

**COUNCIL SEMINAR
24th February, 2017**

Present:- Councillor (in the Chair); Councillors Buckley, Cutts, Hoddinott, Jarvis, Keenan, Lelliott, Marriott, Reeder, Taylor, John Turner, Walsh and Williams.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alam, Albiston, Allen, Beaumont, Brookes, Cowles, Cutts, Hague, Jepson, McNeely, Read, Sansome, Senior and Sheppard.

ROTHERHAM TOWN CENTRE - ORGANISED MARCHES

Members received information from the South Yorkshire Police in respect of the organised march/demonstration which would be taking place in the Rotherham town centre on Saturday, 25th February, 2017.

The South Yorkshire Police representatives were Assistant Chief Constable T. Forber, the Rotherham District Commander R. Odell and Constable P. Read.

It was confirmed that the Borough Council's official position was that such marches and demonstrations were unwelcome in Rotherham. Written representations had already been to the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, seeking a change in the law so as to prohibit such marches and demonstrations. However, the response was that the law would remain unchanged and that people have a right to peaceful protest. The Borough Council would continue to strive to reduce the negative impact of these marches and demonstrations upon the Rotherham town centre.

It was also confirmed that the South Yorkshire Police does not want these marches and demonstrations to occur in Rotherham, because of recognition of the cumulative impact of repeated demonstrations on the different sections of communities and because they often fuel divisions between communities and also cause disruption to businesses.

The South Yorkshire Police representatives informed Members that:-

: the English Defence League (EDL) have organised the march to take place on Saturday 25 February 2017;

: the role of the Police is to maintain law and order, minimise any disruption to normal, everyday life in the community and also to minimise the opportunity for criminality;

: the expensive cost of policing marches and demonstrations represented public finances which could be better spent on other Police services;

: the Police are bound by and have to act within the law and must recognise the right to peaceful protest; both the Police and the Council share the legal duty to facilitate this right;

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: it was emphasized that this was not a “day out” in Rotherham for the EDL; strict conditions have been imposed by the Police on the march and also on any counter-protests, again in order to minimise disruption to the town centre;

: the EDL has been instructed to comply with conditions from 10.00 a.m., even though the march is scheduled to begin at 2.00 p.m.; robust policing will ensure that participants in the march enter and leave the Rotherham town centre in an orderly manner; by notice issued in accordance with Section 35 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, the Police may order the dispersal of people from the town centre, within a specified period of time;

: there will be Police presence in respect of those person who choose to travel to Rotherham by public transport (eg: bus and rail);

: a specific route for the march has been established through the town – from the muster point at Main Street, to Ship Hill and to the exterior of the Town Hall at Moorgate Street; the return route is the same, to the muster point at Main Street, enabling participants to leave Rotherham using the routes to the west of the town centre; the Police will maintain a positive approach to law enforcement;

: persons involved in the counter-demonstration will have a separate muster area at the Minster Gardens;

: the Police are aware of the extent of dismay and frustration from within the community, the business and retail sector, as well as amongst Elected Members in respect of the frequency of these marches and demonstrations; the Police must act independently in accordance with the law; neither does the law allow the Police to prevent further marches and demonstrations happening in Rotherham again in the future;

: there has been very good co-operation with the Police from the majority of licensed premises within the Rotherham town centre, some of which will increase the level of security at their own premises so as to help in maintaining public order; some premises will close during the period of time in which the march takes place and others prefer to remain open to serve their regular clientele; the licensed premises will maintain a dialogue with the Police;

: key lessons have been learned from the policing of the previous marches and demonstrations in Rotherham (eg: a specific incident at Wellgate in 2015); a previous demonstration in Rotherham (18 February 2017) had been robustly policed and had passed without incident causing disruption to the Rotherham community;

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: a detailed explanation was provided of the extent of the Police presence in and around the Rotherham town centre, as planned for 25 February 2017; there will be the use of the various social media, by both the Police and the Borough Council, to provide general information about progress during the day, especially in order to reassure communities and the public in general that the march is passing without incident; this aspect was important because of other public events happening elsewhere in the town centre, for the enjoyment of the wider public;

: it was anticipated that the Rotherham Community Safety Partnership would review the day's events and consider whether there is any appropriate action which could be taken to try and make Rotherham a less attractive place for this type of unwelcome demonstration (eg: the possible use of Public Spaces Protection Orders in accordance with the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014);

: robust action will be taken by the Police in respect of any incidents of hate crime occurring during the march and demonstration; the use of the closed circuit television systems will assist in the identification of suspected offenders; members of the public are encouraged to report any such incidents to the Police;

: Elected Members were encouraged to report any concerns, as witnessed on 25 February 2017, to the South Yorkshire Police.

Members' subsequent discussion highlighted the following salient issues:-

: there were concerns about specific premises within the Rotherham town centre being targeted; it was noted that the Police had been made aware of these concerns and would be providing an appropriate response in order to disrupt any possible crime and disorder around specific premises and areas in the town centre;

: there would be separate discussions about forthcoming town centre events to be promoted by the Borough Council;

: there was further, brief reference to previous marches and demonstrations held in the Rotherham town centre, noting that legal action was continuing in some cases and therefore such matters could not be the subject of discussion at this meeting;

: it was acknowledged that the presence of additional Police officers within the town centre would itself serve to increase the level of anxiety amongst the general public; nevertheless, the Police would endeavour to maintain a robust professional approach to policing the march and demonstration, as well as engaging with and providing reassurance to the general public; the use of the muster points and the specific march route would minimise the amount of disruption to the general public who wished to move around the town centre as they would usually do;

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: reference was made to the legal implications of a Supreme Court judgement affecting the policing of marches and demonstrations in Northern Ireland;

: it was noted that the conditions which the Police could impose on the marches and demonstrations had to be both reasonable and proportionate;

: the overall intention was that, on Saturday 25 February 2017, ordinary citizens and the businesses should be able to go about their daily business unhindered in the Rotherham town centre, that the march and demonstration should pass peacefully and without incident, enabling the Police resources to be withdrawn as soon as possible after the march and demonstration have ended.

Members thanked the South Yorkshire Police representatives for their contribution to this meeting.