

**COUNCIL MEETING  
17th January, 2024**

Present:- Councillor Taylor (in the Chair); Councillors Cowen, Alam, Allen, Andrews, Atkin, Bacon, Baker-Rogers, Ball, Barker, Baum-Dixon, Beck, Bennett-Sylvester, Bird, Browne, A Carter, C Carter, Castledine-Dack, Clark, T. Collingham, Z. Collingham, Cooksey, Cusworth, Elliott, Ellis, Fisher, Foster, Griffin, Haleem, N Harper, Hoddinott, Hughes, Hunter, Jones, Keenan, Lelliott, McNeely, Mills, Miro, Monk, Pitchley, Read, Reynolds, Roche, Sheppard, Tarmey, Tinsley, Wilson, Wyatt and Yasseen.

The webcast of the Council Meeting can be viewed at:-

<https://rotherham.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

**73. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor started the meeting by wishing everyone a Happy New Year. The full activity details since the last meeting in November were contained in Appendix A to the Mayor's letter. The Mayor stated that he had been honoured to attend so many festive, local charity and veteran-led events.

The Mayor shared the news that four very deserving recipients had been honoured in the King's New Years Honours list:

- King's Volunteer Reserves Medal - Major Adrian Thomas Hunt, DL, VR, Corps of the Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers, Army Reserve.
- OBE - Jon-Paul Kitson Cornforth for services to the community in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, particularly during Covid-19.
- OBE - Diane Oxley for services to Young People and to the community in Thurcroft, South Yorkshire.
- OBE - Samuel Jozef Oldroyd Chief Executive Officer, JADE Youth and Community for services to Young People and Families in Rother Valley, South Yorkshire.

**74. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**Resolved:-** That apologies for absence be received from Councillors Aveyard, Burnett, Hall, Thompson and Whomersley.

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

Councillor Ball asked for clarification regarding Minute No. 58 (recommendations from the Independent Remuneration Panel – Members Allowances). During the meeting he had asked about the reduction in allowances in 2015 and stated that this was not answered. As such, he put the question to the Leader.

The Leader explained that a decision was taken in the March 2015 budget to reduce Member Allowances. The Council asked the Independent Remuneration Panel to align the budgets accordingly with the decision that had been taken. This was done in order to save money for the taxpayer and this position was held for a number of years.

Councillors Griffin and Yasseen spoke regarding Minute No. 63 (Notice of Motion – Israel and Palestine) and the negative impact of the late withdrawal of the motion on the democratic process, Elected Members and members of the public.

**Resolved:-** That the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 29th November, 2023, be approved for signature by the Mayor.

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Allen

**76. PETITIONS**

There were no petitions presented at the meeting.

**77. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made.

**78. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

Two public questions had been submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12:

1. Mr. Paul Thorp:

FORS Gold operators champion the reduction of any carbon footprint and the safety of all vulnerable road users as a cornerstone to best practice. When you chose to build cycle lanes, the Sheffield Road to Wellgate was one of the first to be built. Since spending so much taxpayer's money what was the expected benefits to Rotherham and its community?

The Leader responded:

The objectives were very similar to those of the FORS Gold Operators Scheme, including the reduction of carbon footprint and the safety of all vulnerable road users. The objectives of the scheme, as set out in the Cycling Strategy, were to enable Rotherham residents to choose walking or cycling as an option, reducing their carbon footprint relative to driving. The new infrastructure will allow this to be done safely, without impinging on access for motorists.

The Sheffield Road scheme in particular was chosen for two reasons. One was that, often when cycle lanes go in, they do not connect to anywhere and there were random bits of infrastructure. The Sheffield Road scheme allowed connections between the Town Centre and Tinsley and, Sheffield City Council had further proposals for improvements towards Meadowhall and then Sheffield City Centre. This would provide a corridor for common journeys.

The second reason was that the development of Sheffield Road closer to the Town Centre would involve more people living in that community. As such, changes needed to be made on the “town-end” of Sheffield Road in any case because of the number of people and vehicles.

The scheme was paid for wholly from external funding for walking and cycling, not from the Council’s budget. The scheme would be assessed in due course in terms of safety and the number of people using it.

In his supplementary, Mr. Thorp stated that he understood the idea behind the scheme but explained that the literature that had been put out spoke about extending cycling but there was already a Sheffield to Rotherham cycle lane. The Council had used the most carbon-unfriendly way of building a cycle lane instead of just using paint and cones. Sending cyclists across a roundabout and to the wrong side of a road was not going to work. Cyclists would just use the normal road which was now even narrower and would cause the possibility of more accidents. He asked the Leader why this had been done?

The Leader responded that the scheme was designed in line with the latest set of Government guidance. The latest rules from the Government were specifically not to just use paint and cones to separate cyclists and the cycling community did not believe that a series of white lines offer the protection required.

It was the first one that the Council had done, and it would learn from the process. However, it was designed and built in accordance with those national guidelines in order to provide the maximum level of safety.

2. Ms. Hafsa Yusufi:

1983, Rotherham Council partook in resisting South African apartheid alongside other local councils across the UK. Rotherham Council once again has the opportunity to stand on the right side of history. Will this Council follow its own proud precedent and take a principled stand against Israeli apartheid, such as by declaring Rotherham to be an Israeli apartheid-free zone?

The Leader responded:

Since the last meeting, the deteriorating situation in Gaza and the wider Middle East was of grave concern to all. We have all be horrified by the

## COUNCIL MEETING - 17/01/24

rising death toll and violence across the region and our hearts go out to all those affected. Rotherham Council and groups across the Borough have a proud history of supporting people fleeing violence.

In terms of the question, it was important that Rotherham was a welcoming environment for Israeli citizens just as it was for citizens from other countries around the world. In terms of the opposition to the policies that were implemented by the Netanyahu government, the very right-wing government, we were concerned about these even before the escalation in violence and were now increasingly concerned about those. In terms of making a statement against those, we certainly have no problem in doing so.

There had been a lot of talk about the kind of procurement restrictions that could be put in place by the Council, like what happened in 1983 with the boycott of South Africa. The Government was currently legislating specifically to prevent councils from taking that kind of action, specifically against Israel. The Council needed to be on the right side of the rules; it could not be in breach of the law. However, the Leader confirmed that he was happy to have a conversation regarding what kind of signal the Council could send.

In her supplementary question, Ms. Yusufi stated that she was confused over certain things that had happened over the past few months regarding how the Council operates. Firstly, regarding how Councillor Ball presented a motion, spoke to it and then retracted it which wasted a lot of the public's time. Secondly, Ms. Yusufi had been told that on the day of the meeting that questions were supposed to be towards a specific Councillor, however, at the last meeting she had tried to direct her question at her Ward Councillors but was told this was not allowed. Finally, Ms. Yusufi raised concerns in relation to the way petitions were run and conflicting information on the website compared to that being provided by the Council.

The Constitution states that the Council aims to adhere to the concepts of accountability and transparency. In light of that, Ms. Yusufi asked if the Councillors that had stated that they had made representations to the Government would make those public so that they could be seen by the residents of Rotherham? In terms of the other procedural issues, could further clarification be provided so that when residents want to engage with local democracy, they can do so in a very clear and understandable manner?

The Leader stated that he shared Ms. Yusufi's frustration regarding the events at the last Council meeting. It had not just wasted her time but had wasted everyone's time. It was disrespectful. In regard to Council questions, the Leader understood the confusion. The premise of questions to the Council in the Council meeting were that questions needed to be addressed to Cabinet or to a Chair of a Committee. The Cabinet, the administration, spoke on behalf of the Council. As such,

questions were not able to be put to back benchers. There was a rule that said questions had to relate to affairs of the Borough and the Leader understood that there had been some confusion regarding this prior to the meeting. They needed to specifically relate to things the Council was doing or could do in future. Usually, this meant that things that related to foreign policy issues were outside the remit of Council questions but occasionally there was overlap. The Leader confirmed that colleagues in Democratic Services would be happy to discuss with Ms. Yusufi how to submit questions that complied with the Council's rules.

Ms. Yusufi had also asked if the Council would make public any of the correspondence. The Leader stated that he thought they would be able to do that and where things could be shared, they would be.

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

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

**80. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S STATEMENT**

The Leader presented his statement and wished everyone a Happy New Year. He stated that the Council was making good progress on the commitment to hundreds of new Council homes. Since the last meeting, the 500<sup>th</sup> new home since 2018 had been delivered as part of the Housing Delivery Programme. The Council had also bought its first property under the Right To Buy – Right of First Refusal scheme in East Dene. The Leader noted that this policy was a double-edged sword in that more Council houses were needed to give Rotherham residents safe, affordable, warm places to live and in some cases, this could be done most cost effectively by buying back houses and properties that were lost under the Right to Buy Scheme. That did not negate the fact that the system was completely nonsense. The Council were forced to sell Council housing stock under the Right to Buy Scheme at a massive discount. Although the receipts were kept by the Council, they did not cover the cost of replacing those properties. Further, buying those same properties back later, at an inflated value from a private owner, was a waste of public money. The Leader believed this to be a farce and stated that the Council was doing the things possible within the legal framework but stated that the legal framework had to change.

