

**COUNCIL MEETING
15th January, 2025**

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

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

91. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor was deeply saddened to report on the death of Robert Hepburn, the Methodist Minister who had participated in her Mayoral Inauguration. The Mayor would be attending his funeral later in the month and offered the Council's deepest condolences to Mr Hepburn's family. As a mark of respect, the meeting stood and observed a minute's silence.

The Mayor shared that as part of the King's New Years Honours list, two very deserving recipients of Rotherham had been honoured:

- MBE - Ian Walker, Secretary, Rotherham Community Football Club. For services to Sport and to the Community in Rotherham.
- Kings Award for Voluntary Service (equivalent of an MBE) – Rotherham Families First, established in 2019 to provide a one-stop emergency service providing basic necessities for some of the Borough's most vulnerable people.

The Mayor was pleased to be able to welcome officers from across the Council that had been instrumental in the Council achieving Gold accreditation for the Armed Forces Employee Recognition Award. Jo Brown, Assistant Chief Executive, Vicky Hartley, Member and Civic Support Manager and Armed Forces Lead Officer and Emily Searle, HR Consultant accepted the award presented by the Mayor.

A full list of engagements was appended to the Mayor's letter.

92. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Resolved: That apologies for absence be received from Councillors Clarke, Knight and Marshall.

93. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS COUNCIL MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous Council Meeting held on 6 November 2024.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 6 November 2024 be approved for signature by the Mayor.

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Sheppard

94. PETITIONS

Consideration was given to the report which outlined the two petitions that had been received since the last Council meeting. The petitions were titled:

- Installation of Gates in the alleyway joining Grosvenor Road to Milton Road, Eastwood (55 Valid Signatures)
- Eastwood Road Network Changes (342 Valid Signatures)

The lead petitioner, Mr Hussain, did not attend the meeting however it was confirmed that he would receive a written response from the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment within 10 working days in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

Mr Sabir presented the petition in relation to the Eastwood Road Network Changes. It was confirmed that Mr Sabir would receive a written response from the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment within 10 working days in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

Resolved:

1. That the report be received.
2. That the Council received the petitions listed at paragraph 2.1 of the report and the lead petitioners or their representatives be entitled to address the Council for a total period of five minutes in accordance with the Council's Petition Scheme.
3. That the Strategic Director of Regeneration and Environment be required to respond to the lead petitioners, as set out in the Petition Scheme, by Wednesday 29 January 2025.

95. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester and Councillor Ryals declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Minute No. 100 (HRA Business Plan, Rent Setting and Service Charges 2025-26) on the grounds of being a Council tenant and were granted a dispensation to vote.

Councillor Cusworth and Councillor Williams declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 100 (HRA Business Plan, Rent Setting and Service Charges 2025-26) on the grounds that family members were Council tenants. Both remained in the chamber and voted on the matter.

96. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Seven public questions had been submitted for the meeting.

1. Tariq Abdulkarim:

Having clear public art guidelines would help ensure that all communities feel represented and that artistic expression is treated equitably.

Would the council create formal public art guidelines outlining:

1. Criteria for approving or rejecting public artworks
2. Ensuring equal opportunities for cultural expression
3. The process for reviewing and challenging decisions
4. Ensure Fair consistent and transparent decisions

Mr Abdulkarim did not attend the meeting and as such would receive a written response.

2. Michael Suter:

I ask that RMBC draw up a new housing plan to end homelessness and house those on the housing register. Will the council consider the following:

- Building a minimum of 2500 new council properties over the next 5 years.
- To consider compulsory purchasing some of the 3500 empty properties in the Metropolitan Borough of Rotherham.

Councillor Allen explained that the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy, approved by Cabinet in March 2023 and available on the Council's website, set out the Council's priorities for addressing all forms of homelessness in the Borough. An Empty Homes Plan would be published later in 2025 detailing the Council's approach to this issue.

The Council were successful in bringing empty homes back in to use and since 2021, 87 private sector properties had been brought back in to use, as a direct result of the Council's intervention. To achieve 3,500 would not only require funding and legal staffing on a scale far beyond what any council could provide, but those properties would not all be able to be legally CPO-ed anyway.

The Council were already building as many Council homes as they could within the funding available – it was the biggest council homes building programme in Rotherham since the 1970s. Since 2018 the Council had delivered over 600 new homes through the Housing Delivery Programme and were on track to deliver the target of 1,000 new Council homes by Summer 2027. It was not possible to achieve 2,500 additional Council homes in that timescale.

In his supplementary question, Mr Suter stated that Rotherham Council had sold off 1600 properties through the Right To Buy Scheme but only built 600, which led to a deficit and the housing stock going down. He stated that the current plan was not solving the Rotherham housing crisis. He asked if the Council would consider linking up and leading a political campaign to get more money from the government to build council houses on the scale previously set out or would they just be managers and watch the slide into chaos and the development of the far right.

Councillor Allen expressed her disappointment at having to make the sales under the Right To Buy Scheme. It was not a Labour policy, however, the new Labour government had introduced new rules around Right To Buy. These included reducing the discounts available which would ultimately stop the drain on council housing stock.

The Council were also part of the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authorities working group on homelessness. This showed that the Council were not managing chaos but actively working with other authorities to address the issue on a regional basis.

3. Carol Boote:

Following my colleagues' request for the rules on public questions and the documentation for them, dated Monday 11th of November 2024 to the Mayor, we did not receive an answer. Please could you provide the rules on public questions and the documentation for them to be forwarded to myself?

Councillor Sheppard explained that the Mayor's Office and the Governance Team had checked all correspondence logs to confirm receipt of the request from 11 November and nearby dates. Unfortunately, this check had proved to be unsuccessful, and no such request had been found. Councillor Sheppard was sorry if there had been a delay in receiving the requested information. However, he understood that the information which was contained in the Council's Constitution had not been provided.

In her supplementary, Ms Boote stated that an email had been sent on 11 November 2024 asking for emails to be checked for the missing flag raising invitation dated 15 September 2024. She asked if the Council's I.T. support had given explanation as to why the email was missing.

Councillor Sheppard explained that there was no evidence that the email referred to had been received by the Council. As it had not been received, there was nothing for the I.T. team to investigate. Councillor Sheppard asked that evidence be provided of the email address it was sent to so further investigations could be undertaken.

4. Nida Khan:

As we have now come into the New Year and we are fast running out of Grave spaces what progress has Rotherham Borough Council made in resolving the situation?

Ms Khan did not attend the meeting and as such would receive a written response.

5. Anthony Carberry:

The Rotherham NHS trust are evicting workers from 3 accommodation blocks. I ask the council to put pressure on the trust board to stop the eviction threats and find a solution that is acceptable to existing tenants.

