

**COUNCIL MEETING**  
**Wednesday, 9th December, 2015**

Present:- The Mayor (Councillor Maggi Clark) (in the Chair); Councillors Ahmed, Alam, Ali, Astbury, Atkin, Beaumont, Beck, Buckley, Burton, Cowles, Currie, Cutts, Elliot, Ellis, Evans, Godfrey, Gosling, Hamilton, Hoddinott, Hughes, Hunter, Jepson, Jones, Khan, Mallinder, McNeely, Middleton, Pickering, Pitchley, Price, Read, Reeder, Reynolds, Roche, Roddison, Rose, Rosling, Rushforth, Russell, Sansome, Sims, Smith, Steele, Taylor, John Turner, Julie Turner, C. Vines, M. Vines, Wallis, Watson, Whelbourn, Wyatt and Yasseen.

**86. MINUTE'S SILENCE**

As a mark of respect the Council stood for a minute's silence to commemorate the victims of the Paris attacks.

**87. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor shared with the Council the contents of the letter received from Xavier Bertrand, Mayor of Saint Quentin, expressing thanks for the support offered by Rotherham following the terrorist attacks in Paris, which he had shared during their Council meeting on 23rd November, 2015.

The Mayor was also pleased to present two awards and offered her congratulations on behalf of the Council. The first for the Great British High Street Award 2015 – Town Centre of which Rotherham was the winner received by Bernadette Rushton, Simeon Leach, Catherine Davis and Bob Taylor, and the second for the National Enterprise Network Awards 2015 – Enterprise Coach/Mentor of the Year which was won by Martyn Benson from RiDO.

Since the last Council Meeting the Mayor had also represented the borough of Rotherham on sixty-three occasions. Like many she attended a number of moving Remembrance events including the Dinnington Festival of Remembrance and the Minster Remembrance Service and parade at which she was supported once again by Zoe Father, Rotherham's little Mayor.

The Mayor also attended a number of sporting events including the National Women's Football Final at New York Stadium and the Leeds Mayor's Civic Reception for Yorkshire Cricket Club, Yorkshire Women's and Yorkshire Girls Cricket Clubs.

The Mayor attended Lung Cancer awareness day at RDGH, the NHS Proud Awards, and the VAR Community Achievement awards where she presented a special award to the Hospice Shop Volunteer, Edna May Bateman, who was ninety-nine years young and an amazing example to all.

The NSPCC, ROPES, REMA AGMs, were also attended along with the launch of Xmas Toy Appeal Parkgate, a visit to the Shoebox appeal, the Youth Cabinet Manifesto launch and a belated Eid Party at Winterhill School.

The Mayor also hosted Town Hall visits by the young people from Kimberworth Park Community Partnership, Rotherham 218 Squadron cadets, Anston Brook Primary school and the Spanish TRC exchange students.

The Leader also reported on the revisions to the numbers of Advisory Cabinet Members, which now included Councillors Alam, Wallis and Yasseen. Details of the portfolios were to be shared with all Members over the next few days.

#### **88. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Managing Director submitted apologies for absence from Councillors Finnie, Fleming, Hague, Johnston, Lelliott, Parker, Robinson, Tweed and Whysall.

#### **89. PETITIONS**

The Managing Director submitted the following petitions which had been referred to the appropriate Directorates for consideration:-

- Containing 457 from Swinton residents who live on the Wentworth Parks Estate and in Wentworth Gardens and Piccadilly Road areas asking for the regular bus service on Piccadilly Road and Wentworth Road in Swinton to be reinstated.
- An e-petition containing 13 signatures asking for Council websites to be used to advise and help the public not as a campaign tool asking members of the public to sign petitions.

Councillor Wyatt offered his support to the petition asking for the regular bus service in Swinton to be reinstated, pointing out the number of elderly residents living in this area who were isolated without public transport.

Councillor Currie pointed out that a review of the petition process had been requested as it was felt the present scheme was out of touch and had been previously recommended as part of the scrutiny review undertaken by the former Self Regulation Select Commission.

#### **90. COMMUNICATIONS**

No communications had been received.

**91. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest made at the meeting.

**92. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS COUNCIL MEETING**

**Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 21<sup>st</sup> October, 2015, be approved for signature by the Mayor.**

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Watson

**93. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

**(1) Mr. M. Eyre** asked did the Council publish a full list of the Elected Member attendees to the full Council meetings so that the public could see which Councillors did not attend?

The Leader thanked Mr. Eyre for his question and advised that attendees and apologies were recorded for every Council meeting, but that a table in the form that he was suggesting was not produced. He was aware that other authorities did publish a table and was happy to look at this.

In a supplementary question Mr. Eyre pointed out he had been told by a few people that their Councillors repeatedly did not attend meetings and whilst it was a high turnout today, this was not always the case. He asked that a table be published at the end of the year to provide an annual record of attendances so that the public could see clearly if they were being represented or not.

The Leader confirmed he was happy to look into this.

**(2) Mr. S. Thornton** explained that he had been convicted three times by the Standards Committee. On the first occasion he made a complaint that Labour Councillors conspired to "stitch him up". He further complained that Labour Councillors lied in their statements in all three cases and asked why were his complaints not investigated?