In December 2023, the annual staff awards were celebrated for the public servants that went above and beyond in the service of the Borough. The Leader also spoke at the Rotherham Together Partnership Community Achievement Awards at the New York Stadium which celebrated the best of Rotherham's Voluntary and Community Sector.

Councillor Lelliott had officially opened the new Century II Business Incubator at Manvers which included a more environmentally friendly building, a £5.4m investment in 20 new workshops, 16 offices and 2

## COUNCIL MEETING - 17/01/24

laboratories. Nearly all of these were already filled, supporting new businesses to create jobs and opportunities in the north of the Borough.

The Leader confirmed that in the previous week he had visited the Stagecoach depot at Rawmarsh where work had begun on charging infrastructure for South Yorkshire's first electric bus fleet.

The latest round of the Energy Bill Crisis Grants was now open. The Leader stated that too many people were still suffering from the cost of living crisis with more than 13,000 local people in receipt of direct financial support with the cost of living pressures from the Council over the last 2 years. The additional funding would benefit up to 2,500 more people.

The Leader advised that he and Councillor Lelliott were at the topping out ceremony for Forge Island along with senior staff from Arc Cinema. They were very excited about the prospect of the cinema opening. The Council was very excited to be working with them. The development was on track to be delivered in Summer 2024 as part of the Town Centre regeneration.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester asked a question in relation to the house building programme, the Right to Buy Scheme and the declining circle it placed the Council in. One of the other pressures was land availability and the Council tended to use land it already owned. This was what had happened on a number of small sites in East Herringthorpe and each one had led to a loss of green space, spaces that could be used for dog walking etc. Cumulatively, between Herringthorpe Valley Road and Dalton Lane, there had been around 200 houses built but not much in the way of community development. Going forward, as well as just numbers, could more be done to look at the cumulative impact on communities and what could be done to attract community investment such as community centres and play areas?

In response to Councillor Bennett-Sylvester, the Leader stated that he understood the point around the cumulative impact. However, there was a huge challenge as the Council had prioritised the building of Council homes for those on the waiting list. Therefore, the ability of the Council to spend money, money that would otherwise be spent on house building, on community facilities was curtailed. The Leader stated that he understood Councillor Bennett-Sylvester's point and that he understood the challenge that faced communities, but he would not apologise for the priority given to home building. The challenge related to the planning rules and requirements. Progress was to be made in relation to local labour requirements with a report due to be presented to Cabinet in January 2024. The Leader could not commit to the development of more community facilities in the way described. He was happy to hold further conversations but could not make any commitments.

Councillor Reynolds asked a question in relation to the Whinney Hill development and the associated finances. He specifically asked who had built the houses? Who was Homes England? Who put the bricks and

mortar down – who built them? Who gave them the land? What did they pay for the land and what was the return? Councillor Reynolds stated that it was a wonderful development. In relation to community, the area used to be very depressed and for a while was abandoned with demolished houses. There were concerns over who would get to move into the new development in order to create the community to ensure that the houses stayed nice and well kept.

Councillor Reynolds also stated the positives of the Right to Buy Scheme.

In response to Councillor Reynolds question, the Leader stated that it was a consortium of housing associations that were responsible for the Whinney Hill development. They were not HRA Council properties, but the Council did have some nomination rights so some of those waiting for Council homes would be entitled to them. The Leader confirmed that he was happy to get Councillor Reynolds a written response on how the deal was put together in the first place.

The Leader also clarified who Homes England was. It was a Government agency that funded housing developments that may not have happened otherwise. It was part of the government and part of the funding that had been put together for the Whinney Hill site come from them. Homes England also helped with some of the Town Centre developments.

## **81. MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING**

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester asked a question in relation to Minute No. 110 (Rotherham Markets and Central Library). Councillor Bennett-Sylvester noted the bric-a-brac markets that were currently in the Town Centre and queried the forward looking element of the new development. Short term it would seem to have a great impact on the town but long term, was anything being done to analyse what impact the street markets were having in terms of overall market management?

Councillor Lelliott responded that the Council did work with the street market traders and there was a task and finish group that worked to monitor all developments that were happening. There was a long term plan and a team had been set up to look at how to move people back into the markets and the best way to manage that, including moving other stall holders and business in.

**Resolved:-** That the report, recommendations and minutes of the meetings of Cabinet held on 20th November and 18th December, 2023, be received.

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Allen

**82. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY UPDATE**

Consideration was given to the report which provided an update to Council on the activities and outcomes of Overview and Scrutiny work in accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules. Appendix 2 and 3 of the report provided an update on the scrutiny work programme and the progress of implementing the agreed recommendations from scrutiny reviews, from May 2023 to the present day.

Appendix 1 was the update report that was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board in December 2023. 19 scrutiny meetings had been held since the start of the Municipal Year in May 2023 with over 50 separate items being considered across the Commissions and Board. There were also additional fact-finding meetings, reviews and workshops. Recommendations arising from those varied activities had been communicated to Cabinet Members, Senior Leaders and partners as appropriate.

It was noted that due to diary commitments, resource capacity and other priorities being identified, it had not been possible to complete work on all projects/reviews within the projected timescales. As such, Members were asked to review programmed activity at the mid-point and prioritise work over the remaining Municipal Year as required.

Paragraph 2.11 of the report provided an update on the reviews. The majority of recommendations were substantially complete or ongoing. All scrutiny recommendations considered by Cabinet had been accepted.

The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board presented the report to Council and thanked the Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team for their commitment to ensuring that progress implementing agreed recommendations was maintained. She also thanked Caroline Webb, Jo Brown, Emma Hill and Barbel Gale for their work in supporting the scrutiny function. Thanks was also given to the former vice-chairs of OSMB, Councillor Emily Barley and Councillor Tom Collingham.

The Local Government Association Peer Review had stated that “there are clear, robust and embedded governance arrangements, accompanied by effective overview and scrutiny mechanisms. ... The peer team received positive feedback on the work carried out by scrutiny through scrutiny reviews, the support Members receive from officers, and the influence scrutiny has on the council's decision-making process, particularly through pre-decision scrutiny – there is transparency in decision-making.”

**Resolved:-**

1. That the report be noted.

Mover:- Councillor Clark

Seconder: Councillor Bacon

**83. MEMBERSHIP OF POLITICAL GROUPS ON THE COUNCIL, POLITICAL BALANCE AND ENTITLEMENT TO SEATS**

Consideration was given to the report which provided an update on the membership of political groups on the Council, the political balance and the entitlement to seats following the Kilnhurst and Swinton East By-Election on 2nd November, 2023. As the Member that had resigned was from the Labour Group and the Member that was elected was from the Labour Group, there was no overall change to the political balance:

<b>Name of Group</b>	<b>Designated Leader &amp; Deputy Leader (Number of Members)</b>
Labour	Leader – Councillor Chris Read Deputy Leader – Councillor Sarah Allen (34 Members)
Conservative	Leader – Councillor Simon Ball Deputy Leader – Councillor Lewis Mills (15 Members)
Liberal Democrat	Leader – Councillor Adam Carter (4 Members)
Independent Conservative	Leader – Councillor Emily Barley (2 Members)

\*Non-Aligned Members: Cllr(s) Bennett-Sylvester, Wilson, Elliott, Jones

\*\*maternity leave from 7 August 23

The nominations to Committees, Board and Panels were as follows:

Cabinet 8L

Leader – Councillor Read

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing and Neighbourhood

Working – Councillor Allen

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – Councillor Cusworth

Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health – Councillor Roche

Cabinet Member for Jobs and the Local Economy – Councillor Lelliott

Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Environment – Councillor

Sheppard

Cabinet Member for Housing – Councillor Brookes\*\*

Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Community Safety and Finance

– Councillor Alam

## **COUNCIL MEETING - 17/01/24**

### Audit Committee – 3L, 1C, 1NA

Councillor Baker-Rogers  
Councillor Browne  
Councillor Wyatt  
1 x Conservative Vacancy  
Councillor Elliott

### Licensing Board – 12L, 5C, 1LD, 1C, 2NA

Councillor Ellis  
Councillor Hughes  
Councillor Wyatt  
Councillor Clark  
Councillor Pitchley  
Councillor Cooksey  
Councillor Hoddinott  
Councillor McNeely  
Councillor Monk  
Councillor Browne  
Councillor Aveyard  
Councillor Haleem  
Councillor Castledine-Dack  
Councillor T. Collingham  
Councillor Mills  
Councillor Reynolds  
Councillor Barker  
1 x Liberal Democrats Vacancy  
1 x Independent Conservative Vacancy  
Councillor Jones  
Councillor Bennett-Sylvester