Will the council consider buying/ managing these blocks from the NHS trust in order to retain NHS staff working in the borough?

Councillor Allen explained that the Council had been working very closely with the NHS to help identify alternative accommodation for those households affected. The Council had actively engaged in supporting residents who may have been displaced due to the closing of NHS accommodation and had successfully rehomed some of the residents. Housing Advice sessions had been undertaken in the hospital and the team had liaised with private landlords.

The Council understood that the NHS Trust were not considering selling the blocks and would be using the buildings in the future. If they were for sale, it was unlikely that the Council would be in a position to acquire them given their location and likely refurbishment costs – of course the more the Council would spend on refurbishing buildings, the fewer new homes they would actually be able to provide. Instead, the focus remained on delivering new council homes via the Housing Delivery Programme, which was the best way to support all Rotherham residents who were in housing need.

6. Tariq Ali:

We have been told by the Council solicitor at a recent meeting that when councillors send letters or requests to the national government you normally don't receive a reply or if you do it could be 3 years later.

Council Leader Chris Read is this your personal experience?

Councillor Read explained that it was very hit and miss. Sometimes a reply was quite quick (within a couple of weeks); a number of months was not unheard of; and there were occasions where no reply was received.

In his supplementary, Mr Ali addressed Councillor Alam and stated that he understood that Councillor Alam had sent two letters to Sarah Champion MP and a letter to the former Secretary of State, James Cleverley MP, to ask for an international peacekeeping force to protect the people of Gaza and Palestine. Mr Ali asked Councillor Alam if responses had been received to those letters and if the letters achieved anything.

As the supplementary did not relate to the original question, Councillor Alam did not answer. However, the Leader confirmed that any responses received to the Gaza letters would be provided.

7. Mohammad Ashraf:

Council Leader Chris Read during the last Council meeting you implied finality in regard to the Palestine Petition points that were agreed by the Cabinet despite myself and my colleagues having received assurances to the contrary.

Could you provide details on what the Council and yourself can do after last years Cabinet agreement and what restrictions there are?

Councillor Sheppard explained that the Council had set out what it would do in the Scrutiny Report and subsequent Cabinet Report. It had also set out the restrictions. Officers had continued to engage and answer questions and would continue to do so.

In his supplementary, Mr Ashraf raised various points that did not relate to the original question and as such did not comply with the Standing Orders.

Councillor Sheppard did however state that if there were any future requests regarding the petition, the Council would assist where they were able. Councillor Sheppard hoped that the talks that were ongoing would bring peace and a permanent rebuilding of the area.

97. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

98. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S STATEMENT

The Leader was invited to present his statement. He stated that Rotherham's services for children with special educational needs were judged to have the highest rating by Ofsted and CQC. They described a 'genuine shared determination across the partnership that all children and young people with SEND are happy, successful and thrive'. Inspectors found 'most children's and young people's needs are identified and assessed quickly and accurately' and they 'enjoy attending a range of mainstream schools and specialist provisions.' On behalf of all Members, the Leader thanked those professionals from across the partnership who made this possible, even in an underfunded and broken national system.

Safeguarding Awareness Week had taken place at the end of November 2024, and it was noted that a number of members present took part to support those activities. Sessions on countering extremism, neglect, domestic violence, elective home education, modern slavery, professional curiosity, suicide, and of course the Evolve service reiterated the seriousness with which these issues were taken across the council, right at the heart of what Members were there to do.

The Children's Capital of Culture 2025 had launched but the new year weather had not been kind. However the land art installations in Rosehill Park, Kimberworth and at Rother Valley were now in place, and the Otherham light installations – produced in conjunction with Rotherham young people – would be illuminating buildings before the end of the end of the month at the beginning of the year-long celebrations.

The Leader thanked the gritting teams who had worked hard over the last week or so to salt the roads and keep residents safe. The team had worked seven days a week and 24 hours a day involving 50 staff coordinating and delivering gritting on the Highway alone. Alongside gritting the highway, the Council had diverted significant resources to hand grit priority routes which had involved all staff from the Council's Ground and Streets Service totalling over 2,500 hours of work both during the normal working week and across weekends. The team had used over 1800 tonnes of grit salt across 30 different runs.

The Parkgate Link road had officially open and was being well used.

The baby packs scheme had launcher and expectant mothers would have the opportunity to sign up at their 26 weeks check-up.

The Leader ended his statement with some farewells. Firstly to Ben Anderson, the Director of Public Health who was leaving to take up a new post with the NHS. Ben had been instrumental in the Baby Pack Scheme.

Secondly, Caroline Webb, Senior Governance Advisor, was to retire the day after the Council meeting. Caroline had worked at Rotherham, mainly supporting Scrutiny, for over 23 years. The Leader stated that she had been a bastion of common sense and would be missed very much.

Finally, the Leader noted that the Chief Executive, Sharon Kemp OBE, would be leaving the authority later in the year. He stated that he had been very looked to work alongside her over the past nine years and more tributes would follow in the coming months.

Councillor A Carter passed on the Liberal Democrats best wishes to Caroline. He asked the Leader if he thought Ofsted were fit for purpose. He also referenced the recent discussions regarding a national inquiry into grooming gang Child Sexual Exploitation and how disappointing it was that the recommendations from the Jay Report had not been actioned. Councillor A Carter asked the Leader if he thought that report went far enough and if he agreed with Sarah Champion MP that a national inquiry was required.

Councillor Yasseen also referenced the CSE inquiry debate and stated that the victims and survivors needed action, not more delays. She asked the Leader if he agreed.

Councillor Z Collingham stated that he felt a national investigation was required and that the experiences from Rotherham would be essential. He also thanked the departing staff and asked the Leader if he agreed that the new Chief Executive was required to have zest in order to effectively run the Council.

Councillor Reynolds thanked all those involved with the Parkgate Link Road and for all those involved in the gritting. He asked if anything could be done about gritting footpaths.

Councillor Currie also thanked those involved in the gritting and stated that it was a fantastic effort. He informed the Chamber that he had compiled a lessons learnt document and asked who he could share this with.

Councillor Ball referenced the Labour Local Elections Manifesto and asked when residents could expect the £600 to come off their energy bills.

Councillor Bacon also referenced the Labour Manifesto and why fining people for putting their waste in the wrong bins was not included in it.

In response to Councillor Carter's comments on Ofsted, the Leader explained that they were the national regulator. However, it was not adequate just to rely on that and the Council continually did other work to keep high standards.

In response to the comments on CSE the Leader stated that it was past time for action and that the Labour government have committed to implementing the recommendations from the Jay Report. The Leader felt that the current debate in the national media, led by the likes of Elon Musk, was not helpful. In terms of future inquiries, the Leader did not think it was appropriate for victims and survivors to have to wait longer for action.