The Leader was informed by the Legal Department that on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2015, a Standards Hearing Panel decided that Parish Councillor Thornton had assaulted a member of the public in April, 2013, by slapping them across the face after an annual parish meeting. The Panel decided this constituted a breach of the Code of Conduct of Councillors and found Parish Councillor Thornton had not treated the member of the public with respect and was in direct contravention of the Code.

The Panel were also satisfied that Mr. Thornton's aggressive behaviour at the annual parish meeting brought the office of parish councillor into disrepute.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2015 a Standards Panel Hearing found Parish Councillor Thornton had breached the Code of Conduct at an event on the 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2014 where he called a fellow councillor corrupt and repeated the accusation on the 6<sup>th</sup> August, 2014. On the 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2014 he disclosed confidential information provided in confidence at a private meeting.

Parish Councillor Thornton was also advised that should he wish to make such an allegation, it would be considered by the hearing panel, as this went to the credibility of the witnesses in the case. However, Parish Councillor Thornton did not attend the hearing to put forward these allegations. Neither did he provide any further information which would substantiate allegations of collusion.

In relation to the second and third investigations, Parish Councillor Thornton, would not engage with the investigation by either meeting the investigating officer or providing a statement for the investigation.

The Leader understood Parish Councillor Thornton did refer to the witnesses as liars in correspondence, but did not provide any specific information to substantiate such allegations. Such responses to the allegations that he made in correspondence, did not amount to a denial of the alleged acts or an attempt to justify them. Again Parish Councillor Thornton could have attended at the hearing to defend himself against the allegations made and also ask the witnesses questions and make submissions. However, he chose not to do so.

In a supplementary question, Parish Councillor Thornton referred to a “cover up” taking place as he had asked to meet with Commissioner Manzie, who declined. A meeting was also requested with Commissioner Sir Derek Myers, who also declined. He asked, therefore, who was going to take responsibility for the cover up, the Leader of the Council or Commissioner Sir Derek Myers. He had been completely stitched up by Labour Members of this Council and no-one was willing to listen to his side of the story.

The Leader was unable to speak on behalf of the Commissioners, but believed the allegations made against Parish Councillor Thornton to be credible.

**94. THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK AND CORPORATE PLAN 2016-2018**

Consideration was given to the report which provided the Council with the new Performance Management Framework and Corporate Plan included as a commitment within the Corporate “Fresh Start” Improvement Plan.

Attached to the report was the final draft of a new Performance Management Framework for the Council (Appendix A) and the first version of a new Corporate Strategy for 2016 to 2018 (Appendix B).

Whilst both documents were subject to further work before they were finalised, it was important that the entire organisation had a clearer picture of how it needed to work corporately in support of the new vision for the Council as set out by the Leader on 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2015 (as part of the Commissioners' Public Meeting). It was important that Elected Members had the opportunity formally to consider the working documents.

Appendix A set out the means by which the Council worked to identify its objectives, cascaded them through the organisation and tracked progress to provide an overall assessment of how it was performing. It was designed to give an overview of performance management at every level of the organisation, connecting individuals and those providing front line services through service plans and management to the Council's overall priorities and vision.

Appendix B would be the core document that sat within the overall Performance Management Framework setting out the specific headline actions, indicators and milestones that should be monitored and managed to demonstrate delivery against the overall Council vision over the coming years.

**Resolved:- (1) That the final draft of the Performance Management Framework and the first version of a new Corporate Plan for 2016-18 be approved.**

**(2) That the form, content and headline actions/measures within the documents be supported so that work could progress to finalise the detailed content by early 2016.**

Mover: Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Watson

**95. THE COUNCIL'S OUTLINE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2016-2019**

Consideration was given to the new Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as set out as a target in the Corporate "Fresh Start" Improvement Plan.

The MTFS was currently in outline form as it was recognised that the document would require amendment following the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and Spending Review of 25<sup>th</sup> November 2015 and in light of the forthcoming Local Government Finance Settlement for 2016/17 provisionally expected in December, 2015.

In addition, the Council's own budget process was still ongoing, reviewing and assessing savings proposals and growth/pressures bids. A finalised version of the MTFS was anticipated by the end of February, 2016, in line with the requirements of the Improvement Plan.

The MTFS was to be approved by Council at its 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2016, meeting as part of approving the Council's 2016/17 Budget and Council Tax setting.

Councillor C. Vines fully endorsed the outline Medium Term Financial Strategy document as the Council had been broken and needed rebuilding.

**Resolved:- That the Outline Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the three financial years 2016/17 to 2018/19 be noted. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, a final proposed version of the MTFS for approval by Full Council would be submitted by Commissioners to the 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2016 Budget and Council Tax setting meeting.**

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Watson

#### 96. **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**Resolved:- That the reports, minutes and recommendations of the meeting of the Standards Committee be adopted.**

Councillor Beck, Chairman, gave a brief outline of the work of the Standards Committee Working Group and the positive recommendations which included changing the name of the Standards Committee to the Standards and Ethics Committee to reflect the promotion of strong ethics amongst those democratically elected in Rotherham and the revisions to the complaints process and hearing membership.

Councillor Hughes, Vice-Chairman, endorsed the comments by the Chairman and in doing so wished to thank all those who had been involved in the Standards Committee review.