### Licensing Committee – 9L, 4C, 1LD, 1 NA

Councillor Ellis  
Councillor Hughes  
Councillor Wyatt  
Councillor Clark  
Councillor Pitchley  
Councillor Cooksey  
Councillor Hoddinott  
Councillor Monk  
Councillor McNeely  
Councillor T. Collingham  
Councillor Mills  
Councillor Reynolds  
1 x Liberal Democrats Vacancy  
Councillor Jones

Planning Board – 9L, 4C, 1LD, 1NA

Councillor Atkin  
Councillor Birk  
Councillor Taylor  
Councillor Cowen  
Councillor Andrews  
Councillor Keenan  
Councillor Sheppard  
Councillor Khan  
Councillor Havard  
Councillor Ball  
Councillor Bacon  
Councillor Burnett  
Councillor Tarmey  
Councillor Elliott

Staffing Committee – 3L, 1C, 1LD

Councillor Alam  
Councillor Allen  
1 x appropriate Cabinet Member as determined by the matter to be considered  
Councillor T. Collingham  
Councillor Tarmey

Standards and Ethics Committee – 5L, 2C, 1NA

Councillor McNeely  
Councillor Griffin  
Councillor Hughes  
Councillor Keenan  
Councillor Yasseen  
Councillor Z. Collingham  
Councillor Bacon  
Councillor Wilson

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 7L, 3C, 1LD, 1NA

Councillor Clark  
Councillor Bacon  
Councillor Baker-Rogers  
Councillor Pitchley  
Councillor Cooksey  
Councillor Yasseen  
Councillor Wyatt  
Councillor Browne  
Councillor Ball  
Councillor Tinsley  
Councillor Miro  
Councillor Elliott

## **COUNCIL MEETING - 17/01/24**

### Health Select Commission – 10L, 5C, 1LD, 1IC, 1NA

Councillor Yasseen  
Councillor Miro  
Councillor Griffin  
Councillor Havard  
Councillor Bird  
Councillor Cooksey  
Councillor Harper  
Councillor Hoddinott  
Councillor Andrews  
Councillor Keenan  
Councillor Foster  
Councillor Baum-Dixon  
Councillor Hunter  
1 x Conservative Vacancy  
1 x Conservative Vacancy  
1 x Conservative Vacancy  
Councillor Thompson  
Councillor Wilson

### Improving Lives Select Commission – 10L, 5C, 1LD, 1IC, 1NA

Councillor Pitchley  
Councillor Cooksey  
Councillor Baker-Rogers  
Councillor Griffin  
Councillor Hughes  
Councillor Monk  
Councillor McNeely  
Councillor Khan  
Councillor Haleem  
Councillor Atkin  
Councillor Bacon  
Councillor Z. Collingham  
Councillor Mills  
1 x Conservative Vacancy  
1 x Conservative Vacancy  
Councillor Bennett-Sylvester (gifted by Liberal Democrats)  
Councillor Barley  
Councillor Wilson

### Improving Places Select Commission – 10L, 5C, 1LD, 1IC, 1NA

Councillor Wyatt  
Councillor Tinsley  
Councillor Taylor  
Councillor Havard  
Councillor Cowen  
Councillor Ellis  
Councillor Atkin  
Councillor McNeely  
Councillor Aveyard

Councillor Khan  
Councillor Andrews  
Councillor T. Collingham  
Councillor Castledine-Dack  
Councillor Reynolds  
1 x Conservative Vacancy  
Councillor C. Carter  
Councillor Barley  
Councillor Bennett-Sylvester

Corporate Parenting Group – 3L, 1C, 1LD

Councillor Cusworth  
Councillor Pitchley  
Councillor Browne  
Councillor Z. Collingham  
1 x Liberal Democrats Vacancy

Introductory Tenancy Review Panel – 2L, 1C, 1IC

Chair and Vice to be drawn from members of the Improving Lives Scrutiny Commission or Improving Places Scrutiny Commission  
Councillor McNeely  
Councillor Cooksey  
1 x Conservative Vacancy  
Councillor Bennett-Sylvester (Gifted by Independent Conservative)

Joint Consultative Committee 3L, 1C, 1LD

Councillor Alam  
Councillor Clark  
1 Conservative Vacancy  
Councillor A. Carter

Health and Wellbeing Board – 2L

Councillor Roche  
Councillor Cusworth  
Councillor Castledine-Dack (Observer)

**Resolved:-**

1. That Council note the political balance of the Council as a result of the by-election.
2. That Council note the nominations to the various Committees.

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Allen

**84. RECOMMENDATION FROM AUDIT COMMITTEE - APPOINTMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT MEMBER OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE**

Consideration was given to the report which stated that on 19th July, 2023, Council resolved to amend the Audit Committee Terms of Reference to include provision for a second independent member. Prior to this, the Committee was comprised of 5 Councillors and one independent person.

Following the amendment to the Terms of Reference, a recruitment exercise had been undertaken. Recommendation 1 of the report was to appoint Alison Hutchinson as an Independent Member of the Audit Committee until January 2028 (4 year term.)

The current independent Member, John Barber, had resigned from this position with effect from 4th January, 2024. During the recruitment exercise, a second candidate was also considered to be suitable for the role. Recommendation 2 of the report was therefore to appoint Michael Olugbenga-Babalola as an Independent Member of the Audit Committee until January 2028 (4 year term.)

The recommendations had been supported by the Audit Committee at their meeting on 9th January, 2024.

At the meeting, the Chair of the Audit Committee placed on record her thanks to John Barber for his valuable contributions during his term.

**Resolved:-**

1. That Council appoint Alison Hutchinson as an Independent Member of the Audit Committee until January 2028 (4 year term.)
2. That Council appoint Michael Olugbenga-Babalola as an Independent Member of the Audit Committee until January 2028 (4 year term.)

Mover: Councillor Baker-Rogers

Seconder: Councillor Browne

**85. THRIVING NEIGHBOURHOODS - UPDATES FROM AUGHTON AND SWALLOWNEST WARD COUNCILLORS**

Further to Minute No. 55 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 19th November, 2018, consideration was given to the annual Ward update for Aughton and Swallownest as part of the Thriving Neighbourhood Strategy.

An update report had been provided as part of the agenda. However, each Ward Member was invited to speak.

Councillor Pitchley introduced the report and thanked Councillor Taylor and the residents for their support during the last few years. Fence, Ulley and a part of Aston were also included within the Aughton and Swallownest Ward. There were 3 Ward priorities:

- Develop and support initiatives that will improve health and wellbeing and tackle poverty.
- Develop and support initiatives around crime and community safety.
- Develop and support initiatives that will improve the environment and the neighbourhood.

Work to achieve these priorities included:

- Working with local schools, particularly around local democracy.
- The funding of friendship branches, improved outdoor areas and bowling sessions.
- The provision of a memorial stone and tree by Pritchard and Sons in Burgoyne Park. Thanks was given to Aston Parish Council for this.
- Celebrating all the volunteers and partners within the Ward.
- Crime and Community Stalls.
- Skips, litter picks, ward walks and new bins.

Councillor Taylor seconded the report and highlighted the following:

- Boxing fitness sessions at the Parish Hall.
- Work with the charity Hope, which was one of the Mayor's chosen charities, to organise road safety workshops for young people following a number of tragic accidents.
- The controlled crossing on the A57 which will be happening in 2024. Councillor Beck was personally thanked for his work on this project.

Councillor Pitchley and Councillor Taylor thanked all schools, partners, Parish Council's, community groups and policing teams for all their hard work. The Housing Officer, Richard Tomlinson, and Andrea Peers, Dawn Thomas and Karen Bickerton for the Neighbourhoods Team were also thanked.

**Resolved:-**

1. That the report be noted.

Mover:- Councillor Pitchley

Seconder:- Councillor Taylor

**86. THRIVING NEIGHBOURHOODS - UPDATES FROM ASTON AND TODWICK WARD COUNCILLORS**

Further to Minute No. 55 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 19th November, 2018, consideration was given to the annual Ward update for Aston and Todwick as part of the Thriving Neighbourhood Strategy.

## COUNCIL MEETING - 17/01/24

An update report had been provided as part of the agenda. However, each Ward Member was invited to speak.

Councillor Bacon provided a history of Aston and Todwick and thanked those that had supported him before highlighting the following:

- The introduction of speed watches on the A57
- Work to improve various roads such as the A57/Worksop Road junction in Aston and around the Todwick Red Lion roundabout.
- Speed activated signs, new road markings and other street furniture.
- Work with the Towns and Villages Fund – there were multiple proposals sites around Todwick which required good quality works only.
- The Levelling-Up project in Aston that would improve the green space behind the boiler house on Florence Avenue.
- Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour – Local Neighbourhood Watch schemes have been established along with regular public police events.
- Campaigns for better buses and the securing of two live bus signs.
- Work on over 30 projects with partner agencies, schools, churches, parish Council's etc.

In seconding the report, Councillor Barker stated that he and Councillor Bacon had worked well together and with the community on a number of projects. This had included working with schools, helping children go to Magna and learning about science. Councillor Barker stated that he was proud of what had been achieved.

Councillor Wilson asked whether Councillor Bacon's speech related to the Neighbourhood Report or was a party political broadcast.

