longer paid rent into the HRA. He asked if any kind of long term budget strategy could be developed in terms of moving this into the General Fund.

Councillor Zach Collingham stated that the Labour proposals over-reached on Council Tax and did not deliver the funding needed to see wider regeneration or road improvements across the Borough as a whole. It did not address the issues regarding the length of time taken to deliver projects and would result in wasteful spending. Councillor Collingham looked forward to holding the administration to account over this.

Councillor Beresford, Cabinet Member for Housing, thanked all Members for supporting the proposals in relation to the Welfare Rights Service. The continuation of funding for this Service by the Council would allow specialist welfare benefits advice to be provided to those residents experiencing a cancer diagnosis. Councillor Beresford asked Councillor Bennett-Sylvester to contact her outside of the meeting regarding the specific piece of HRA land referenced and she would look into the matter.

Councillor Baker-Rogers, Cabinet Member for Adult Care and Health, expressed her support for the budget as it did what a Council was supposed to do. It looked to improve the quality of life of residents, no matter their age, where they lived or their individual needs.

Councillor Cusworth, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, spoke in support of the budget. She stated that it brought clear benefits to families across Rotherham and was a family friendly budget. The expansion of the Healthy Holidays programme and increase in school uniform support would ease financial pressure on families whilst helping children access healthy food and essential clothing. Additional investment in universal youth work and new youth service

vehicles would improve outreach, reduce anti-social behaviour and provide safe, positive opportunities for young people in all communities. Councillor Cusworth also highlighted improvements at Crowden Outdoor Education Centre.

Councillor Baum-Dixon did not think the budget proposals demonstrated a wise use of public money. Whilst he believed that the vulnerable should be helped, the Council had to learn to step away when it was not needed and leave people to make their own decisions. Councillor Baum-Dixon stated that this was an over-reach and the Council were getting involved in things they would be better off staying out of.

Councillor Steele stated that this was a budget to help people. Whilst the Conservatives offered cuts, the Labour Group offered support and a commitment to look after people. He acknowledged that these Services cost money and this money was raised through taxation, but he believed the budget proposed was fair.

Councillor Pitchley spoke of her own experience of swimming when recovering from a stroke and how beneficial that was. She stated that it was sad that some stroke survivors would not have been able to continue with the swimming therapy due to the cost and she, therefore, supported the proposals to make swimming more affordable. Councillor Pitchley stated that support should be given to those that needed it and the inclusive nature of the support proposed throughout the budget meant any stigma associated with asking for help would be removed.

The Leader was invited to respond to the debate as mover of the proposals.

In response to Councillor Currie, the Leader confirmed that a celebration event for litter pickers was planned for the summer. He acknowledged the issues regarding parking on grass verges but stated this was difficult to address. However, in relation to parking near shops and the planning process, the Leader confirmed that he and Councillor Williams would come back to Councillor Currie if there was anything that could be done. He could not commit to bringing back the Rotherham By The Sea event.

The Leader stated he would not take any lessons on Labour principles from Councillor Ball. He stated that Councillor Ball was closely associated with the former MP for Rother Valley who had seemed outraged that support would be put in place to help people with cancer access additional financial support.

There was no easy answer to Councillor Bennett-Sylvesters concerns around HRA funding for communal spaces, but he would keep asking the questions.

In relation to Councillor Baum-Dixons comments about donating to charity, the Leader stated that whilst this was a worthwhile endeavour, it did not address the points made by Councillor Pitchley that many people did not have the confidence to ask for help, did not know where to ask for help and felt embarrassed about asking for help. It was those people that the Labour budget sought to help.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, and the Council's Constitution, a recorded vote was taken for this item, on the proposals as set out in the report, as follows:

For: Councillors Adair, Ahmed, Alam, Allen, Baggaley, Baker-Rogers, Bennett-Sylvester, Beresford, Brent, Clarke, Cowen, Currie, Cusworth, Duncan, Elliott, Garnett, Harper, Hughes, Ismail, Jackson, Jones, Keenan, Lelliott, Marshall, Mault, McKiernan, Monk, Pitchley, Rashid, Read, Sheppard, Steele, Sutton, Taylor and Williams. (35)

Against: Councillors Bacon, Ball, Baum-Dixon, Blackham, A. Carter, C. Carter, Castledine-Dack, T. Collingham, Z. Collingham, Fisher, Hall, Harrison, Reynolds, Stables, Tarmey, Thorp, Tinsley and Yasseen. (18)

Abstention: Councillors Bower and Hussain. (2)

Resolved:

That Council:

1. Approves the Budget and Financial Strategy for 2026/27 as set out in the report and appendices, including a basic Council Tax increase of 1.95% and an Adult Social Care precept increase of 2%.