Councillor Jepson referred to his previous request to the Standards Committee Working Group on whether consideration had been given to abolishing the Standards Committee altogether and was advised by the Chairman that this had been considered, but that it was felt by the Working Group that there was a strong need for a Standards Committee which promoted good ethical behaviour and probity in Rotherham.

Councillor Jepson pointed out the Standards Committee should be a totally independent membership with no other Councillors sitting judgement on others.

Mover:- Councillor Beck

Seconder:- Councillor Hughes

#### 97. **SUPPLEMENT TO THE CODE OF CONDUCT**

Consideration was given to a report setting out a supplement to the Council's Code of Conduct.

Lead Commissioner, Sir Derek Myers, in conjunction with partner representatives, other Commissioners, Members and senior officers, had sought to strengthen the Code of Conduct by preparing a supplement entitled "A healthy system of democratic leadership and accountability".

The supplement had been approved by the Standards Committee Working Group and by the Standards Committee at its meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2015.

**Resolved:- That the supplement to the Council's Code of Conduct be approved.**

Mover:- Councillor Beck

Seconder:- Councillor Hughes

**98. CODE FOR ROTHERHAM MBC: SENIOR STAFF WORKING TO COUNCILLORS**

Consideration was given to the Code for Rotherham MBC: Senior Staff Working to Councillors which had been prepared by Commissioner Sir Derek Myers in liaison with other Commissioners, Leaders of political groups, Trade Unions and Senior Officers.

The report was considered by a special meeting of the Standards Committee on 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2015.

Although there currently was a Member/Officer Protocol as part of the Constitution, the Code herewith provided more specificity as to the dynamics of the relationship expected between Senior Officers and Members.

**Resolved:- (1) That the decision of Standards Committee be noted and the Code for Rotherham MBC: Senior Staff working to Councillors be adopted.**

**(2) That consequential amendments to the Council's constitution be approved.**

Mover:- Councillor Beck

Seconder:- Councillor Hughes

**99. REVISED MEMBERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS 2015/16**

Consideration was given to the revised membership arrangements for the current municipal year as recommended.

Councillor C. Vines sought clarification on why Councillor Currie was being replaced and was advised by Councillor Currie that it was at his request given his work commitments.

**Resolved:- That Councillor Rosling to become a member of the Advisory Licensing Board to replace Councillor Currie**

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Watson

**100. AUDIT COMMITTEE**

**Resolved:- That the reports and minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee be adopted.**

Councillor Currie questioned the validity of the appointment of an independent member in accordance with the Committee's new prospectus, given that this person was not elected and, therefore, should not be given a vote.

Councillor John Turner also pointed out that the independent person should also be non-political so they could not be drawn into any conflicts or prejudice.

Councillor Wyatt, Chairman of the Audit Committee, confirmed this was good practice to have an independent view and the position had been advertised publically with no reference to any political persuasion.

Mover:- Councillor Wyatt

Seconder:- Councillor Hughes

**101. PLANNING BOARD**

**Resolved:- That the reports and minutes of the meetings of the Planning Board be adopted.**

Mover:- Councillor Atkin

Seconder:- Councillor Middleton

**102. STAFFING COMMITTEE**

**Resolved:- That the reports, recommendations and minutes of the meetings of the Staffing Committee be adopted.**

Councillor Watson drew particular attention to Minute No. 14 and the positive news that Interim Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services was to be made permanent.

Mover:- Councillor Watson

Seconder:- Councillor Roche

**103. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSONS**

No questions had been received.

**104. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO ADVISORY CABINET MEMBERS AND CHAIRMEN**

**(1) Councillor Currie** asked please could the Leader give him the names of any current serving Councillors in receipt of special responsibility allowances, who were either Cabinet Members or on the South Yorkshire Joint Police Authority Committee in the era of 1997 to 2013.

The Leader confirmed there were three serving Councillors in receipt of a special responsibility allowance who were Cabinet Members during the period 1997 to 2013. These being:-

Councillor Sue Ellis  
Councillor Rose McNeely  
Councillor Ken Wyatt

Councillor C. Vines was the only current serving Member who was on the South Yorkshire Joint Police Authority during the 1997 to 2013 period.

In a supplementary question Councillor Currie referred to failure and the need for a fresh start. Change was happening with the new management structure, but he expressed his concerns about the need for a fresh start politically and not rewarding failure, which was the reason why he had become an "Independent". The people of Rotherham would continue to see failure while ever people were being paid to make decisions in that era when 1400 young people were let down. He asked the Leader when was he going to stop the denial and these people fall on their swords and step down.

The Leader explained he did not accept the denial premise of the question, but pointed out a number of changes had been made to the political environment with a number of key people around in that era having moved on. There were a small number of members left who were around at that time who were doing a great job and he gave them his full support.

Councillor C. Vines, in a point of order, confirmed Councillor Currie was entitled to question/interrogate any member and he invited any questions, which he would answer in an open and transparent way for the benefit of members of the public.

**(2) Councillor Julie Turner** referred to Rotherham being the Town Centre Category winner in the Great British High Street Awards 2015, but asked why were there so few Rotherham people shopping here.