In response to Councillor Reynolds, the Leader explained that it would be very difficult to commit to gritting footpaths. He encouraged people to register as snow wardens as this could help.

In response to Councillor Ball the Leader noted that the Government were setting up GB Energy which would bring bills down.

In response to Councillor Bacon, the Leader stated that it was not fair on Council Tax payers that 1% of Council Tax was spent on contaminated waste. It was therefore necessary to pilot the new Waste Collections Policy, as agreed at Cabinet in December 2024, to educate residents on waste and introduce punitive measures for those wilfully ignoring the rules.

In response to Councillor Z Collingham's comments on the recruitment of a new Chief Executive, the Leader stated that it was essential the person appointed had the required energy and enthusiasm for the role as well as an exceptional level of organisation.

99. MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING

Consideration was given to the reports, recommendations and minutes of the meetings of Cabinet held on 18 November and 16 December 2024.

Councillor A Carter asked a question in relation to Minute 87 of the Cabinet Minutes from 16 December 2024 – Waste Collections Policy. The item had been Called-In for scrutiny and this had taken place on Tuesday 14 January 2025. Councillor A Carter questioned the Leader about this Policy and whether the already stretched enforcement team would be able to enact the Policy.

The Leader explained that the Household Waste Collection Service team were already responsible for checking waste. They did not and would not be hunting to the bottom of peoples bins to check for the smallest bit of waste in the wrong bin. The Policy meant there would be a progressive approach, starting with education and speaking to residents before fines were even considered. The Leader explained that the people who followed the rules should not have to pick up the bill for those that did not. That was not fair.

Resolved: That the reports, recommendations and minutes of the meetings of Cabinet held on 18 November and 16 December 2024 be received.

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Sheppard

100. RECOMMENDATION FROM CABINET - HRA BUSINESS PLAN, RENT SETTING AND SERVICE CHARGES 2025-26

Further to Minute No. 90 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 16 December 2024, consideration was given to the report which sought approval for the Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2025/26 and proposed increases in housing rents, non-dwelling rents, District Heating charges and other service charges. It was recommended that Council dwelling rents be increased by 2.7%

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) recorded all expenditure and income relating to the provision of Council housing and related services, and the Council was required to produce an HRA Business Plan setting out its investment priorities over a 30-year period.

The proposed 2025/26 HRA Business Plan incorporated the Council's commitments to continue and extend the Council's Housing Delivery Programme, alongside significant new investment to support decency and thermal efficiency in existing council homes. The Plan included provision for £979m investment in the housing stock over 30 years, including approximately £35m additional investment over the next five years compared to the previous year's position. This was alongside continuing to fund day-to-day housing management and repairs and maintenance costs. At the same time the Housing Delivery Programme would continue beyond 1,000 homes. The existing funding provision of £113m for hundreds more Council homes by 2027 would be supplemented with an additional £37m to begin to build the pipeline of schemes beyond 2027.

Borrowing was required in years 3 to 6 in order to support necessary investment and provision for servicing that level of debt was built into the 30 year Plan. The Business Plan had been modelled to ensure healthy balances were maintained in all years.

Alongside providing the draft HRA budget for 2025/26, the report also recommended increases in housing rents, non-dwelling rents, District Heating charges and other service charges for 2025/26. It was recommended that Council dwelling rents were increased by 2.7%, equivalent to CPI+1%, in line with Government policy. There were 12,668 tenancies in receipt of full Housing Benefit or full Universal Credit (UC) who would not be directly affected by an increase in rent. 2,276 tenancies received part Housing Benefit and any increase in rent would be part covered by benefit payments.

It was also proposed that shared ownership rents be increased by 3.2%; charges for communal facilities, parking spaces, cooking gas and use of laundry facilities be increased by 2%; District Heating unit charges be set at 13.09 pence per kwh.

The Cabinet report and appendices were attached to the covering report and included extensive detail on the proposals.

Questions in the meeting were on topics such as district heating, the language around benefits ring-fencing money for community facilities, communal bin storage, HRA funding being used for Rothercare and the distribution of HRA funding across the wards.

Councillor Allen confirmed she would provide Councillor Bennett-Sylvester with the information on Rothercare. She also confirmed that she would be happy to attend the Improving Places Select Commission to discuss the neighbourhood funding arrangements.

Resolved:

That Council:-

1. Approve the proposed 2025/26 Base Case Option 2 for the HRA Business Plan.
2. Note that the Business Plan will be reviewed annually to provide an updated financial position.
3. Agree that Council dwelling rents are increased by 2.7% in 2025/26 (Option 2).
4. Agree that the Council should retain the policy of realigning rents on properties at below formula rent to the formula rent level when the property is re-let to a new tenant.
5. Agree that shared ownership rents are increased by 3.2% in 2025/26.
6. Agree that charges for communal facilities, parking spaces, cooking gas and use of laundry facilities are increased by 2% in 2025/26.
7. Agree that charges for garages are increased by 10% in 2025/26.
8. Agree that the District Heating unit charge per Kwh is set at 13.09 pence per kwh.
9. Agree that the decision to reduce the price of District Heating Charges further during 2025/26 be delegated to the Assistant Director of Housing in conjunction with the Assistant Director of

Financial Services following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing. The delegation would only be used to respond to a change in Government policy or a significant change in the Ofgem price cap that has the effect of necessitating a lower unit price.

10. Approve the draft Housing Revenue Account budget for 2025/26 as shown in Appendix 6.

Mover: Councillor Allen

Seconder: Councillor Alam

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester and Councillor Ryals declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in Minute No. 100 (HRA Business Plan, Rent Setting and Service Charges 2025-26) on the grounds of being a Council tenant and were granted a dispensation to vote.

Councillor Cusworth and Councillor Williams declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 100 (HRA Business Plan, Rent Setting and Service Charges 2025-26) on the grounds that family members were Council tenants. Both remained in the chamber and voted on the matter.

101. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY UPDATE

Consideration was given to the report which provided an update on the activities of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Bodies in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 14. The report set out the various pieces of scrutiny that had been undertaken. The four appendices were the Work Programme's for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, Health Select Commission, Improving Lives Select Commission and Improving Places Select Commission respectively.

In moving the report, Councillor Steele offered his thanks to Caroline Webb for all the support she had given him, and the scrutiny function, over the years.

Some concerns were raised over the possible duplication of work on Rothercard. Councillor Steele confirmed he would raise this with Councillor Sheppard. Councillor Currie asked if the Constitution could be reviewed as he wanted to be on Scrutiny but was currently unable to take up any of the vacant positions. Councillor Steele agreed to look into this. There was further debate on the call-in item and whether chairs of scrutiny should come from opposition parties.