Councillor Allen was particularly interested in the Towns and Villages Fund projects. She noted that the projects discussed were awaiting approval from the 2 Ward Members and she asked if that had now been given so that it could start?

As the mover of the report, Councillor Bacon had the right of reply. In response to Councillor Wilson, he stated that the report circulated, and his speech highlighted the achievements and ambitions of Ward Members for Aston and Todwick.

In response to Councillor Allen, Councillor Bacon confirmed that approvals had been given.

### **Resolved:-**

1. That the report be noted.

Mover:- Councillor Bacon

Secunder:- Councillor Barker

**87. AUDIT COMMITTEE**

Resolved: That the reports, recommendations and minutes of the meetings of the Audit Committee be adopted.

Mover: Councillor Baker-Rogers                      Seconder: Councillor Browne

**88. HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD**

Resolved: That the reports, recommendations and minutes of the meeting of the Health and Wellbeing Board be adopted.

Mover: Councillor Roche                      Seconder: Councillor Cusworth

**89. LICENSING BOARD SUB-COMMITTEE AND LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE**

Resolved: That the reports, recommendations and minutes of the meeting of the Licensing Board Sub-Committee be adopted.

Mover: Councillor Ellis                      Seconder: Councillor Hughes

**90. PLANNING BOARD**

Councillor Tinsley raised a question regarding the Planning Committee minutes of 14th December, 2024. As this question was substantially the same as a question he had submitted under the Member's Questions to Cabinet Members and Chairpersons (Minute No. 91) item 19, the Chair of the Planning Board stated he would answer the question later in the meeting.

**Resolved:** That the reports, recommendations and minutes of the meeting of the Planning Board be adopted.

Mover: Councillor Atkin                      Seconder: Councillor Bird

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

Two questions had been received:

1. Councillor Ball: It has come to my attention the Mayor is suggesting that he takes the Police and Crime Panel into the Combined Authority if so how can this provide adequate independent scrutiny?

Councillor Haleem, the Council's designated spokesperson on South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel, responded by stating that the Police and Crime Panels scrutinise Mayors and Deputy Mayors for Policing and Crime with respect to their exercise of PCC functions, in the same way they scrutinise PCCs. The Combined Authority does

not have a role in scrutinising the Mayor in relation to their PCC functions. Councillor Haleem stated that she was not aware of the current Mayor making any such suggestion, so perhaps the question was based on a misunderstanding.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Ball stated that he was aware of the suggestion and asked if what was being suggested, which was less independent scrutiny, was really the way forward? He also asked Councillor Haleem if she had, in her role as spokesperson, suggested any alternatives or raised any concerns? If no, why not?

Councillor Haleem stated that she did not think it was less representative as each Panel was hosted by a local authority within the police force area, known as the 'host authority' (defined in Legislation and not a Combined Authority). The host authority was responsible for establishing and maintaining a Panel and was always represented on the Panel.

2. Councillor Ball: Can you inform me how many staff out of the OPCC will lose their jobs when transferring over to the Mayor's office?

All OPCC staff would transfer to the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority at the point of transfer so no staff from the OPCC would lose their jobs when transferring over to the Mayor's office.

## **92. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS AND CHAIRPERSONS**

29 questions had been received:

1. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester: Congratulations on the final approval for Castle View. Can you please summarise the road map to opening and particular how agency will be given to service users to shape its offering?

Councillor Roche responded by stating that the scheme fitted in with the previous work done on the learning disability refreshment which had been very successful. The LGA had visited and were very complimentary about what had been done such as having 23 micro organisations involved in delivering care; there were 550 opportunities for a wide range of choice; 125 local staff were employed. That was a success and Councillor Roche believed that Castle View would also be a success.

The timeline for the construction of Castle View was as follows:

- Construction to commence Summer 2024
- Completion expected Winter 2025/26
- Estimate that the new service will be operational by Spring 2026.

- During 2025, people will take part in a review of their support needs and care plan and be made aware of the support choices available to them including a move to Castle View.
- Once the interior of the building was fitted out and ready for use, people who wished to move to the new service would be supported to do so.

Throughout the whole process, a consultation and engagement programme was in place to ensure customers, carers and staff were fully involved and had 'a voice' in relation to the design of both the building and the Service.

This had so far included a public consultation exercise, and a series of meetings and workshops. The latest being on 8th January 2024 where the final plans and designs were shown and discussed. This was very positively received by all those involved.

Customers at Reach had also made a model of how they would like the new building to be. Customers who were interested in gardening and the allotment were just about to commence some draft designs of the outdoor space and what they would like to do with it (including a sensory garden.)

Councillor Roche stated that this was a very positive development for Rotherham.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Bennett-Sylvester stated that this was exceptional, especially regarding the supported living that was going to be onsite. However, one of the issues that had been raised by users was that they were learning things via Cabinet reports, not direct discussions. He asked the Cabinet Member to confirm that there would not be future delays between Cabinet announcements and informing residents?

Councillor Roche confirmed that feedback was being given as soon as possible and some of the services users contacted him on a regular basis for updates. There had been a small delay but this was at a time when there was nothing to report back as the design team and asset transfer of land took time along with the planning consent. Councillor Roche stated that they would be kept informed at every stage and that would be done on a very regular basis

2. Councillor Monk: Can the Cabinet Member provide an update on the work to increase recruitment and retention of Fostering Families in Rotherham?

Councillor Cusworth stated that there had been extensive work over the last 12 months to increase recruitment and retention in the fostering service. This has included:

## COUNCIL MEETING - 17/01/24

- approving new fees and allowances at November Cabinet.
- creating Long Service Awards.
- developing an Emergency/Out of Hours Helpline for foster carers.
- Fast tracking of Independent Fostering Agency transfers and where appropriate matching fees. There had been an increase in Independent Fostering Agency carers transferring to the Council due to the wraparound support and competitive packages available.
- Establishing an Elected Member Fostering Working Group to support with plans to recruit and retain Rotherham Foster Carers. This had seen Elected Members raise the profile of fostering in various forums, supporting the new fees and allowances approval and devise proposals for Members to take forward to keep fostering on the agenda. A report was due to be presented to Cabinet in February 2024.
- Secured a fostering recruitment pledge from each Directorate. The action plan and progress is reported into the Strategic Fostering Working Group.
- Involved foster carers in making videos and writing anecdotes about their role to support with marketing. The best person to recruit a foster carer was another foster carer.
- Established a strong Fostering Partnership with Rotherham United Football Club. A fostering football match was scheduled for 17th February
- Increased the number of available placements with existing foster carers through Pathway to Care and adaptations to foster carers homes.
- Increased the training package and the number of support groups to foster carers and implemented a foster carer wellbeing offer.

This work had resulted in the successful retention of existing foster carers and had also supported the projected net gain of 9 new foster carers this year. This would be the first net gain of foster carers in a number of years and included the loss of 8 de-registrations this year (none of whom had children in care at the time of de-registration). To date, the Council had recruited 14 foster carers and had 13 assessments of prospective foster carers underway.

3. Councillor Hoddinott: The rising price of baby formula is a worry for many families. What support does the Council offer to new parents that are struggling with costs?

Councillor Cusworth stated that the Council promoted the national Healthy Start scheme which provided vouchers for eligible families (from pregnancy to children being 4 years) and this helped with food items, which reduced the burden on the family budget to buy essential items such as baby formula. Families needed to register for the vouchers online and those eligible were provided with pre-paid cards

to spend in supermarkets and local shops. The Early Help Service and 0-19 Service helped promote this.

The current uptake of Healthy Start Vouchers in Rotherham was positive and in December 2023 Rotherham's uptake was 82%, compared with 73% nationally. Promotion of the scheme was carried out by health, Local Authority and voluntary sector agencies.

The Council's Household Support Fund funded by the DWP enabled cost of living support for eligible families with food vouchers in school holiday, Council Tax top up grants, energy crisis support and discretionary housing payments. Whilst this was not directly related to infant feeding formula, it eased the burden on families that were struggling financially, freeing up the household budget to pay for essential items such as baby food.

As it stood, the Household Support Fund would not be continued into the new financial year and that would put real pressure on families.

Food banks offered baby formula however, this was based on stock availability.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Hoddinott stated that the uptake of over 80% was pleasing. However, Healthy Start vouchers were a national scheme and the value of them had not risen. As inflation was running away, food prices were astronomical, and there were investigations into whether the baby formula pricing had been fixed, were there any opportunities to feed that back to the Government? The vouchers were not keeping up with the cost of living crisis.

Councillor Cusworth confirmed that she would meet with Councillor Hoddinott and Councillor Roche (to gain a Public Health perspective) to see what could be done in terms of lobbying to close the gap between the value of the vouchers and the increase in the cost of living and inflation.

4. Councillor Hoddinott: It was worrying that the Household Support Fund would end in March, and thousands of families would be left bereft. What could you do about it?

Councillor Sheppard responded by stating that it was extremely concerning that with the Household Support Fund due to come to an end in March that there had been no confirmation of either an extension or a successor fund.