Councillor Watson, Deputy Leader, confirmed he was answering the questions on behalf of Councillor Denise Lelliott, who was attending a very important Tata Steel Taskforce Meeting in Sheffield. He asked his fellow Councillors if they agreed with him that this was a fantastic result

for Rotherham.

In terms of people shopping on the High Street there were more and more people who were doing so and four million people had shopped in Rotherham markets, which was more than comparable markets. The town centre had seen a 9.5% increase in footfall since 2010 so did not accept the premise of the question that Rotherham's people were not shopping. Rotherham's High Street had been recognised nationally, which was significant and the success should be applauded.

In a supplementary question Councillor Julie Turner had been told by residents that the town centre had lost its sparkle and atmosphere, many now avoided it preferring to shop at Parkgate. Sheffield was currently running an exhibition looking at how the city would look in the next twenty years and asked when could Rotherham expect to have a comprehensive plan that embraced housing, work and shopping and nightlife for the town centre.

Councillor Watson explained that the town centre refresh would be available in draft form for all Members early in the new year.

**(3) Councillor Reynolds** referred to the Bramley Traffic System and two non-answers so far. He was told it was a mistake, but the rules were changed to make it right and asked what benefit half a million pounds bought to the people and shops of Bramley.

Councillor Sims, Advisory Cabinet Member for Waste, Road and Enforcement, confirmed that the Bramley Traffic Management scheme was introduced in late 2005 to address the increases in traffic, primarily though not exclusively from the Woodlaithes housing development (approximately 800 dwellings), to the west of Bramley and to address local concerns regarding the narrowness of footways and a lack of parking on Main Street.

The benefits for shops and residents were predominantly associated with easing congestion through the Village Centre. The scheme also eased congestion on the A631 for traffic turning right into Cross Street, which previously queued past the end of the right turn lane. The traffic scheme acknowledged the demand for on street parking and accommodated it where possible, with four parking spaces (including two disabled spaces) on Main Street and echelon parking provided on Cross Street.

In a supplementary question Councillor Reynolds queried the aid to congestion as he believed there was more congestion now, meant a detour for drivers and a traffic light system had to be installed, the majority of businesses were now closed and there were fewer parking spaces than there was previously and asked what the cost benefit analysis on what was spent had meant to the people and businesses of Bramley.

Councillor Sims, Advisory Cabinet Member for Waste, Road and Enforcement, would ensure an answer to this question was provided in writing.

In a point of information Councillor Hoddinott, as Ward Member for that area, advised Councillor Reynolds that the businesses of Bramley were open and thriving and not empty and looking forward to a new Aldi opening shortly.

**(4) Councillor Reynolds** stated that on the new traffic light system heading from Riverside towards the old Millmoor Stadium you could not turn right whereas on the former roundabout you simply could. For the costs involved – couldn't the old adage of "if it aint broke don't fix it" be applied.

Councillor Sims, Advisory Cabinet Member for Waste, Road and Enforcement, confirmed the changes to this junction were made to improve traffic flow. The Council secured funding from the Department for Transport to improve the junction as part of their Pinch Point fund which was established to relieve known pressures on the highway network.

The reason for the no right turn was to deal with future capacity on this junction and the funding was made available on the basis of providing capacity for the anticipated increase in traffic from planned growth in future years, predominantly along Centenary Way.

Whilst you could not turn right immediately at the junction itself and this may seem inconvenient, the right turn from Main Street into Centenary Way was completed by way of the signal-controlled U-turn approximately 150m to the west of the junction. Including a right turn from Main Street onto Centenary Way in the design would have meant the junction being over capacity and hence congested in future years.

In a supplementary question Councillor Reynolds asked was this at no cost to the Rotherham taxpayers.

Councillor Sims, Advisory Cabinet Member for Waste, Road and Enforcement, advised this question had been asked and answered previously.

**(5) Councillor Reynolds** asked what was the honest opinion of the Cabinet on the long term future of Magna?

The Leader confirmed all Members had seen the PwC objectives and that Magna's finances were fragile. However, if the Council had withdrawn its loan arrangements, as some had suggested, Magna would have closed. Potentially Magna had a future ahead of it, which was why Council officers had been asked to work with Magna to ensure maximum financial benefit to the taxpayers of Rotherham was obtained.

In a supplementary question Councillor Reynolds referred to the building's use, its design to dispel heat and how during the winter months it was expensive to heat. He asked why the Council was propping up this "white elephant" as it could be demonstrated that the exhibitions etc. at Magna could transfer to New York Stadium, which was a modern and purpose built building.

The Leader pointed out that these were two separate establishments serving separate functions, but there was a separate arrangement with Magna that the Council had to address.

**(6) Councillor Cowles** indicated that, in the wake of Kids Club, William Shawcross (Chair of the Charity Commission), suggested trustees should serve no longer than six years. Do we know all the trustees of Rotherham charities and do we have turnover of personnel in order to help avoid similar irregularities?

The Leader asked if Councillor Cowles was referring to the Kids Company rather than the Kids Club as he had been unable to find details on a "Kids Club". He confirmed the Council did not hold a database of all Rotherham's charities, but did appoint some trustees as a Council as part of the "Appointments to Outside Bodies", which included Charities.

