

**COUNCIL MEETING
5th March, 2025**

Present:- The Mayor of Rotherham (Councillor Sheila Cowen) (in the Chair); Councillors Ismail, Adair, Ahmed, Allen, Bacon, Baggaley, Baker-Rogers, Ball, Baum-Dixon, Beck, Bennett-Sylvester, Beresford, Blackham, Bower, Brent, A. Carter, C. Carter, Castledine-Dack, Clarke, T. Collingham, Z. Collingham, Currie, Cusworth, Duncan, Fisher, Foster, Garnett, Harper, Havard, Hughes, Hussain, Jackson, Jones, Keenan, Knight, Lelliott, Marshall, Mault, McKiernan, Monk, Pitchley, Rashid, Read, Reynolds, Sheppard, 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>

114. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor reported the sudden passing of Dame Julie Kenny DBE DL. Dame Julie had served as a Government appointed Commissioner at Rotherham Council from 2015-2018. She was well known for her achievements across Rotherham and was also one of Yorkshire's most successful businesswomen and community champions. More recently, she was best known for her efforts to save and restore Wentworth Woodhouse. Dame Julie was granted the title of Honorary Freewoman of Rotherham in 2021 in recognition of her extraordinary contribution to Rotherham. On behalf of the Council, the Mayor sent deep condolences to Dame Julie's family and asked everyone to join her in observing a minute's silence.

The Mayor had been honoured to attend the tenth Holocaust Memorial Day event in Clifton Park. A full list of Mayoral activities was contained in Appendix A of the Mayor's letter.

It was noted that the Council meeting was taking place during Ramadan. This meant members in the community and some elected Members were fasting each day from dawn until sunset and the Mayor gave them her best wishes. The Mayor also noted the start of Lent and wished those celebrating her best.

115. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Resolved: That apologies for absence be received from Councillors Alam, Elliott, Fisher, Hall, Ryalls and Stables.

116. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS COUNCIL MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous Council meeting held on 15 January 2025.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 15 January 2025 be approved for signature by the Mayor.

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Sheppard

117. PETITIONS

There were no petitions to consider.

118. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Monk declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 10 (Budget and Council Tax 2025-26) on the grounds of a close family member who was a business operator in the borough. As this was a non-pecuniary interest Councillor Monk remained in the chamber and voted on the item.

119. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Seven public questions had been submitted for the meeting.

(1) Mr. Haycock referred to the New Bill taken to Parliament by M.P. Lee Pitcher calling for the tampering/vandalisation of emergency safety equipment to be a criminal offence. He asked would this Council continue to give full support and help the family to protect lifesaving emergency equipment. Damaged lifesaving stations could not be accessed in difficult situations. Lifesaving equipment needed to be protected to save lives.

Councillor Sheppard, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Neighbourhood Working, thanked Mr. Haycock for his question and for all the work he, his family and friends have done on ensuring lifesaving equipment was available and kept safe.

The Council would support the recent Bill introduced to Parliament by M.P. Lee Pitcher, which aimed to make the tampering and vandalism of emergency safety equipment a criminal offence. The critical importance of protecting life-saving equipment was understood in communities, as damaged or inaccessible stations could have devastating consequences in emergency situations.

The Council stood united with Mr. Haycock, his family and the community in a shared commitment to safeguarding lifesaving equipment and would work diligently to ensure its effectiveness in saving lives.

Personally, the Cabinet Member wanted to thank Mr. Haycock for all he had been doing in the meetings that have been held over recent years. It was a privilege to work alongside him and the work he had done had been fantastic.

In a supplementary question Mr. Haycock pointed out he was aware that at some point there had been some work done on local bylaws that could prevent more damage to local equipment. He asked whether this was still going to be pursued despite the fact that it had also gone to Parliament.

Councillor Sheppard was aware there was a meeting to be held shortly so was happy to include this matter on the agenda.

(2) Ms. Cartland-Ward asked a question in relation to the Rotherham Borough Selective Licensing Schemes, which were stated as "not having been successful" during the 2015-2025 period. What options have been fully reviewed by the Council as alternatives to the proposed 2020-2025 Selective Licensing Scheme, currently going through consultation?

Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, explained the phrase 'not having been successful' was not used in the Cabinet report so was unsure where this came from. The report stated that the previous Selective Licensing Schemes have focused strongly on the inspection of properties and enforcement. The Cabinet report also noted the positive outcomes of the sustained focus on these areas and credited the large numbers of landlords who have maintained improvements in both repair and management from the first scheme.