Since its introduction in October 2021 the Household Support Fund had played a critical role in supporting the most vulnerable communities and residents in our Borough to respond to both the pandemic and the rising cost of living.

The £12.4m of funding that have been awarded to the Council had enabled it to provide the following by the end of September 2023:

- 258,000 food vouchers to children eligible for free school meals during the school holidays through a £5.9m allocation until the end of the Easter school holidays.
- 46,237 payments to some of our most vulnerable households in the Borough through a combination of additional support with Council Tax and the Council's Energy Crisis Support Scheme.
- 12,275 crisis food parcels were distributed.
- 892 payments to care leavers to support them with household costs.
- 521 households received Discretionary Housing Payment Top Ups
- And finally, it was projected that the Council had enabled local VCS organisations [like Sunnyside Supplies] to provide 1,400 Christmas hampers.

Given the critically important role played by the Household Support Fund in the Borough, it was extremely concerning that this funding was due to end in March. This was a particular challenge for boroughs like Rotherham where in the last year alone the number of children in receipt of free school meals had increased by 765 or 6% to 12,700, making the need for this funding more imperative than ever.

In November, the Leader wrote to the Chancellor making the case to extend the Household Support Fund beyond March in the Autumn Statement. The Council could continue to make representations to the Chancellor articulating the importance of extending the funding to benefit Rotherham's residents and communities through his March Budget.

5. Councillor Tinsley: Concerns over delivery of supplies of grit salt and shovels to Snow Wardens had been raised previously to the Council. I have noticed recently that supplies were being delivered by the supplier directly to residents. Had issues been identified in the delivery of grit supplies and were there any cost implications in using external suppliers to deliver direct?

Councillor Sheppard explained that the Council had engaged a local builder's merchant to deliver the shovel, gloves and bagged grit salt directly to Snow Wardens following challenges in keeping up with demand last winter. The Service had not had any reported issues since the introduction of this process. This process meant Council Officers did not need to collect and deliver supplies. The delivery was at no extra cost, however, ensured an efficient delivery process allowing the Council to accept requests from increased numbers of Snow Wardens.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Tinsley stated that he had recently received a reply to an email he had sent regarding grit supplies 3 years ago and questioned whether there was a backlog in getting the supplies out?

Councillor Sheppard stated that operational issues should be reported to officers or himself straight away.

6. Councillor Tinsley: Can the Leader confirm if he has promised the residents of Little London Maltby that the Council will Compulsory Purchase the Houses on Churchill Avenue which have been derelict and a blight on the community for years?

The Leader confirmed that no promises had been made as those promises would not necessarily have been possible to keep. The compulsory purchasing of land was a legal process subject to a number of factors. At the moment, there was a planning application on the site which would interfere with any CPO processes. The Leader had promised the Big Power for Little London Group that he would continue to work with them on their priorities for the area and try and make headway on improving the blight on that community with regard to those empty buildings.

In his supplementary, Councillor Tinsley stated that it had been a blight on Maltby for a number of years and there had been promises or video statements made from the Council about Compulsory Purchase Orders. Councillor Tinsley acknowledged that the Leader had committed to work with the Big Power for Little London Group but questioned why Ward Councillors were not being included. They had done a lot of work on Little London and getting the houses boarded up. He stated that the Leader was having private meetings, but Ward Councillors were not even getting updates and as such the power was being diluted by different channels. He asked the Leader if he would commit to including Ward Councillors in these meetings?

The Leader explained that he meets with the Residents Group at their request, and it was a matter for them as to who they wished to invite to those meetings. He would relay the message, but the Group had asked to speak to him and he had met them on a couple of occasions, at their request and he would continue to do so.

7. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester: Especially since the pandemic there has been a surge in demand for businesses to offer home delivery services. What are we doing to support businesses in Rotherham Town Centre to offer such services especially if based on pedestrianised streets?

Councillor Lelliott stated that the Council did recognise that retail and food businesses were increasingly using home delivery services as part of their offer to customers. As such, the Council was actively

## COUNCIL MEETING - 17/01/24

facilitating home delivery services by reviewing and managing kerbside arrangements, including allowing loading and access where appropriate. It also had a permit process to assist businesses in the town centre who needed access to pedestrianised areas.

The Council was building and investing millions of pounds in the Town Centre including work on improving the public realm. In some of the areas that delivery drivers used, the environment was ruined and stained. It was undoing the good work done on the public realm. The whole point of regenerating the Town Centre was to get people to come in and visit the Town Centre. This required a safe pedestrianised area where people could use the shops and visit the Town Centre. This was far more productive than a delivery driver being able to get right on the kerb outside the shop door. The Council did appreciate and want to support the delivery businesses and as such, were speaking to them and the parking team regarding loading bays. However, the priority had to be on making sure that the people who wanted to come into Rotherham and go to the markets and the shops felt safe in a pedestrianised area.

In a town centre environment, there always needed to be a balance between vehicle access and pedestrian safety. The Council remained open to feedback from businesses to enhance its support initiatives and create an environment that fostered trade for businesses but also ensured a safe, pedestrian-friendly town centre for residents and visitors.

In his supplementary, Councillor Bennett-Sylvester stated that this situation had come to light prior to Christmas when Andrew's Butchers on Effingham Street were delivering food parcels for the social supermarket and got ticketed which caused embarrassment. He also stated that he disagreed with Councillor Lelliott regarding pedestrianised areas. In retail, it was important to make it as convenient as possible for customers to load up and go. There had been some recognition of this regarding extra parking on Effingham Street. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester asked Councillor Lelliott what was being done regarding permits as some felt there were not enough. With regard to smart signage and regarding an online offering, what was going on regarding on-going discussions with retailers in the Town Centre regarding any concerns they have had in this area?

Councillor Lelliott explained that the Council's parking team had met with Town Centre businesses and there was also the Voice meetings. All businesses were invited to that and there were also leaflet drops and the Town Centre Manager went out and invited them. Everybody who was working in the Town Centre had a presence in that meeting (including Parking Services, Streetpride, Housing etc.) The meetings were getting more successful and more people were attending. Businesses were also encouraged to email the Council directly with

any queries. The meetings took place every quarter. Discussions and negotiations were ongoing.

8. Councillor Tinsley: The two main landlords on Little London avoided Selective Licencing housing designation because of “improvements” to housing conditions on their properties. Can you confirm that the Council has only inspected approximately 10% of these properties to HHSRS Standards and the rest of the inspections were undertaken by the landlord. Would you agree this was like marking your own homework?

The Leader stated that it would be like marking your own homework if it were true, but it was not. The first part of the question was about the last designation of Selective Licensing areas and there were at least 2 elements as to why Little London did not make the cut at that time. The first was that there were legal requirements/tests that had to be met before Selective Licensing designations could be entered into. The view at the time was that those thresholds were not met in relation to Little London as they were in relation to parts of Dinnington, Eastwood and elsewhere.

The second thing at that time was that the Government was cracking down on the ability of local authorities to place a more widespread Selective Licensing designation although the rules may have changed since then. There were a number of local authorities that were imposing borough-wide designations at that time and the Conservative Government intervened to prevent that from happening. They said that if a Council wanted more than a certain proportion of properties to be designated as Selective Licensing areas, councils could not make that decision; they had to apply to the Secretary of State. The combination of those 2 elements and the uncertain legal position in terms of the confidence about being able to put that in place in Little London and the fact that it would be challenged directly by the Secretary of State, meant that the designation was not taken forward at that time.

In relation to the housing assessments that had been undertaken, the first round dip sample was about 12% of the privately rented properties in that area. That focussed on the smaller landlords in the area because there was less information about those. There had been subsequent inspections undertaken which meant the total stood at 34% of the private rented properties in that area. That was in addition to all the work that the landlords’ agents themselves did in order to inspect the properties which was, at various times, reported back to the Council. Roughly a third of the properties in the area had been through the formal inspection process.

## COUNCIL MEETING - 17/01/24

In his supplementary, Councillor Tinsley stated that the 34% figure was a mixture of individual landlords, not the 2 main group ones. He stated it would be interesting to get an up-to-date breakdown of those figures.

Councillor Tinsley also stated that if HHSRS inspections of all the houses had been done, there could have been a decent case to make to the Secretary of State regarding the problem. He asked the Leader if in hindsight, he believes he should have done that?

The Leader stated that in relation to the numbers, 12% was the original smaller landlords and the other 24% belonging to the larger landlords. The Council would continue to roll out those inspections over the weeks ahead.

In relation to the decision taken a number of years ago, the Leader did not agree with Councillor Tinsley's statement. The Leader believed it would be really dangerous if the Council started to refer things to the Secretary of State without evidence and as a last hope because this would have disappointed residents in Little London but it would have meant that the Council could not impose those designations on private tenants in other parts of the Borough such as Dinnington, Masbrough, Eastwood and Parkgate etc. That would have left them without the additional protections and support of Selective Licensing Schemes. It would not have been the right decision based on the information available at the time. However, the designation would come back up in 2025 and could be looked at again

9. Councillor Tinsley: There are some fancy new welcome to Rotherham boundary signs as you enter across the Borough. Our Twinned Town St. Quentin in France seems to have been left of the signs. Has that partnership finished and if so when and why?