The Council would take into account this and other guidance from the Charity Commission when it reviewed those appointments, which it did on an annual basis.

In a supplementary question Councillor Cowles asked, in these stringent times, what percentage level of grant funding was proposed to be awarded to charities for the next financial year, who set the budget and would Members be given the opportunity for this to be scrutinised on the acceptance.

The Leader explained he did not have the numbers to hand and when the decisions about grants were made in departmental budgets Councillor Cowles was welcome to scrutinise this as part of the budget process.

**(7) Councillor Cowles** asked that, having read the PwC Magna report, could the Leader please enlighten him as to any worthwhile piece of information contained in the report that Councillors did not already know, and thus, just what, if any value whatsoever had been gained from this waste of public money?

The Leader was aware of Councillor Cowles' longstanding view about the PwC Independent Report and indicated there were two things that were of value – one the recommendations of PwC and the second on the Council's one year rolling programme of support to Magna. The report had helped to provide the Council with the information required to make an informed decision regarding the Council's future relationship with Magna.

In a supplementary comment Councillor Cowles referred to being “conned” three times – first by the Leader in the lack of confidence in his own judgement of a worthless report that did not even recognise that there were two strands to this business - the attraction’s education strand which everyone wanted to see succeed and the corporate entertainment side, which was based on the decision making process for the Commissioners.

The second by the Magna CEO, who now said Magna had a bright future and was satisfied with the restructure of the debt regardless of the fact that the report stated a minimum of £1 million was required to invest in the attraction side. It was clear he was only interested in the corporate side regardless of the fact that it was not what Magna was intended for and if a restructure of the debt was all that was required why was this not undertaken in the first place.

Thirdly the Council had been “conned” by the Commissioners.

**(8) Councillor Cowles** referred to a few months ago when he asked the Leader to look into setting up an energy scheme for the benefit of Rotherham residents and asked had he done anything yet to progress such scheme?

The Leader confirmed in August officers met with colleagues from Peterborough Council who have taken a lead in this area. What officers learned was that much of their good ideas Rotherham were already progressing or unfortunately opportunities were diminishing because of changes to Government funding for renewable energy and the top-up tariffs that people were familiar with.

As a result of the meeting with Peterborough Council, the following projects have been reviewed:-

1. Setting up an Energy Performance Agreement with Honeywell Ltd. to improve the energy efficiency of RMBC operational assets. After their initial assessment, Honeywell have advised the Council that due to the extensive energy improvements the Council have already carried out, there may not be a lot left to gain.
2. The installation of photovoltaic panels was reviewed, but not considered feasible due to the Government decision to slash the feed in tariff by 87%. This change had resulted in a volatile renewable market and up and down the country new schemes were now being considered unviable.

However, there were a few things the Council had done already, which included:-

- Insulating Council houses including external wall insulation schemes for poorly insulated homes; cavity wall insulation and improved loft insulation.
- Updating district heating schemes at a cost of over £500,000 since April and installing three biomass boilers that were registered for Renewable Heat Incentive funding.
- Installation of 731 new efficient boilers in Council housing stock between April and October this year at a cost of £1.7m.
- Where Government funding was available the Council would also assist in upgrading private housing heating systems. For example, the Council had recently secured £100,000 to enable 50 properties to have old boilers to be repaired or replaced. The work would be carried out by Yorkshire Housing on behalf of the Council.
- Where the Council was commissioning new homes RMBC has increased the expectations of energy performance beyond the basic building control standards.
- RMBC operational properties have been improved to reduce energy consumption and save money using a wide range of technologies including upgrading to LED/low energy lighting.

Clearly, the Council had undertaken a number of schemes already and the Leader had been advised there were no plans to take this further forward.

**(9) Councillor John Turner** asked was the Council aware of the spiralling costs of funerals brought about principally by crematoria costs? It seemed more and more people could not afford to die and that the bills inevitably were paid by Councils and that the costs to the Councils had risen by almost a third in four years.

Councillor Sims, Advisory, Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Enforcement, confirmed she was aware of recent media reports highlighting that the average funeral costs in the UK have risen to around £3700. However, by far the largest constituent part of this cost was the fees levied by funeral directors for the services that they provided.

It was true that some people were unable to afford the fees associated with funerals, and in these circumstances families may claim for a Funeral Payment from the Social Fund (administered by the Department of Work and Pensions). Such a payment would meet the whole cost of a cremation or burial, along with contributing up to £700 towards the fees charged by funeral directors.

However, there were a small number of occasions when the local authority would be required to arrange and potentially fund a funeral. This would be under the following circumstances:-

- The deceased had no next of kin to make arrangements, or next of kin decline involvement.
- The family would be financially disadvantaged if they were to fund the

funeral themselves (taking into consideration eligibility for the Funeral Payment referred to above).

- The deceased passed away in the community i.e. not an NHS setting (this includes A & E)
- The death occurred in Rotherham.

When the funeral was funded by RMBC, the Welfare Officer would take control of the financial estate in order to recover expenses incurred, plus a charge of £350.00 as agreed with HM Treasury.

In a supplementary question Councillor John Turner was aware of this information and asked about the current yearly cost of pauper funerals, whose costs were going to continue to spiral and get worse, did the Cabinet Member not think the Council would be better administering these services themselves.