Alternative schemes considered would be detailed in the Cabinet report prior to any final decision but, briefly, these have included things like a reactive service model, a self-regulated model and the Council would also give consideration to alternative proposals made during the consultation.

In a supplementary question Ms. Cartland-Ward asked why the Council dismissed its own service's officers' suggestion to put any new selective licensing scheme on hold until after the Renters' White Bill had come into force.

Councillor Allen confirmed nothing had been dismissed as yet and with all the things considered none of them were related to the Renters Bill. What had become obvious was that this was a far more protracted exercise than anybody thought and by the end of this Selective Licensing period there was a mandatory three -month gap before any other scheme was actually introduced.

(3) Mr. Azam made reference to Bereavement Services and asked, once the contractual negotiations with Dignity have concluded, could Councillor Sheppard state how long exactly it would take for the work that was required at Wath and the Muslim Section at East Herringthorpe to be completed?

Councillor Sheppard, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Neighbourhood Working, confirmed it was Dignity's responsibility as contractor to lead on the development works including the submission of planning applications, complying with Environment Agency requirements, undertaking grounds testing, and developing the programme of works. As Dignity have outstanding requirements to address on the existing East Herringthorpe planning application with the Environment Agency, no clear timescales have been given to the Council, therefore, the Council could not provide these at this time. The Council was addressing this through the penalty charge mechanism of the contract due to the lack of a proper plan from the Contractor.

The planning permission for Wath was granted in October 2023 and the Council understood Wath to be in a state of readiness for works to commence.

The Council's obligation was to provide land for burial space in the Borough. At previous Council and Cabinet meetings it was stated that the Council would not allow burial space to run out in the Borough and the position in that respect remained unchanged.

The Council would continue to provide updates through the quarterly Muslim Bereavement Liaison Group meetings to ensure that communities were involved in the development of plans and aware of timescales. If it was believed there were matters that were pertinent to the group contact would be made between the scheduled meetings.

In a supplementary question Mr. Azam believed the motto that should be used would be if you have an issue blame Dignity, then tell everyone and if they believe this give yourself a pat on the back. Otherwise if you could not do what was asked you would find a reason to blame Dignity and if they believe this give yourself a pat on the back. Finally if you could not find anything then you would shout as loud as possible to ensure everyone believed it was the fault of Dignity. He, therefore, referred to a report given to the Council in December, a meeting being scheduled, but cancelled, with a follow up meeting in January where it was reviewed. There was an agreement that the report would be issued in time for Cabinet in January, but this did not happen and further information was now awaited before the report could be issued. He asked the Cabinet Member to advise him when the report would be released to the Muslim Community so they could actually review it and understand the contents or was the Cabinet Member going to blame the delay on Dignity as well.

Councillor Sheppard pointed out that this was discussed at the previous meeting held in the John Smith Room a couple of weeks ago. The report author was currently out of the country and their return was awaited before some of the issues could be addressed. As soon as the report was available it would be issued.

(4) Mr. Bashir asked had any other art exhibition ever been censored by initially having its context cards and some of its art exhibits taken down before the entirety of the art exhibition was removed?

Councillor Sheppard, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Neighbourhood Working, clarified that there had been no intention to censor art exhibitions or similar events. However, it was essential that there was a process to approve artworks when they were placed in public buildings.

In a supplementary question Mr. Bashir asked how many people requested the library exhibition of local residents and the artists of Monday 25 November 2024 to Friday 6 December 2024, to be taken down on and before Thursday 28 November 2024 with full removal by Saturday 30 November 2024. He also asked under what basis was this decision made, rules or legislation and could documentation to this effect be shared with him via email.

Councillor Sheppard was not aware of any numbers of people, but in terms of the process it was brought to the attention of the Culture and Leisure Team who have responsibility for the libraries and the decision was made to remove exhibits from display as the proper procedure had not been followed. Attempts were made to liaise with the artists involved to explain about the improper process. Development plans were in hand to develop a new protocol in conjunction with the Museum, Arts and Heritage Service to ensure a situation did not occur like this in the future.

(5) Mr. Smyth asked if selective licensing was truly successful, why was the Council expanding it rather than reducing its scope, given that an effective scheme should decrease the need for intervention and how did the Council justify this approach over using existing enforcement powers under the Housing Act 2004?

Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, explained about the change to the proposed declaration, but not only to expand, but also to remove some areas from the scheme. The area most notably removed was Maltby and this was done because the landlords there have undertaken works to reduce hazards by some 50%. Unfortunately, this was not the case everywhere.