2. Approves the extension to the Local Council Tax Support Top Up Scheme, that will provide up to £131.44 of additional support to low income households accessing the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme. It will support those most financially vulnerable to rising household costs, through reduced Council Tax bills as described in Section 2.5.15.

3. Approves the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2028/29, as described within Section 2.6.

4. Approves the Reserves Strategy as set out in Section 2.8 noting that the final determination of Reserves will be approved as part of reporting the financial outturn for 2025/26.

5. Delegates authority to the Service Director of Planning, Regeneration and Transport in consultation with the Service Director of Financial Services and Cabinet member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, to approve the specific detailed allocations and use of the Local Plan Reserve.

6. Notes and accepts the comments and advice of the Executive Director of Corporate Services (Section 151 Officer), provided in compliance with Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, as to the robustness of the estimates included in the Budget and the adequacy of Reserves for which the Budget provides as set out in Section 2.14.

7. Notes the feedback from the public and partners following the public consultation on the Council's budget for 2026/27 which took place from 28 November 2025 to 9 January 2026, attached as Appendix 5.

8. Approves the proposed increases in Adult Social Care provider contracts and for Direct Payments as set out in Section 2.4.

9. Approves the proposed approach and increases in Children's Social Care costs as set out in Section 2.4.23.

10. Approves the revenue investment proposals set out in Section 2.7 and Appendix 2.

11. Approves the proposed revenue savings set out in Section 2.7 and Appendix 4.

12. Approves the Council Fees and Charges for 2026/27 attached as Appendix 7.

13. Approves the application of the Business Rates Reliefs as set out in Section 2.10, in line with Government guidance.

14. Approves the use of the additional £10m Recovery Grant Uplift announced as part of the Final Financial Settlement 2026/27 to address the Budget gap of £9.3m in 2028/29 and provide £0.7m further investment into the Council's Roads Programme in 2026/27.

15. Approves the proposed Capital Strategy and Capital Programme as presented in Section 2.12 and Appendices 3A to 3F.

16. Approves the Treasury Management matters for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 9 of this report including the Prudential Indicators, the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy, the Treasury Management Strategy and the Investment Strategy.

17. Approves the continuation of the principles and measures adopted since April 2020 to make faster payments to suppliers on receipt of goods, works and services following a fully reconciled invoice as described in Section 2.11.

18. Approves the procedure for Budget allocations for the Community Leadership Fund as set out in Section 2.9.

19. Approves that the Capital Programme Budget continues to be managed in line with the following key principles:

    (i) Any underspends on the existing approved Capital Programme in respect of 2025/26 be rolled forward into future years, subject to an individual review of each carry forward to be set out within the Financial Outturn 2025/26 report to Cabinet.

    (ii) In line with Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules 7.7 to 7.11 and 8.12, any successful grant applications in respect of capital projects will be added to the Council's approved Capital Programme on an ongoing basis.

    (iii) Capitalisation opportunities and capital receipts flexibilities will be maximised, with capital receipts earmarked to minimise revenue costs.

Councillor Sheppard declared a personal interest in Minute No. 127 – Recommendation from Cabinet – Budget and Council Tax 2026-27 and Medium Term Financial Strategy - on the basis that there were proposals relating to Selective Licensing Areas and he lived in a Selective Licensing Area. As this was a personal interest, Councillor Sheppard took part in the debate and vote on the item.

128. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2026-27 MUNICIPAL YEAR AND INDICATIVE CALENDAR OF MEETINGS FOR THE 2027-28 MUNICIPAL YEAR

Consideration was given to a report, submitted in accordance with the rules of procedure as detailed in the Council's Constitution, that set out the proposed Calendar of Meetings for the 2026/27 Municipal Year.

Council were also asked to note the indicative Calendar of Meetings for 2027/28. This would be brought back to Council in March 2027 for formal approval.

Resolved:

1. That the Calendar of Meetings for the 2026-27 Municipal Year be approved.

2. That the Indicative Calendar of Meetings for the 2027-28 Municipal Year be noted.

Mover: Councillor Read Seconder: Councillor Cusworth

129. RECOMMENDATION FROM STAFFING COMMITTEE - PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2026-27

Consideration was given to the report which presented the Pay Policy Statement for 2026/27, attached at Appendix 1, for approval. The Pay Policy Statement 2026/27 was received by the Staffing Committee on 9th February 2026, alongside the request to recommend to Council.

Councillor Currie asked if details of the employer contribution pension cuts and their implications would be taken to Staffing Committee. Councillor Alam stated that a written response would be provided.

Resolved:

1. That Council approve the Pay Policy Statement for 2026/27 (Appendix 1) as recommended by Staffing Committee on 9th February 2026.

Mover: Councillor Alam Seconder: Councillor Cusworth

130. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items to consider.