Councillor Sims, Advisory, Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Enforcement, confirmed the number of funerals arranged and funded by RMBC included:-

- 2012/13 – 19 funerals – cost £29005, recovered £19259 – net cost £9746
- 2013/14 – 14 funerals – cost £28593, recovered £14007 – net cost £14586
- 2014/15 - 23 funerals – cost £26473, recovered £7893 – net cost £18580

**(10) Councillor John Turner** asked would the Council be aware that Cheshire East, a Conservative Council which some of Rotherham's Members visited recently, have a practice of encouraging and also setting up separate companies owned by the Council, one of these companies governs crematoria services.

Councillor Sims, Advisory Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Enforcement, confirmed she was not aware of the specific arrangements in Cheshire East. However, given the Chancellor's recent autumn statement setting out the significant cuts Rotherham were facing over the next five years, it was right and proper that all options were explored to ensure the Council delivered the best services. Any changes to how services were delivered would need to be considered on a case by case basis, but the Council were open to all options, including setting up a local authority company where it was beneficial to do so.

In Rotherham bereavement services were delivered in partnership with Dignity Funerals Ltd. This partnership would see the delivery of high quality bereavement services for many years to come.

In a supplementary comment Councillor John Turner asked would the Council be aware that Cheshire East Council were running at a surplus and were able to offer in their magazines grants to organisations from £10,000 up to £25,000 and compared this to the state of the art fitness centre on Herringthorpe Playing Fields, whose roof was leaking and subsequently demolished. Would the Council have not been better offering this to a private company to repair the roof or sell or a private company?

**(11) Councillor John Turner** asked was it correct that the Council's near half a billion pounds debt was substantially composed of a loan of circa 350 million pounds to refurbish Council houses?

The Leader confirmed this was a similar question to one previously asked by Councillor Fleming in that the Council's current overall level of loans outstanding was £478m, of which approximately £304m related to loans taken out over many years to build, maintain and refurbish the Council's housing stock. This part of the Council's overall debt was reflected in the Council's Housing Revenue Account.

£220m of the Housing Revenue Account debt arose from the borrowing approved and incurred to refurbish the housing stock under the terms of the Government's Decent Homes Strategy, between 2004 and 2011.

The current level of housing debt was within the approved Housing Revenue Account debt cap of approximately £336m, which was set under the Government's self-financing regime in April 2012.

In a supplementary question Councillor John Turner referred to previous Council meetings where he had asked about the creation of an arm's length management organisation and the answer provided was that the Government would give Rotherham £300 million. He was given to understand that this was a gift as it turned out it was no gift. He, therefore asked why did Rotherham take this this on, which proved to be unsuccessful.

The Leader believed the question related to the Council borrowing against future revenue from Council house tenants to provide an upgrade to Council stock. This was a very worthwhile scheme and had been of great benefit to the people of Rotherham.

**(12) Councillor Jepson** asked could Members be updated with the current position regarding the proposed closure of Kiveton Park Steel (as requested at the Council meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> October, 2015) and what measures, if any, were the Council taking to mitigate this and any subsequent job losses in the area.

Councillor Watson, Deputy Leader, confirmed that RMBC through the RiDO service remained in contact with the Administrator and on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015, they advised that all staff were still there and the

company was still trading and fulfilling customer orders whilst actively looking for a buyer. They have had a number of interested parties who they were in discussions with. The Administrator would advise if they have to make any redundancies and if this was the case, RiDO would liaise with partner organisations such as Jobcentre Plus and National Careers Service who could provide support. RiDO agreed to maintain contact going forward and the Administrator knew to contact RiDO if there was anything they felt that RiDO/RMBC could do to help at any stage.

Councillor Jepson appreciated there were a number of rumours in the area and was satisfied that a substantial knowledge of what was taking place was known and thanked those involved for this.

**(13) Councillor Jepson** asked what was the cost per year to the Authority for replacing stolen/lost traffic management signs etc. and were the Council intending to move to only using ones made from recycled materials as opposed to metal?

Councillor Sims, Advisory Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Enforcement, stated that the cost of replacing temporary signage in 2014/15 was £4700. The majority of replacements were due to the signs being damaged, rather than theft. Although signs and cones have been stolen in the past for re-use, the Highway Delivery Team had combatted this by having signs and cones colour coded and RMBC embossed. The signs were sprayed with the Council's name which had proved to be a success.

Most signs made from recycled material were plastic. The cost of a sign manufactured from recycled polypropylene with reflective sign faces to BS8442 was £38 as opposed to £25 for the same sign manufactured in metal. Additionally, plastic signs were generally bulkier and anchoring securely could be an issue.

At the moment the plan was to increase the recycling signs as opposed to metal, but metal signs were more robust, self-weighting and recycling signs would be more susceptible to damage and would need replacing more often.

In a supplementary question Councillor Jepson confirmed he would be contacting Streetpride as he had seen three signs that had been left abandoned after roadworks were completed.

Councillor Sims, Advisory Cabinet Member for Waste, Roads and Enforcement, thanked Councillor Jepson and confirmed it would be more helpful if the Council could collect signs after works were completed.