The Leader stated that the partnership had not finished in the sense that once towns were twinned, they were twinned in perpetuity. However, over the course of around the last 10 years, declining resources had meant that there was not the staff time to maintain an active twinning arrangement. There was no funding for annual trips to St. Quentin, however, the towns maintained good relations but the active twinning arrangements had been withdrawn due to funding cuts.

In his supplementary, Councillor Tinsley stated that a good start would be to get the signs updated as twinning with St. Quentin was something to be proud of. By removing that information from the signs, it was disrespectful to that partnership. Councillor Tinsley stated that it should be relatively easy to do and offered to pay for it out of the increase in Councillors' allowances.

The Leader explained that having visited St. Quentin in his own time, he could confirm that Rotherham's signs now match St. Quentin's signs (in that neither referenced the twinning arrangement.)

10. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester: Among the many blights that are allowed to exist in Rotherham Town Centre there are large industrial waste bins often overflowing on public highways, namely top of High Street and Vicarage Lane. What are we doing to prevent them being eyesores?

Councillor Sheppard thanked Councillor Bennett-Sylvester for his question and stated that it had been observed that a number of these bins in the Town Centre tended to over-flow. These bins appeared to be large waste bins supplied by numerous companies that businesses used for business waste in the Town Centre. For any businesses that used the Council's Commercial Waste Service then that could be addressed directly. Where it did not relate to Council customers, the Council could still seek to take action to ensure bins were presented appropriately by serving relevant Enforcement Notices on businesses found not to be managing their waste appropriately. Councillor Sheppard would ensure officers investigated these reports.

11. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester: What was the annual cost to the HRA for maintaining play areas and other recreational public spaces on housing land?

Councillor Allen explained that the HRA was projecting a spend outturn of £90,661 for 2023/24. This related to expenditure on the management, maintenance and day-to-day repair of play areas, as well as investment in new equipment and facilities.

Regarding maintenance of Housing recreational public spaces, the HRA was projecting a spend outturn of £512,000 for grounds maintenance and £227,000 for maintenance of trees on Housing land.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Bennett-Sylvester referenced the Right to Buy Scheme and how it was impacting the housing stock. As more people bought Council stock, there were less people paying into general estate maintenance. The Council could not say to residents that they could not use recreation land if they were not Council tenants. However, in the long term, he asked if there was any possibility that, where there were services enjoyed by an entire community but paid for out of the HRA/tenants rents, that this could be transferred over to the General Fund?

Councillor Allen stated that she would provide a written response.

12. Councillor Tinsley: New software to help manage the emptying of litter bins across the Borough had seen pre-existing schedules being removed. For example in Maltby High Street this had seen bins

overflowing and rubbish blowing down the street. Has the Council removed all pre-existing bin emptying schedules?

Councillor Sheppard stated that the pre-existing bin schedules had not been changed at all so far. The Council had invested in new software to modernise the service and make sure it was as efficient and effective as possible.

Maltby High Street had 16 bins in total and from the data the new system provided, it could be confirmed that since October of last year, when the system was up and running, the Council had only received 2 reports of an overflowing bin in this area.

In summary, Councillor Sheppard stated the pre-existing bin schedules had not been changed and there had only had 2 reports, including information from the system, of over-flowing bins in this area since October.

In his supplementary, Councillor Tinsley stated that when he had spoken to officers there had been quite a lot of confusion as to when the software was implemented. Some had said it had been removed because Maltby used to get emptied 3 times a week on set days. There were now days when no one was emptying the bins. Councillor Tinsley's second point was to question where the data for overflowing bins was coming from. It could come through Councillors so there were different ways of getting the data. He stated that it would be common sense to keep pre-existing schedules alongside the new software and then adjust that after review. He asked if the Cabinet Member would look into that?

Councillor Sheppard stated that the Service continued to monitor all data received regarding the bins. As part of the new system, Elected Members and residents could use the new reporting tool to report when a bin was overflowing. Councillor Sheppard encouraged Councillor Tinsley to use that tool and encourage his residents to use it as well. As long as that data was coming in, it could be used to review the schedule and change it to make sure that there were enough people in the right areas at the right time.

13. Councillor Tinsley: On the 23rd of November 2023 at the Planning Board a site visit to Highfield Park was unusually undertaken immediately before being decided at the Town Hall. The site visit was called for by the Chair and Vice-Chair of Planning, can the details of where that specific power was written within Planning Board protocol documents be provided?

Councillor Atkin, Chair of Planning Board responded by stating that the Chair and Vice-Chair of Planning Board would consider any request for a site visit made prior to the Planning Board meeting itself. Where they did not consider that a visit was appropriate then Planning

Board Members could still request a visit at the beginning of the meeting (which was voted on by all Members present).

In his supplementary question, Councillor Tinsley stated that the document referred to was called "How to influence planning decisions for Parish and Town Councils" which was not a protocol document. He believed that Councillor Atkin had not followed procedure and that the site visit should have gone to Planning Board to be voted on, minuted and then presented at a subsequent Planning Board. He asked Councillor Atkin if he agreed that the Planning Board Protocol should be looked at and that it be an appropriate document that could be reviewed so that everything was transparent?

Councillor Atkin explained that 5 years ago it would have been unusual not to have a site visit prior to Planning Board, not unusual to have one like Councillor Tinsley had suggested. Prior to advances in technology, it was always worth going on a site visit as the plans were not always clear. Regularly there would be a Planning Board with around 3 visits beforehand and this was still done at some councils. However, over the years, the quality of the presentations improved, and fewer site visits were required. The COVID-19 pandemic meant all site visits were stopped.

Now, 2 weeks before the Planning Board meetings, the Chair and Vice-Chair had a briefing with officers to go through items on the agenda. Lots of requests from the public were received for site visits. In relation to the Highfield application, Councillor Atkin explained that it was only an outline application so only the principle of development and the access were considered. However, the access was contentious. As such, he had decided, after consultation with the Vice-Chair and others, that a site visit should be conducted. It was Councillor Atkin's view that the Board would have requested a site visit anyway but doing that at the meeting would have meant that the application would not be considered for another 3 weeks. By using his power as Chair to hold a site visit that all attended, the process was actually at least 3 weeks quicker.

14. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester: There are 2,801 Council-owned properties listed as "customers" of Rothercare in the upcoming report to Cabinet. Were these homes using the Service or did they include properties where residents were paying the mandatory charge and not using the Service?

Councillor Roche stated that the 2,801 customers referred to above were all connected to and receive the Rothercare Service regardless of how it was paid for.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester asked whether there would be additional people on top of the 2,801 that were paying for the Service but not receiving it?

Councillor Roche stated that the answer would be provided in relation to another question that Councillor Bennett-Sylvester would ask later in the meeting.

15. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester: Before allocating the £1.7 million Capital spend to digitise the Rothercare Service would it be an idea to ascertain the number of Council properties not wanting the Service, give them the appropriate choice and remove them from the required costings?

Councillor Roche explained that nationally, the Public Switch Telephone Network (PSTN) would close in December 2025, seeing the traditional analogue PSTN lines decommissioned and replaced by a fully digital infrastructure. This would substantially impact Alarm Receiving Centres (ARC's) such as Rothercare. The Council did need to allocate Capital funding now in order to maintain provision.

During this transition period the Service would be reviewing how best to manage the rollout of the new equipment in line with customer needs and existing policies. Further updates would be provided as plans were developed throughout the transition period.

The report being presented to Cabinet soon was part 1 which dealt with the digital transfer. Part 2 would follow later in the year and would cover costings, customers and those who did not use the service. It was not possible to state what could be saved at the moment as it had not been written. It was very complicated to set out who paid, who did not pay, who used the Service and who did not and as the digital transfer part of the report was time sensitive, it was felt best to bring the second part of the report at a later stage.

Councillor Roche confirmed that the Service was subsidised but noted that the costs in Rotherham were around £3 per week compared to Leeds which was over £8 per week and the surrounding councils which charged around £5 per week. It was also confirmed that the people who actually used the Service would be the first ones to receive the new digital rollout.

In his supplementary, Councillor Bennett-Sylvester stated that this was a concern. He asked whether, before the project was started, it could be established who actually wanted it and what the numbers were being dealt with? There was a concern about whether Capital was being put upfront that was not necessarily needed or the opposite where more might want it.

Councillor Roche stated that he understood the point and that initially the Service had hoped that both parts of the report could be presented together. However, when analysis of the charges started to take place, it became very complex and as such, it was being done in 2 parts. However, the fact that the rollout was being done to those

who used the Service in the first instance should negate some of the concerns raised. Part 2 of the report would be presented before all of the digitalisation work had been completed so there would be time to sort any issues out.