Resolved:

That Council receive the report and note the updates.

Mover: Councillor Steele

Seconder: Councillor Bacon

102. NOTICE OF MOTION - PROTECTING OUR FARMLAND AND COUNTRYSIDE BY PRIORITISING SOLAR PANEL INSTALLATIONS ON ROOFS AND CAR PARKS

Prior to the discussions on Minutes 102 and 103, the Monitoring Officer advised members that ongoing planning matters and planning applications could not be discussed. Members were not to pre-judge, or appear to pre-judge, these matters.

It was moved by Councillor Ball and seconded by Councillor Thorp that:

Council Notes:

1. An increased use of renewable energy sources, such as solar power, is critical in meeting the UK's net-zero commitments and tackling climate change.
2. Agricultural land is a finite and invaluable resource for food security, biodiversity, and the rural economy. Open, unspoilt countryside is important for conservation, health and wellbeing and public amenity.
3. Rooftops and car parks represent underutilised spaces that are highly suitable for solar panel installations, without reducing the many benefits of greenfield land, in particular its potential for food production and agriculture.
4. Several successful initiatives, including solar canopies over car parks (as seen in parts of the UK and Europe), demonstrate that solar power can be integrated into urban and suburban spaces effectively, generating significant energy and providing dual use, without the societal costs of losing large areas of greenfield land.

Council Believes:

1. Preserving greenfield land and farmland is essential for ensuring local and national food security, especially in the face of global climate pressures and rising population demands.
2. Solar energy development must be balanced with the need to protect greenfield land for other purposes, including agriculture, and the need to maintain the harmony of our countryside.
3. Encouraging rooftop and car park solar installations will promote sustainable energy generation, while safeguarding land for farming and environmental conservation.

Council Resolves:

1. To adopt a political stance in favour of small, discrete, solar panel installations, supporting their installation on:
 - Rooftops of commercial, residential, and public buildings.
 - Car parks through the development of solar canopies.
2. To encourage the use of brown field land for large-scale solar farms,.
3. To actively encourage partnerships with private and public sector organisations to maximise the use of existing infrastructure for renewable energy projects.
4. To campaign at a regional and national level for policies that align with these priorities and provide financial incentives for rooftop and car park solar projects.

An amendment was moved by Councillor Sheppard and seconded by Councillor Read:

Council Resolves:

1. To adopt a political stance in favour of small, discrete, solar panel installations, supporting their installation on:
 - Rooftops of commercial, residential, and public buildings.
 - Car parks through the development of solar canopies.
2. To encourage the use of brown field land for large-scale solar farms,.
3. To actively encourage partnerships with private and public sector organisations to maximise the use of existing infrastructure for renewable energy projects.
4. To campaign at a regional and national level for policies that align with these priorities and provide financial incentives for rooftop and car park solar projects.

ADD:

5. To note the 2023 report by the UCL Energy Institute for the Council for the Protection of Rural England which noted that rooftops could only provide about half of all the renewable energy needed to hit national net zero targets

On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried, and the amended motion became the substantive motion which read as follows:

Council Notes:

1. An increased use of renewable energy sources, such as solar power, is critical in meeting the UK's net-zero commitments and tackling climate change.
2. Agricultural land is a finite and invaluable resource for food security, biodiversity, and the rural economy. Open, unspoilt countryside is important for conservation, health and wellbeing and public amenity.
3. Rooftops and car parks represent underutilised spaces that are highly suitable for solar panel installations, without reducing the many benefits of greenfield land, in particular its potential for food production and agriculture.
4. Several successful initiatives, including solar canopies over car parks (as seen in parts of the UK and Europe), demonstrate that solar power can be integrated into urban and suburban spaces effectively, generating significant energy and providing dual use, without the societal costs of losing large areas of greenfield land.

Council Believes:

1. Preserving greenfield land and farmland is essential for ensuring local and national food security, especially in the face of global climate pressures and rising population demands.
2. Solar energy development must be balanced with the need to protect greenfield land for other purposes, including agriculture, and the need to maintain the harmony of our countryside.
3. Encouraging rooftop and car park solar installations will promote sustainable energy generation, while safeguarding land for farming and environmental conservation.

Council Resolves:

1. To adopt a political stance in favour of small, discrete, solar panel installations, supporting their installation on:
 - Rooftops of commercial, residential, and public buildings.
 - Car parks through the development of solar canopies.
2. To encourage the use of brown field land for large-scale solar farms.

3. To actively encourage partnerships with private and public sector organisations to maximise the use of existing infrastructure for renewable energy projects.
4. To campaign at a regional and national level for policies that align with these priorities and provide financial incentives for rooftop and car park solar projects.
5. To note the 2023 report by the UCL Energy Institute for the Council for the Protection of Rural England which noted that rooftops could only provide about half of all the renewable energy needed to hit national net zero targets.

On being put to the vote the motion was carried.

103. NOTICE OF MOTION - PROACTIVE ACTION AT THE MALTBY COLLIERY SITE

It was moved by Councillor Tinsley and seconded by Councillor Stables that:

Background:

The former Maltby Colliery site, a location with a long history of coal mining, is currently undergoing a reclamation scheme. This site has sparked significant health and safety concerns among local residents, including risks of land contamination and public injury within the area.

Compost-like output (CLO), a processed waste product derived from organic waste materials, is commonly used in land reclamation projects due to its ability to improve soil quality and support plant growth.

However, while CLO offers benefits in enhancing soil structure and fertility, it also poses potential risks to both public health and the environment. The composition of CLO is often not fully transparent, raising concerns that it may contain toxic elements such as heavy metals, persistent organic pollutants (POPs), and other hazardous substances. Over time, these harmful substances could leach into surrounding soil, water systems, and air, threatening local ecosystems, public health, and the long-term safety of the land.

CLO has been identified at the Maltby site, containing visible contaminants such as glass and plastic. Additionally, water leaching into the soil has been reported. Both issues have previously been raised with the Environment Agency (EA), which is responsible for permitting and enforcement at the site. However, the EA has yet to conduct an investigation.

In addition to concerns surrounding CLO, the site's coal mining history adds further complications. Coal mining operations often leave behind a legacy of pollution, including heavy metals, hydrocarbons, and other

contaminants. These pollutants, which may have remained in the soil for decades, continue to pose risks to both the environment and human health. In 2014, the Council resolved to carry out Planning enforcement action on the owner of the site for the importation of MRF fines, stating that “The importation of material to the site represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt”. So similar action could be considered by the council regarding the importation of CLO.