**(14) Councillor Hunter** asked due to the sharp rise in serious crime in Rotherham's townships and the limitations of the underfunded Police force, residents were talking to private security firms about providing street patrols, was the Council willing to provide financial and technical

support for such schemes to help keep residents safe?

Councillor Watson, Deputy Leader, confirmed the Council would be grateful for any information Councillor Hunter may have about areas that were considering a need for private security patrols so the Council could work jointly with the Police to see what help could be provided.

As Councillor Hunter knew the way in which the Council including Ward Councillors worked with the Police to tackle local problems was through local policing units and multi-agency Case Identification Meetings that identified areas of most concern and applied an appropriate policing/partnership response.

There were currently no plans to offer any financial or technical support to any private schemes, but the Council would continue to share with the Police any concerns that the community raised and play an active part in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Watson indicated that the Cabinet Member would be more than happy to discuss this further with Councillor Hunter if he so wished.

In a supplementary question Councillor Hunter referred to Police numbers he had received which varied between 26-37 active Police Officers at any one time and at any one shift. When residents heard these figures they were concerned about the small number of Police who were actually protecting over 263,000 people living in the borough. He, therefore, asked the Council to look at any proposals seriously as this was a very small amount of Police Officers that were on the streets today.

Councillor Watson, Deputy Leader, was aware of the limited number of Police officers. This was a direct result of the Government's spending cuts, which had been campaigned against and which could have been even worse if the Autumn Statement had not be rolled back to avoid the events in Paris. He was happy to meet to discuss and considered the current position a disgrace.

**(15) Councillor Hunter** referred that throughout the spring and summer months there had been numerous complaints regarding the standard of the grass cutting and the general presentation of the town and asked could the Council make it one of its New Year resolutions to positively improve standards in this area.

Councillor Sims, Advisory Cabinet Member for Waste Roads and Enforcement, confirmed that the frequency of grass cutting had been increased this year due to additional funding being made available from the housing revenue account. This was in addition to the changes in equipment that were made last year, to enable a better standard of cut in variable weather conditions.

This had resulted in the number of complaints received reducing this season by over 49% when compared with last year (before the funding was made available), and by 41% when compared with the previous three year average. The grass cutting teams have also continued to receive compliments from the residents of and visitors to Rotherham on the quality of the work delivered.

In a supplementary question Councillor Hunter asked about the verges and central reservations wildflower mixed and suggested that these should really be the dwarf variety to avoid visibility problems for pedestrians and motorists.

Councillor Sims, Advisory Cabinet Member for Waste Roads and Enforcement, advised specific seeding was used on the wildflower areas, with special seeding used on the sight line areas on central reservations, but this was dependent very much on the weather conditions and seasons. Due to this dwarf wildflower varieties were used in these areas and specific sight lines cut if the height of these plants increased.

**(16) Councillor Hoddinott** referred to the news that Tata would proceed with 720 job cuts in Rotherham and Stocksbridge, which was devastating for families in the run-up to Christmas and asked what assistance would the Council and partners provide to those facing redundancy?

The Leader confirmed this was indeed a nightmare for those facing redundancy into the new year. Councillor Lelliott was currently attending the Tata Taskforce Meeting, which was an indication of the Council's commitment to the process. There was a Partnership in place involving RMBC, Tata, Steel Union Communitas, Sheffield City Council, Jobcentre Plus, Chamber of Commerce, Sheffield City Region Executive, BIS, Skills Funding Agency, National Careers Service with a detailed programme of support which would include Jobs Fairs, help with CVs, Money Advice and Guidance being put in place for the Tata employees affected by the redundancies.

The Leader also confirmed that he had taken a paper through the Sheffield City Region Enterprise Board this week which made a number of recommendations as this did not just affect Rotherham, but the wider community. Most significantly was the effect on the supply chain and it could be up to 1400 companies within a 50 mile radius, which would also suffer as a result of the decline in demand.

The City Region were also prepared to make a substantial investment to try and assist those companies going forward and would be seeking Government match funding, which was a substantial piece of work. There were also additional pieces of work on retraining and reskilling and the Sheffield City Region had some unspent skills bank money that they were putting towards the skills bank fund. As it was intended for medium to longer term training this may not be appropriate in this situation, which was why support was being sought from the Government on £1 million

short term support.

Members may also be aware that Tata Steel had some staff working out of Swindon Labs and pulled them out of the region. Two companies were still working there and work was taking place with those two companies so as not to lose more jobs from the area as a result of the terrible situation.

Everyone wanted to see Tata succeed in the future. Two thirds of their staff would still remain in Rotherham and Stocksbridge after these losses and this week further support was sought from the Local Enterprise Partnership and other partners about lobbying the Government on the issue of prices, which was the key issue facing Tata Steel.

In a supplementary question Councillor Hoddinott asked to place on record her thanks to all those who were working hard with those affected, families, local Councillors and Members of Parliament. Obviously everyone wanted to see those jobs, but where they could not be sustained these be mitigated.

Councillor Hoddinott wanted to make sure that the Government matched any funding and local commitment to helping the steel industry.

**(17) Councillor Elliot** referred to the Government rushing through electoral registration changes that could see around 1 million people fall off the register this month and lose their opportunity to vote and asked how many people could be disenfranchised in Rotherham?