16. Councillor Tinsley: There has been previous motions around the sale of illicit cigarettes and e-cigarettes across the Borough. Reading the Advertiser this week I have seen case of a shop in Rotherham that had had its licence revoked after been found twice selling illicit cigarettes. Do you agree we should be taking stronger action against offenders with measures such as Closure Orders.

Councillor Lelliott responded by stating that the Council's Trading Standards Team had undertaken considerable work in partnership with South Yorkshire Police to tackle sales of illicit tobacco and vapes. Over the past 12 months tobacco and vapes to a value of £900k had been seized.

The Council had and would continue to use all available measures to tackle the sale of illicit cigarettes and e-cigarettes, as demonstrated by the significant action taken by the Council and its partners in seizing products and taking appropriate Licensing action. Closure Orders were a power under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act and relied on legal tests being met around levels of disorder so would not always be appropriate in these circumstances.

The legal test for a Closure Order was found in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

In his supplementary, Councillor Tinsley stated that in the case he had previously mentioned, the premises had been caught twice with illegal workers, twice with illicit cigarettes and twice with illicit e-cigarettes. He had just been given a slap on the hand and had his licence taken away. Councillor Tinsley asked what was to stop them doing it again if they were not adhering to licensing conditions anyway? He stated that the strongest measures should be taken and if the circumstances set out did not warrant enough for a Closure Order then there were clearly some issues. The Council needed to protect the residents of Rotherham, particularly children.

In response, Councillor Lelliott reiterated what she had said previously. The Council had to follow the rules set out in the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. In order to issue a Closure Order officers (subsequently the Courts) must be satisfied, on reasonable grounds, that the use of a premise has resulted in nuisance to members of the public or that there had been, or was soon likely to be, disorder near those premises associated with the use of the premises.

If legal tests were met, authorised Council Officers or a Police Inspector could issue a closure for up to a maximum of 48 hours, after which point an application would need to be made to the Court to continue the Order. At this level the legal thresholds were increased. For example in the case of nuisance, it became 'serious nuisance'. As a result it was not normally appropriate to use these powers in relation to the sale of cigarettes.

Councillor Reynolds sought a point of clarification on what was meant by nuisance. Councillor Lelliott explained that she did not write the laws and the Council could only enforce what was legislated for.

17. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester: Following the extensive failure to provide CCTV coverage due to SIM card issues can you please report on the robustness of the SIM card provision for Rothercare to ensure there will be no failure of service?

Councillor Roche stated that he understood the concern raised. However, there was continuous testing of digital units and SIM card combinations to ensure their robustness for use by Rothercare. This approach was in tandem with identifying any mobile weak spots across Rotherham. Advances in technology were happening all the time and the Service would strive to maximise the benefit of this for customers with regard to reliance and ease of use. The Service would continue to engage with technology partners and experts in this area of development, to ensure the service kept pace with all new advances in systems that could benefit customers and prevent systems becoming obsolete.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Bennett-Sylvester stated that the response was reassuring, especially comparing the 2 different systems. A further question related to this matter regarded power outages and whether that was covered in the robustness in terms of continuation of service?

Councillor Roche confirmed he would take the question back to officers and provide a written response.

18. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester: Can you please elaborate on how the £1.7 million Rothercare digitisation will replace existing analogue units but also provide for expected growth in demand of the service by December 2025?

Councillor Roche stated that as part of the Analogue to Digital Switchover, analogue boxes would be replaced by a digital equivalent box by the end of December 2025. Existing customers would be notified in advance and arrangements made to carry out the required installation work at their convenience. All new customers would have the digital equipment installed from the beginning.

To enable the switchover, additional support was being provided on equipment replacement to allow Rothercare to focus on new customers and in developing capacity within the Service.

In his supplementary, Councillor Bennett-Sylvester stated that there were around 130 new enquiries a week. One of the difficulties with Adult Social Care was that the funding did not keep up with demand. He asked Councillor Roche if he was confident that the £1.7m would accommodate that growth, especially with pressures of an aging population?

Councillor Roche stated that the rate of inflation had increased again but since there was a fairly short timescale between the start of the project and the delivery, the Service was reasonably confident that the price would cover the proposals. However, since inflation had gone back up again and that would impact costs and wages etc., Councillor Roche stated that he could not give a 100% guarantee that more money would not be required. Councillor Roche did believe, however, that the £1.7m would be enough. Part 2 of the report would help with planning for the future to ensure the costs for all new customers were covered.

19. Councillor Z. Collingham: Does the Council value its reputation among residents and the wider community and what steps were taken to consider and review this in decision-making and the delivery of services and projects?

The Leader stated that the Council did value its reputation among residents and the wider community but not as an end in itself. The Council having a good reputation reflected well on the services provided and hopefully gave people confidence to engage with the Council when they needed to do so. However, the objective was to provide high quality services to residents, not to enhance the Council's reputation for its own ends.

The Annual Resident Satisfaction Survey had been undertaken and the level of satisfaction and confidence in the Council had risen over recent years. In terms of the delivery of services, there was the day-to-day feedback that the officers received. In terms of policies, the Council regularly went back out to the public to review policies every 3 or 5 years depending on the cycle. The Leader gave the example of the Council's Taxi Licensing Policy where 624 responses were received, and some changes were made in line with those responses. The Council Plan had been consulted on and one of the issues raised was around road safety. As a result, a number of proposals were put forward for policies in relation to road safety.

In his supplementary, Councillor Z. Collingham stated that the answer was reassuring. However he stated that most people would never complete the surveys or consultation sent out and he therefore sought

assurance that the Council was always trying to put their best foot forward where their good name was concerned and preserve it as well as enhance it. Councillor Collingham asked the Leader what reassurance could be given so that when things did happen that damaged the reputation of the Council (traffic alternation in Maltby causing tailbacks; traffic light controlled crossings in the Thurcroft and Wickersley South Ward with no operable traffic lights; extreme long term unoccupied properties etc.) what could be done in terms of day-to-day things but also the management of long running extreme problems that most Directorates experienced? Was there someone at a political level monitoring this with a desire to do better and preserve the good name all the time?

The Leader explained that the oversight came in a number of different ways. There was the performance management process that he oversaw on behalf of Cabinet and Cabinet were responsible for their Directorates. Where there were significant problems in the delivery of a service, for example when residents were waiting a long time for the delivery of that Service, that would be reported through and focus political attention on it by making resourcing decision appropriately. More broadly, all Elected Members had a responsibility when issues of concern in communities came to light to raise those with the Authority and try and get the right outcomes. Some of those would be projects in delivery that sometimes took longer than expected. The Leader did accept that it was a big, complicated organisation serving a lot of people and there would always be challenges and difficulties.

20. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester: Despite all these questions I am sure we agree that Rothercare was an outstanding Service for those who choose to use it. Going forward what are your initial thoughts on promoting the Service to allow more residents to live independently once digitisation was completed?

Councillor Roche referenced the LGA report on Adults that was still in draft but confirmed it had noted the strong structural leadership at all levels of Adults. It also talked about the strong partnerships and high levels of satisfaction along with the commitment of the staff. The report also raised areas for consideration.

Rothercare also received a lot of positive feedback, demonstrating its value to thousands of people and demonstrating its role in supporting independence. It was available to all residents in the Borough and further promotion had been planned post-digitalisation to ensure it reached as wide an audience as possible. The number of people requesting aid for Adult Services and the number of people getting older was increasing so it was important to reach out to those. Part of the Service was allowing people to live in their own home independently for as long as possible. Councillor Roche noted that several councils were starting to think about putting more people into care homes because it was going to cost too much money to keep

them in their own homes. He hoped that Rotherham would never be in that position.

In his supplementary, Councillor Bennett-Sylvester stated that Adult Social Care was one of the defining challenges of the generation and the anarchy of the Government was not helping. In keeping people in their homes, Rothercare could provide savings for the Council. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester asked if part 2 of the report would look at the individual cost benefits of keeping residents in their own homes so they were not bed-blocking or having to take up spaces in care homes which often worked out far more expensive?

Councillor Roche stated that the second part of the report would focus on costs, the way the Service was processed and how it was offered but he would certainly put the point raised by Councillor Bennett-Sylvester to the Strategic Director.

21. Councillor Ball: How many public charging points are currently out of action within this Borough?

The Leader stated that he could only comment on the chargers under the direct control of the Council. There were 3 currently out of use: Drummond Street (due to theft of cables); Douglas Street (due to theft of cables); and Constable Lane, Dinnington (due to vandalism of the display/payment terminal).

Councillor Ball stated in his supplementary question that he was an electric vehicle driver and believed that the charging points were not in the correct place. He stated that he and others would choose to charge at home because it was 7.5 pence per kilowatt whereas the chargers being discussed were around 50 to 60 pence per kilowatt. Councillor Ball suggested that a forecourt way was the better way of doing things. It would be like a petrol station at the side of the motorway where it would attract more people in and have better security. Other charging points across the Borough had been subject to theft/vandalism thousands of times.