The Maltby Colliery site is openly accessible by foot and frequently visited by individuals on off-road bikes and quads. A large lagoon on the site also shows signs of bank instability, raising concerns about public safety.

Recent testing on adjacent land designated for the Highfield Park housing development has confirmed the presence of land contaminants, raising serious questions about the safety of this area for residential use. While remediation of this land for housing is the responsibility of the developer as a planning condition, a proposed allotment site within the same area has not been included in soil testing. Growing food in potentially contaminated soil presents a direct public health risk to residents and highlights the broader dangers if no action is taken.

As these concerns continue to mount, local residents are calling for greater transparency, comprehensive testing, and stronger regulatory oversight of the reclamation process and the materials used in land restoration.

The Council Notes:

1. CLO (Compost-like Output) is classed as a waste product with no set standard to regulate it. CLO is not permitted to be used on Agricultural land.
2. The testing carried out by the developer at the adjacent Highfield Park housing site has highlighted contamination in the soil, indicative of what may exist across the wider area.
3. Testing of the soil at the part of the adjacent Highfield Park housing site intended for use as allotments has not as yet been carried out.
4. The importation of MRF fines from Hatfield Colliery to the Maltby Restoration site back in 2016 resulted in Planning Enforcement action by RMBC to prohibit further deposits. “The importation of material to the site represents inappropriate development in the Green Belt”
5. The Council holds powers under the Environmental 1990 Act Part 2 to create a strategy on Contaminated land and the investigation of contaminated land.

This Council resolves to:

1. Review/update the Council's Land Contamination Strategy:
 - Conduct a comprehensive review of the Council's current land contamination strategy, to ensure that it is up to date with the latest environmental legislation and guidance.
 - Ensure that the strategy incorporates best practices for managing legacy contamination and preventing future pollution risks to residential, agricultural, and recreational areas.
 - Engage with external environmental experts to ensure that the strategy is up-to-date and aligns with the latest regulatory and environmental standards.
2. Call upon the Environment Agency to:
 - Carry out investigative testing on the Maltby Colliery site to ascertain what contamination is present and what actions should be taken to reduce the risks, including to human health.
 - Request that the Environment Agency carry out a legislative review on CLO, with a view to further regulation of this waste material.
3. RMBC's Planning / Community Protection
 - Review the use of CLO at the Maltby Colliery site and determine if the importation of that material could contravene current and any future planning permissions at the site.
 - To review public access and security measures to the Maltby Colliery site under restoration. Review the stability of the lagoon banking, referring local concerns about the dangers posed to the public to the HSE if appropriate.
 - Review the current plan for allotments on Highfield Park, taking appropriate actions to investigate and remediate the land via Planning or via responsibilities under the Environmental protection 1990 act part 2a.

On being put to the vote the motion was carried.

104. NOTICE OF MOTION - KIER STARMER'S LABOUR GOVERNMENT HAVE FAILED WASPI (WOMEN AGAINST STATE PENSION INEQUALITY) WOMEN

It was moved by Councillor Tarmey and seconded by Councillor A Carter that:

Summary/Background:

The ruling by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) in March 2024 was a vindication of the WASPI movement's efforts and it underscores the government's responsibility to address the injustices faced by these women. It also highlighted longstanding failures in government communication. This meant that affected women were not fully aware of the changes and exactly what it meant for them.

This injustice, perpetrated by successive Governments, has not only had a profound effect on the individuals involved but on the wider community in Rotherham and on local government, not least because:

This Council believes:

- Some women who would have looked after older relatives or partners are unable to afford to do so, with a knock-on impact on local social care.
- Some women who would have otherwise retired and chosen to care for their grandchildren, are having to continue working, increasing the childcare burden on the state locally.
- Some women have been left in poverty, and are struggling to meet their housing costs, with a knock-on impact on local housing stock.
- There is a broader impact on voluntary services of all kinds locally, which are missing out on able, active volunteers who would otherwise have been able to retire from full-time work as planned.
- Our local economy is negatively affected by the reduced spending power and disposable income the uncommunicated State Pension Age changes have brought about among women born in the 1950s.
- It is wrong for the government to have taken the decision not to promise compensation for women affected by changes in state pension age. The council recognises that Local MPs Sarah Champion and John Heeley have campaigned in support of WASPI women, but they have been badly let down by the new U.K. government.
- The cut to the Winter Fuel Allowance will only amplify problems for many of these women.

This Council supports:

- A swift resolution to this ongoing injustice before more and more women die waiting for compensation.
- The conclusion of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on State Pension Inequality that women born in the 1950s have suffered a gross injustice, affecting their emotional, physical and mental circumstances in addition to causing financial hardship.
- The calls for compensation for WASPI women who were adversely affected by the changes and inadequate communication around them.

Therefore, this Council resolves to ask the Leader of the Council to write to:

1. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to reconsider their decision not to compensate WASPI women.
2. Local MPs to express the council's regret that they have failed in their duty to convince their own Government to compensate WASPI women.

On being put to the vote, the motion fell.

105. NOTICE OF MOTION - SAVE ROTHERHAM POST OFFICE

It was moved by Councillor C Carter and seconded by Councillor Tarmey that:

Summary/Background:

Council is shocked to learn that Rotherham Post Office is at risk of closure – alongside 115 other branches across the UK.

Rotherham Post Office is a vital community hub. Hundreds of residents rely on its services. For Post Office Ltd to announce that it is threatened with closure, with no consultation with local people, is extremely concerning.

Council firmly opposes any proposal to shut local Post Offices in Rotherham.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

1. Instruct the Chief Executive to write to the Chief Executive of Post Office Ltd expressing Council's deep opposition to Rotherham Post Office being closed and asking for assurances that it will not be shut.
2. Request the Chief Executive write to the Government's Business Minister, Justin Madders, to request the Government immediately intervene and protect our local Post Office from closure.

On being put to the vote the motion was carried.

106. AUDIT COMMITTEE

Resolved: That the reports, recommendations and minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee be noted.

Mover: Councillor Baggaley

Seconder: Councillor Elliott

107. HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

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

Mover: Councillor Baker-Rogers Second: Councillor Read

108. LICENSING BOARD AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

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

Mover: Councillor Beresford Second: Councillor Sutton

109. PLANNING BOARD

In moving the minutes, Councillor Williams informed Members that a seminar was being arranged regarding the changes to the National Planning Policy Framework. Details on this would be circulated shortly.

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

Mover: Councillor Williams Second: Councillor Mault

110. STAFFING COMMITTEE

Resolved: That the recommendation of the Staffing Committee be accepted, and the minutes of the meeting be noted.