The Leader confirmed that across the whole country it was expected that as many as one million people could go missing from electoral rolls as a result of the Government's changes. Over the last two years the Leader was pleased to say in Rotherham, because of the specific steps taken by the Electoral Registration Officers, it was thought those losses had been kept to a minimum. There were two particular issues – there were people who were still on the register last year and, although they could not be matched when the data was matched from other sources, they had signed the electoral registration and the Council were pursuing them by letter and door to door canvassing.

The second issue was around first time voters not getting on to the register because their parents would not add them. In December there were more 16-18 year olds registered to vote than those registered in the twelve months previously, which was a glowing recommendation to the work that had been done.

There were still some five thousand people not on the electoral register compared to the figures from the year before. Compared to many other authorities across the country Rotherham was doing really well at this time.

**(18) Councillor Reeder** referred to the Council bringing in a selective licensing scheme from the 1st May 2015 and asked could the Leader tell her how many have registered and what date they have to be registered by, how many need to register and if they have not registered already what action would be taken and when.

The Leader confirmed the Council had estimated 1,250 licensable properties at the start of the programme and already received applications for 846 of those properties. Whilst it was intended to apply the scheme from the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015 the legal action during April meant fewer landlords had applied. The Council was pleased that two thirds of those properties were now licensed.

Officers had now commenced door to door contact and had identified at least a further one hundred properties which may be eligible to be part of the scheme so these were being closed down. At the moment thirty landlords had received notices for not registering on the scheme and the first of one potential prosecution was currently being prepared. If this was presented to the Legal Team before Christmas the best guess was for this to be in court during April/May, 2016. The Council would pursue landlords who would not take part in the scheme and take the firmest action possible.

In a supplementary question Councillor Reeder referred to the recent court case where costs were awarded to the Council of £23,000 and asked if any of this had been paid.

The Leader was unable to confirm this detail and would provide this answer in writing.

**Questions 19 and 20 from Councillor Parker would be provided for him in writing as he was unable to attend the meeting.**

**105. URGENT ITEMS**

The Mayor authorised consideration of an urgent item on the Magna Trust in order to determine urgently whether the Council continued to provide ongoing support and if so what level of financial support was provided.

**106. MAGNA TRUST - UPDATE**

Further to Minute No. 138 of the meeting of Commissioner Manzie held on 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2015 consideration was given to a report which detailed the minded to decision taken by Commissioner Manzie.

The views of Council were, therefore, sought on the conclusions of the review of the Magna Business Plan and the strategic positioning of Magna as a key site. Councillor Chris Read (Leader) supported the recommended option to seek a repayment plan with Magna on the two loans and sought changes to the inter-creditor deed as well as the Council

offering support in kind to help Magna identify business and development opportunities in respect of the Magna facility and the wider site.

Councillor C. Vines expressed his concern about the Council offering support in kind and how information about the Business Plan was detailed in the media prior to Opposition Members being informed. He did not feel the Council had moved on and was uncomfortable offering his support moving forward.

Councillor Hoddinott welcomed the report and the financial opportunities available as part of Option 4, which protected employment and public money through investment. An option had been put forward by Councillor C. Vines to the Leader, the detail of which was not public.

Councillor C. Vines confirmed he had forwarded his proposals to the Leader of the Council, but expressed concern that the detail of the report to Council had been shared in the media with no formal discussion with Members or in the public interest.

Councillor Reynolds welcomed the protection of employment, which was for the benefit of Rotherham, but questioned the level of support to Magna when the town had an equivalent asset and modern building in the town with New York Stadium. It was suggested that consideration should be given to the long term future of Magna and the use of the site for social housing.

Councillor Currie believed the minded to decision by Commissioner Manzie to be correct, questioned the viability of social housing on an industrial site and supported Option 4 moving forward.

Councillors Alam, Beck, Buckley and Jepson echoed the comments and issues raised by Councillor Hoddinott and the protection afforded to employment and public funds. Both supported Option 4 moving forward.

Councillor Hunter questioned the status of the loans under Option 4 if they were combined.

Councillor Reynolds again referred to the long term future of the site should Magna fail and suggested the extension of credit to Magna should be increased, secured against the site, and then run as a commercial concern generating revenue, rather than a focusing on one side of the business.

The Leader responded to the comments made by fellow Councillors, confirmed to Councillor Hunter that the revised loan agreement under Option 4 would capture both loans securely and restated his support for Option 4 of the report.

The Mayor reminded Members of their duty to treat each other with respect and to restrain their comments, which was echoed by other Members.

**Resolved:- To support confirmation by Commissioner Manzie of the minded to decision of 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2015 in favour of Option 4 to negotiate an agreed repayment plan with Magna on the two loans.**

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Watson

**107. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended 2006 - (finance and business affairs).

**108. MAGNA TRUST - UPDATE**

Further to Minute No. 106 of this meeting, consideration was given to the confidential appendices of the report submitted.

A number of questions were raised on the appendices including confidence in Magna going forward, the future and viability of the trading elements, visitor numbers, utility expenditure and the constitution of the commercial entertainment and education element, which the Leader responded to.

**Resolved:- That the information be noted.**

**109. CLOSING REMARKS**

The Mayor formally closed the meeting at 4.30 p.m. and in doing so wished all those present a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.