Councillor Ball asked whether the forecourt option could be looked in to instead of spending money repairing the existing chargers because no-one used the stand alone units, and they were vulnerable to crime?

The Leader stated that the Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy would be forthcoming in the next few weeks. The approach taken had been to provide a variety of chargers that offered a variety of different speeds in different locations. That was based on a survey of EV owners a couple of years prior. Based on that information, choices were made. The Leader confirmed that there would be things to learn because this was an emerging market. He urged Councillor Ball to look at the proposals when they came forward.

22. Councillor Ball: How much has been the cost to install and repair the charging units in the Borough from conception to date?

The Leader confirmed that in total, £890,700 had been spent on installation and repairs. £23,700 of this was due to theft or vandalism but those costs had all been funded externally and not at a cost to the Council.

In his supplementary, Councillor Ball again stated that the costs had to come from somewhere and that it was not cost effective to keep the units in. He again urged the Leader to use the forecourt way. This would also provide local jobs and bring more money in from outside of the Borough which would help the local economy. Councillor Ball asked the Leader to look at this way going forward.

The Leader explained that he would take that on board. In terms of the funding, it had come from national Government funding pots so the Council had to act in accordance with the national rules and expectations. It would, however, be a case of testing out the different options before it could be known for certain the best way of doing it.

23. Councillor Castledine-Dack: What was the Council doing to engage with prospective business tenants for the planned new units on Laughton Road in Dinnington to ensure that occupants were in place from the get-go?

Councillor Lelliott explained that in Autumn 2023 the Council consulted with over 200 people including local businesses and stakeholders to gather information about the demand for commercial space in Dinnington. This had been supported by data from local commercial agents to determine the size and type of units that should be included in the scheme.

The Council's priority was to continue to engage positively with the businesses that traded in the existing Laughton Road units that would be directly affected by the Scheme and support them to continue trading in Dinnington if they aspired to do so. Any additional business opportunities would be marketed at an appropriate point in the programme to ensure that the scheme opened in 2026 at full capacity with a varied and vibrant offer.

Councillor Lelliott also explained that she had been at the consultation with the businesses who were all keen and enthusiastic and supportive of what the Council was doing in Dinnington. Existing businesses would be offered the new units on a like for like basis but this would not be available until 2026.

24. Councillor Ball: What was the total revenue from the public charging units that RMBC have installed within the Borough?

The Leader confirmed that the total public charging revenue income for financial years 2019/20 (when the chargers were first installed) until the current financial year to date 2023/24 (April – December 2023) equated to £14,361.

In his supplementary, Councillor Ball state that the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board had been told the previous day that the Council had shown an increase of 3.23% of CO<sup>2</sup> emissions despite setting a target of 18% which was then revised down to 10% and was due to be revised again. He asked the Leader what could be done to encourage members of the public to take up more electronic vehicle ownership, especially when the units could not be used because the wires had been stolen?

The Leader stated that it was his understanding of the discussion at OSMB that the 3.23% increase related to the Council's own fleet. There had been some procurement issues around the electric vehicles and the Leader expected the figure to reduce as a result of that procurement. The figure, therefore, did not say anything about electronic vehicle driving in general or the Council's overall emissions position.

The Leader stated that the key thing that could be done was to stagger the infrastructure in place and get it regularised so that people were used to using it. The market research had shown that range anxiety, worries about the cost of and practicalities of running an EV and the cost of the upfront payment were the reasons given for not moving to electric vehicles. There was relatively little that the Council was able to do apart from the provision of new infrastructure. The Council was not in a position to start funding those upfront except for in the in-house fleet. The Leader again urged Councillor Ball to look at the Strategy when it came forward.

25. Councillor Ball: Can you inform me and others how many people answered the consultation question in May 2022 "Would the Riverside Gardens green space encourage you to spend more time in the Town Centre"?

Councillor Lelliott explained that 253 people responded to this question, and two-thirds of respondents stated they were likely to spend more time within Rotherham Town Centre as a result of the proposed development.

Councillor Ball stated that this worked out at 171 residents out of 250,000 plus residents that had voted to say they would spend more time within Rotherham Town Centre due to the Riverside Gardens development. He stated that this was not the greatest of consultation.

## COUNCIL MEETING - 17/01/24

Councillor Ball asked if anyone in the room genuinely believed that spending £1.9m on a temporary 5-year pocket park in the Town Centre was good value for money and would attract people to town centre. He asked if the ambition of the Council should have actually been to put forward more projects in communities such as his own in Maltby? Councillor Ball also stated that the Council had sought an extra £900,000 from the South Yorkshire Mayor when the initial £1m budget had been spent instead of reigning it in. He asked in the Council would go to the Mayor to get this kind of investment in parks like Dinnington, Maltby and Swallownest.

Councillor Lelliott stated that 253 people actually took the time out to responds to the consultation and two-thirds stated that the development would encourage them to come into the Town Centre. She asked how many of the Conservative Councillors had responded to the consultation?

Councillor Lelliott informed Members that she had visited the Forge Island development and stood on top on the new Travelodge building, looking down at the investment that the Council had put in. Councillor Lelliott claimed that Councillor Ball was trying to talk down the development as he did not have anything else to say.

Councillor Lelliott said that people would absolutely come in and use the Riverside Garden and it absolutely would be worth the money. The Labour Council said they would deliver economic regeneration for Rotherham Town Centre and Councillor Lelliott confirmed that they had delivered on it.

26. Councillor Castledine-Dack: What work was RMBC doing to ensure that all elements of Dinnington's approved Neighbourhood Plan were delivered?

Councillor Lelliott noted that the Dinnington Neighbourhood Plan was a plan submitted by the Town Council rather than a plan from Rotherham Council. It was submitted to form part of the Development Plan and was adopted by the Council as part of Rotherham's Development Plan in May 2021.

Neighbourhood Plans provided a planning framework to influence and shape development proposals in the local area. New developments were expected to be in accordance with the Plan which could be given significant weight as a material consideration when considering planning applications within the area.

Councils like Rotherham were not responsible for delivering Neighbourhood Plans in that sense in the same way that Councils could not deliver all the development set out in the Borough's Local Plan.

However, the Council had and would continue to use the Neighbourhood Plan to inform any development that it did deliver.

27. Councillor Ball: Was the Council still using consultants in regards to the flood defences and if so how much had this cost to date?

Councillor Sheppard confirmed that consultants were still being used to help progress the priority Flood Alleviation Schemes to a 'shovel ready' state by the end of the 2024 calendar year. To undertake all of the surveys, investigations, hydraulic modelling, calculations, designs, and landowner engagement to date, much of which the Council was unable to do, had required investment of around £3.4m. This investment had been critical to ensuring the Council improved protections from flooding for residents and businesses across the Borough.

This approach has been very successful to date with over £16m of external investment secured for the Borough, delivering schemes such as the £4m Canal Barrier delivered in 2022 and the £7m of flood defences at Ickles Lock opening in August 2023.

In his supplementary, Councillor Ball asked if there were any apprenticeships that could be put into the scheme so that Rotherham people could be trained up?

Councillor Sheppard stated that he was aware of some apprenticeships within the Flood and Drainage Team but he would provide full details in a written answer.

28. Councillor Ball: Can you give the amount that has been found internally and externally to provide for flood defences across the Borough?

Councillor Sheppard stated that to date, the Council had provided £11.75m itself and secured £16.25m from various external stakeholders and partners such as Local Levy, Network Rail and the Environment Agency – together this totalled £28.0m.

29. Councillor Hunter: When considering planning applications for new build homes, did the Planning Panel take into consideration, the types of homes (3 bed semi v executive homes) to be built are appropriate and value added to the wider Rotherham area?

Councillor Atkin, Chair of the Planning Board, responded by stating yes, Policy CS7 of the Council's adopted Local Plan required proposals for new housing to deliver a mix of dwelling sizes, type and tenure by taking account of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment to meet the present and future needs of all members of the community.

## **COUNCIL MEETING - 17/01/24**

In addition to this, the Policy also required the provision of 25% affordable housing on all housing development over 0.5 hectares or of 15 dwellings or more, subject to this being consistent with the economic viability of the development.

In his supplementary, Councillor Hunter asked, if that was the case, why were hundreds of executive homes being built when there were few or no millionaires to buy them? He stated that it made no sense when 3 bedroom semi-detached and family houses were needed. Councillor Hunter asked if the Policy could be looked at again because it did not seem to offer the correct balance?

Councillor Atkin stated that Conservatives usually supported the free market and the free market would build whatever it wanted yet Councillor Hunter seemed to want the Local Authority to instruct housebuilders to build what the Council wanted, not what they wanted. Councillor Atkin stated that a developer would build what they wanted, and the Council would then negotiate with them but it was the developer's risk at the end of the day. He also stated that Councillor Hunter's premise was wrong in that executive houses were not being built everywhere. A lot of 2 and 3 bedroom houses had been approved such as in Waverley.

### **93. URGENT ITEMS**

The Mayor provided a minor correction to a previous agenda item but there was no urgent business to consider.