Mover: Councillor Alam Second: Councillor Read

111. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSONS

There were 9 questions for the designated spokespersons:

1. Councillor Ball: Rotherham's night-time fire cover, once a shining beacon of protection, has dwindled alarmingly over the past decade. What stirring actions, what bold and decisive measures, have you personally undertaken to arrest this deeply worrying erosion of safety for our residents?

Councillor McKiernan explained that Rotherham fire station continued to provide 24/7 cover, supported by other stations and fire engines across the borough and across the county. The fire and rescue service had received significant, real-term reductions in funding since 2010. Councillor McKiernan stated that the bold and decisive measures that Councillor Ball took were to join the Conservative Party and become an advocate for austerity. Meanwhile, it has continued to receive

single year funding settlements for many years, creating further financial uncertainty. Both the service and the Authority had continued to lobby successive government ministers for a fair and long term funding settlement for the fire and rescue service. The service reviewed its risk management planning annually as part of its established Community Risk Management Plan process.

In his role on the Fire Authority, Councillor McKiernan stated that he would be supporting the responsible decisions that needed to be taken, based on the risks facing the service and the public, and supporting a government that would back public services, not one that undermined them at every turn.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Ball asked Councillor McKiernan to provide specific examples (names, dates, decisions) of meaningful change.

Councillor McKiernan advised Councillor Ball to search online.

2. Councillor Ball: Dearne's on-call pump, a critical lifeline for large-scale emergencies, has become about as reliable as a British summer. What plans, what mighty and immediate steps, do you have to restore this vital resource to a state of robust operational readiness, ensuring that the people of Rotherham are not left high and dry in their hour of need?

Councillor McKiernan explained that the service continued to take steps to improve the availability of its on-call fire engines- including at Dearne fire station. This included the regular recruitment and training of new on-call firefighters (including 6 at Dearne in 2024) and the introduction of an on-call support team, which had had a big impact on the availability of on-call fire engines across the county. All fire and rescue services in the UK faced challenges in recruiting sufficient numbers of on-call firefighters due to the very specific eligibility requirements for the role, but Councillor McKiernan was confident the service was taking appropriate steps to address this issue in South Yorkshire.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Ball asked how the people of Rotherham could trust the plan to improve the reliability of on-call fire engines at Dearne fire station when the problem had persisted for years? He asked if the timeline was weeks, months or another decade.

Councillor McKiernan stated that he had not been on the Fire Authority long enough to know the specific details but as Councillor Ball had previously been a member, Councillor McKiernan suggested he may know some of the details himself.

3. Councillor Ball: Given the grim decline in Rotherham's fire cover, what representations have you personally made—what fiery speeches, what persuasive appeals—to ensure that sufficient resources and personnel are available to protect the safety of our community?

Councillor McKiernan explained that the Fire Authority wrote to ministers in the autumn calling for a longer term financial settlement, capital investment funding and council tax precept flexibility. Nationally, the Chief Fire Officer continued to join other services in lobbying government for stable, long term funding via the National Fire Chiefs Council. The Authority welcomed this government's decision to allow Fire Authority's to raise their council tax precept by £5 to help address their ongoing financial challenges, which were the result of significant real-terms funding reductions under the government since 2010. This council tax option would be considered by Fire Authority members at their budget setting meeting in February.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Ball asked what Councillor McKiernan had personally done.

Councillor McKiernan stated that he had attended every meeting, had been on and would be going on training sessions and he was doing the best he could in the limited amount of time he had been on the Fire Authority.

4. Councillor Ball: How can the service justify delaying responses to secondary fires by dispatching smaller units instead of the nearest appliance, this proposal risks turning efficiency into folly. How, pray tell, does this protect the safety of our community, rather than leaving us vulnerable to the vagaries of chance?

Councillor McKiernan explained that Small Incident Units had long been used by fire and rescue services to respond to secondary fires, like bin and grass fires. Small Incident Units attended lower risk incidents like these in order to keep full size fire engines available to respond as quickly as possible to more serious, life threatening emergencies. The service constantly reviewed its data and performance to ensure that the right assets are placed in the right locations to maximise appliance availability, such as the proposed transition of the Small Incident Unit from Cudworth to Dearne.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Ball asked what the contingency plan was for when small units were tied up elsewhere, leaving secondary fires to smoulder and spread?

Councillor McKiernan stated that a full sized appliance should be available in that situation.

5. Councillor Ball: Deploying smaller fire units to secondary fires sounds efficient on paper, but considering these units could be redirected to major incidents, how does this guarantee safety for Rotherham's residents, are we not simply creating a system where secondary fires are left smouldering while resources are stretched thinner than a well-worn fire hose?

Councillor McKiernan explained that Small Incident Units kept fire engines available for more serious, life threatening emergencies by responding to lower risk incidents like bin and grass fires. The fire service continued to report its performance in responding to all 999 calls. In 2023/24, its average response time to all emergency incidents was 7 minutes 40 seconds.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Ball asked if Councillor McKiernan would take responsibility when major incidents arose and there were inevitable delays caused by the inefficient redistribution of resources.

Councillor McKiernan stated that he was not responsible for on the ground operations.

6. Councillor Ball: Is the use of smaller fire units for secondary fires truly a stroke of efficiency—an innovative masterstroke worthy of applause—or is it, in reality, a penny-pinching measure dressed up in the finery of progress, what assurances can you give that this approach doesn't leave public safety hanging by a thread?

Councillor McKiernan explained that he had answered this question previously. Small Incident Units had been used to respond to lower risk incidents, like bin and grass fires, for more than 15 years. They were also used successfully by most other fire and rescue services in the UK to achieve the same aims. Full size fire engines remained available to respond to the most serious incidents. The service would evaluate and review the movement of a Small Fire Unit from Cudworth to Dearne fire station, should this proposal be approved by the Fire Authority.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Ball asked that, if public safety was a priority, why were more robust solutions not being invested in, rather than relying on smaller, less reliable units?

Councillor McKiernan stated that front line services had been cut for the previous 14 years. He wished the Fire Authority could afford everything it wanted but it could not.

7. Councillor Ball: You've endorsed public consultation on the CRMP, but have you rolled up your sleeves and properly engaged with the Fire Brigades Union, these valiant individuals represent the beating heart of our firefighting service. What effort have you made to understand

their concerns and ensure their voices are not drowned out in the din of bureaucracy?

Councillor McKiernan explained that the Fire Brigades Union, along with other staff representative bodies, had been fully involved in project group meetings as the service had developed its draft Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), and the discussions which had followed its publication. The Fire Brigades Union had been invited to respond to the draft proposals. It had already responded, and this would be conscientiously considered by the service and the Authority before the final CRMP was published.

Councillor McKiernan confirmed that he had personally spoken with the Fire Brigades Union outside of meetings and had regular communications with them.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Ball asked Councillor McKiernan to explain what the CRMP was. He also asked, that if the Fire Brigade Union's concerns were not addressed, how could the consultation be anything more than a box ticking exercise?

Councillor McKiernan restated that the FBU had been consulted and their comments had been taken seriously. However the Fire Authority had a responsibility to consult many stakeholders and take their views into account as well.

8. Councillor Ball: Our firefighters, those brave souls who risk life and limb for us all, surely deserve a say in the CRMP consultation. Have their invaluable insights, forged in the heat of danger, been given the attention they so richly deserve, or are their concerns being swept aside like ash in the wake of ill-thought-out plans?

Councillor McKiernan explained that all staff were invited to share their views as part of a pre-consultation exercise which informed the contents of the draft CRMP. Now the draft CRMP had been published, the Authority were continuing to engage with firefighters via surveys, team briefs and meetings to seek their views on the draft proposals. Station managers were also engaging with watches to gather and record their feedback.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Ball asked Councillor McKiernan what the CRMP was.

Councillor McKiernan stated that it was the Community Risk Management Plan, and the title was self-explanatory. The Fire Authority had to have one and it engaged with the community and various stakeholders to assess risk and provide the best possible for the community.

9. Councillor Ball: The voices of frontline firefighters must surely ring loud and clear in shaping decisions on public safety. What specific and meaningful steps have you personally taken to ensure their expertise and experience are at the very heart of the CRMP process?

Councillor McKiernan explained that, as stated already, firefighters were asked for their views as the CRMP was being developed. This helped to inform the draft plan. Their views were now being further considered as the Authority formally consulted on the service's draft proposals.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Ball asked what an example of a fire fighter feeding in to the CRMP would be? What meaningful suggestions might come back from a fire fighter who was risking his life?

Councillor McKiernan stated that a written response would be provided.

112. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS AND CHAIRPERSONS

There were 22 questions for Cabinet Members and Chairpersons:

1. Councillor Bacon: Following the Council's loss of nearly half a million pounds of tax payers' money in a capital project, will the council commit to reviewing what went wrong, and give strong assurances that lessons have been learnt?

Councillor Alam explained that he presumed that this question related to the write off approved at Cabinet in November 2024, as part of the Council September Financial Monitoring report. The Council proposed to write off a debtor balance in relation to Iliad (Rotherham) Ltd, to the value of £466,360.22, dating back from 27 March 2013. The debt stemmed from an old regeneration scheme where RMBC entered into a Development Agreement with the developer Iliad to deliver the Westgate Demonstrator Project. Under the terms of the Development Agreement just prior to commencement of construction on site, Iliad and the Council would enter into a long term lease. As the buildings were completed Iliad would then pay to the Council a Lease Premium. However, Iliad got into significant financial difficulty and were unable to meet the lease premium and ultimately fell into liquidation. As a result of this the Council was not able to recover the lease premium that it had raised as a debtor.

Councillor Alam explained that even with the best due diligence in the world, sometimes private companies did go bust. The Council had taken steps over a number of years to pursue the debt as there was a small possibility of debt recovery even with the

company being in liquidation, however, the Council's efforts had not been able to recover the outstanding balance. In terms of the Council's own actions to try to avoid such things arising, with projects such as this the Council always carried out financial viability checks on businesses that it looked to engage to help mitigate any potential risk. Whilst the Council took steps to ensure that it ensured it was working with financially robust organisations, the risk of a business falling into financial difficulty could never be fully eradicated.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Bacon stated that this highlighted another failure on Labour's watch. A recent audit report had revealed a series of failings in the way that the Council managed public finances when it came to big projects. He asked if Labour would acknowledge the internal audit report, support publishing as much of it as possible and apologise to the public for the serious failing on their watch.

Councillor Alam explained that there were recommendations from the audit report. The failings mentioned were in 2013 and improvements had been made to the monitoring of capital projects by officers and members since then.

2. Councillor Bacon: Following complaints from residents that utility companies are allegedly not fully restoring areas of works to the standard they found them in, what steps will the council take to ensure these companies look after public infrastructure?

Councillor Taylor was not present at the meeting to respond so a written response would be provided.

3. Councillor Thorp: How many children from Rotherham who need to be in care, but due to the lack of homes, are having to be cared for outside of the Borough, and how much is this outside care costing RMBC?

Councillor Cusworth explained that there were 180 children and young people placed outside the borough. Of these, there would be some where this was purposeful for safety reasons, specialist education placements or placement with family. Whilst the Council did want more spaces for children and young people within the borough, it would always need spaces outside the borough for specialist needs and to be able to be flexible in the management of placements for children and young people.

The external placements currently cost about £19.9m; if all the children and young people involved were able to be cared for in area, then the cost would be approximately 14.5m.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Thorp acknowledged that there were circumstances in which out of borough placements were required. He asked how many of the 180 children could be brought back to Rotherham if the right facilities were in place.

Councillor Cusworth explained that a written response would be provided with the figures. Members did have to be mindful of the amount of money made by private care homes. For example in 21/22, local authorities in England spent approximately £1.5 billion on care for children and private providers made around £300 million of profit. The Childrens Wellbeing Bill that was set to be introduced would put a cap on that.

Councillor Cusworth stated that it would be extremely helpful if all Councillors could promote fostering from the widest range of communities in Rotherham, which would help to increase the number of homes available to children and young people in Rotherham.

4. Councillor Sutton: Will the cabinet member recognise the concerns the residents of Maltby have around the planning application for the Maltby colliery site which will not only bring an environmental impact on our community with the CLO and other contaminants it will bring an increase in size and numbers of lorries through Maltby if the planning for the reclamation scheme goes ahead?

Councillor Taylor was not present at the meeting to respond so a written response would be provided.

5. Councillor Monk: What can the cabinet member tell us about the impact of this Council's decision to auto enrol eligible families for free school meals in Rotherham?

Councillor Monk was not present at the meeting to ask her question so a written response would be provided.

6. Councillor Baggaley: Could you provide an update on the expansion works at Waverley Junior Academy and reassurance to parents that additional places will be available from September 2025?

Councillor Cusworth explained that Waverley Junior Academy had been consistently over subscribed for several years. This meant that some local parents had not always been able to get their first choice of school and some children had not always been able to be educated at their nearest school. The Council had worked with the school to increase the number of places by extending the school building itself. This had always been the plan as part of the Waverley development however it had been brought forward by 12 months.

The expansion will support parental choice and allow more children to be educated locally. Councillor Cusworth noted that the sponsors of the academy had worked with the Council at speed to get the expansion done.

In his supplementary, Councillor Baggaley stated that with the additional 210 places, it would increase pupil yield to 630 with an FS0/FS1 provision on top. Councillor Baggaley expressed concerns for child safety around the school, especially after the school crossing warden had left the post. He asked what could be done to improve road safety around schools.

Councillor Cusworth explained that the vacant post was being advertised and service wanted someone in post as quickly as possible. The site also formed part of the survey for school crossing patrols and traffic management. Conversations were ongoing in traffic management around this issue. Further information would be provided in writing and Councillor Cusworth invited Councillor Baggaley to a meeting with her and Councillor Taylor to further discuss the matter.

7. Councillor Yasseen: Who decided the new and existing cycling routes?

Councillor Taylor was not present at the meeting to respond so a written response would be provided.

8. Councillor Clarke: Following the local area inspection in September, please could you give me an outline of what is next for the Rotherham SEND provision?

Councillor Clarke was not present at the meeting to ask her question so a written response would be provided.

9. Councillor Yasseen: With the Council committing to building more homes, why is it not working with local partners, such as the NHS, to maximise housing opportunities from Partners surplus estate sites?

Councillor Allen explained that the Council facilitated bi-monthly meetings of the Strategic Estates Group, which brought together public sector partners, including NHS organisations, to discuss a range of issues including the best use of surplus land and assets to meet wider Borough objectives and priorities. Councillor Allen reiterated that meetings were held regularly.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Yasseen stated that there had been community members at the meeting fighting for the NHS accommodation. For her research, Councillor Yasseen stated

that it did not look as though people were meeting and the right support had not been put in place. It was only once the campaign had started that the Council helped. Councillor Yasseen referenced previous comments that there was a lack of funding but she asked if the underspend from the HRA could be used and conversations held with NHS partners regarding the accommodation blocks.

Councillor Allen explained that the Council would expect partners to raise such issues at the Strategic Estates Group meetings. Councillor Allen said members of the community knew more about it before the issue was raised at the Group. In terms of the NHS accommodation blocks, the Council had been led to believe that the blocks would be repurposed. The Council would, via the Strategic Estates Group, continue to push the NHS to be clear about their intentions. Finance would be a major consideration should the properties become available. However, there were also concerns that the blocks were in the middle of the hospital site and therefore may not be suitable for general accommodation.

10. Councillor Yasseen: Can you reassure us that child safeguarding is fully embedded in all Council services, reflecting our commitment to a 'Child-Centred Borough'. What specific measures are in place to ensure safeguarding remains a consistent priority across all services?

Councillor Cusworth explained that safeguarding remained a priority for all services across the Council and there was a Council Safeguarding Policy in place and available on the intranet which reinforced that safeguarding was everybody's business. This was recognised by Ofsted at the last Focused Visit in May 2024, which concentrated on safeguarding across children in need in Rotherham and they commented that "strong corporate support ensures a whole-council approach to understanding children's vulnerability and responding to risk and need." They also noted the political leadership and Strategic Leadership Team with safeguarding running from the very top.

The Council had a Safeguarding Champions Group which included representatives from all Directorates across the Council so that safeguarding remained a golden thread. There was mandatory safeguarding training for all staff and safeguarding training for Elected Members with 6 monthly updates. Child Exploitation also formed part of the induction course.

Councillor Cusworth concluded by saying there was lots of other work going on and that Rotherham was seen as the Gold Standard when it came to child safeguarding.

Councillor Yasseen raised various points in her supplementary question that the Mayor deemed not to relate to the original question. As such the Mayor rejected the question and moved on to the next.

11. Councillor A Carter: What date can we expect work to start on the improvements to parking outside the Brinsworth Lane shops?

Councillor Sheppard stated that it was expected that the works would be complete before the end of the financial year and they were scheduled to take around 4 weeks for completion.

In his supplementary, Councillor A Carter asked for confirmation that work would start by the end of February 2025.

Councillor Sheppard confirmed this was correct.

12. Councillor A Carter: Would the cabinet member support our submission for improvements to Brinsworth Gateway through the Our Places Fund project, that would see improvements to shop frontage, essential road resurfacing, and improvement of the street scene, that would complete the projects we originally submitted to the Towns and Villages fund four years ago?

Councillor Sheppard confirmed that he would be considering it along with various other locations across the borough in response to the consultation.

In his supplementary, Councillor A Carter stated that if any further information was required, the Brinsworth Neighbourhood Officer would be able to assist.

Councillor Sheppard thanked Councillor Carter for that information.

13. Councillor A Carter: What is the financial cost to the council and therefore Rotherham taxpayers due to empty units at the new Forge Island development, including lost business rates, lost rent, and consequent impact on paying off the capital investment loan?

Councillor Taylor was not present at the meeting to respond so a written response would be provided.

14. Councillor Ball: Can you provide a detailed breakdown of how council tax revenue is being allocated and how you justify recent increases in light of ongoing service cuts?

Councillor Ball was not present at the meeting to ask his question so a written response would be provided.

15. Councillor Ball: How do you plan to improve procurement practices to ensure better value for money and reduce unnecessary spending?

Councillor Ball was not present at the meeting to ask his question so a written response would be provided.

16. Councillor Ball: Can you explain why investments in the EV infrastructure are limited to singular charging points rather than exploring Gridserve-style hubs that could generate jobs and support economic growth?

Councillor Ball was not present at the meeting to ask his question so a written response would be provided.

17. Councillor Ball: What is the council doing to secure and maintain essential public safety equipment, such as throwline boards, across all high-risk areas?

Councillor Ball was not present at the meeting to ask his question so a written response would be provided.

18. Councillor Ball: Can you provide evidence of measurable outcomes from recent public spending initiatives, particularly those marketed as tackling antisocial behaviour and community safety?

Councillor Ball was not present at the meeting to ask his question so a written response would be provided.

19. Councillor Ball: How is the council collaborating with local police to ensure consistency in tackling antisocial behaviour and reducing strain on emergency services?

Councillor Ball was not present at the meeting to ask his question so a written response would be provided.

20. Councillor Ball: What more can be done by the council to engage with local community groups, such as Maltby Happy Gardeners, to develop sustainable, cost-effective solutions for maintaining green spaces?

Councillor Ball was not present at the meeting to ask his question so a written response would be provided.

21. Councillor Ball: Given ongoing issues with speeding and antisocial driving, what is your long-term plan to address these problems across Rotherham?

Councillor Ball was not present at the meeting to ask his question so a written response would be provided.

22. Councillor Ball: What is your five-year plan to balance economic growth, environmental sustainability, and public service improvements, and how will you ensure tangible benefits for residents?

Councillor Ball was not present at the meeting to ask his question so a written response would be provided.

113. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items to consider.