Other enforcement powers included in the Housing Act 2004 were not enough to deliver the proactive and focused work necessary to identify hazards in areas where vulnerable private tenants were perhaps reluctant to complain. The boundaries of the proposed scheme were part of the live consultation and the member of the public had made his own representations.

The live consultation would conclude on the 17 March and residents, tenants and landlords of the affected areas or around them were encouraged to share their views via the online consultation.

In a supplementary question Mr. Smyth referred to Maltby's removal and questioned the validity of the data used to support its removal. He asked would the Council commission an independent review of the consistency of the data used to justify selective licensing success in that area.

Councillor Allen confirmed the Council were waiting to see the outcome of the consultation process via online, feedback from the face-to-face events or from the leaflets distributed to households in affected areas. At this moment in time, the Cabinet Member was not able to commit to anything until the feedback from that consultation had been seen.

(6) Mr Khan asked did the Council think it was right to issue enforcement notices for landlords to repair damaged caused by tenants, who have been served with eviction notices, thereby stopping the eviction process until the repairs have been done?

Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, sensed that there was a specific case behind the member of the public's question so encouraged him if he had specific details to share so this could be looked into.

Whilst a tenant was in occupation the landlord must ensure the property remained free from serious hazards. Landlords were obliged under Section 11 of the Landlord and Tenants Act 1985 that even if the tenant had contributed to the damage causing the hazard. Landlords may exercise their right to evict a tenant who abused a property, but must maintain a minimum level of safety for their occupying tenant during this period.

In a supplementary question Mr. Khan asked how would the Council support responsible tenancies while also addressing the challenges that may arise such as preventing situations where eviction processes become unnecessarily prolonged or where landlords feel unfairly burdened?

Councillor Allen explained that in terms of support for tenants who were going through an eviction process, the Council's services could support them with advice and guidance on how to get through that period and this would continue throughout the duration of the eviction period.

(7) As Ms. Boote was unable to attend the meeting in person she would receive a written response to her question.

120. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

121. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S STATEMENT

The Leader was invited to present his statement. He noted that registration for the baby packs was now open. Vetro Lounge had been confirmed as the first bar and restaurant at Forge Island and was expected to open at the end of April. An announcement on a second restaurant was expected in the coming days. In relation to the Housing Delivery Programme, 630 new homes had now been completed with a further 102 under construction or in the process of being purchased. The week of the Council meeting had been the week secondary school places had been announced. 91.1% of Rotherham children would start in their first choice secondary school in September 2025. That was 9% ahead of the national average. 97% had got a place in one of their three preferred schools. This compared to 94% nationally. Finally, the Leader noted that International Women's day was approaching and highlighted the personal safety app WalkSafe that had been launched in South Yorkshire.

In response to the statement, Councillor Z Collingham and Councillor A Carter echoed the Mayor's words in relation to the passing of Dame Julie Kenny. Both also asked questions in relation to Forge Island relating to keeping the pressure on to fill all of the units and on what lessons could be taken forward from the Forge Island development to the Markets and Library development. The Leader explained that the previous failure to fill some units was with the umbrella company that had wanted to fill them. They had got into difficulties and there was nothing the Council could do about that. It was in the borough and the Council's best interest to see the units occupied so work would continue to ensure that. The market development was a very different development to Forge Island but the Council continued to work with new and existing traders to step up the offer at the new market.

Councillor Ball asked a question in relation to the Housing Delivery Programme and Cumwell Lane. He stated that residents in Hellaby had been assured that the land would not be developed for a number of years. However, plans were now progressing for a 260 home estate with no improvements to local services or infrastructure. Hellaby was already overburdened, and this would add to the strain. Councillor Ball asked the Leader to write to the government to oppose the development and push for a reassessment of Rotherham's housing targets.

The Leader stated that he was unaware of the specific development and therefore could not comment on the details. In terms of the housing targets and representations to government, the Leader confirmed that representations had already been made. He had met with the Housing Minister around a month ago. It was about trying to find the correct balance between the national rules that had to be followed and the needs of communities in Rotherham. It had to be sustainable.

122. MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester asked a question in relation to Minute 122 of the Cabinet meeting held on 10 February 2025 – Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy. He was disappointed that the work on the A630 would not be going ahead at this point. He asked if S.106 money was used for the Chesterhill Development that was part of the sustainable travel plan and, if so, was there anything remaining. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester also asked that, since the scheme scored so highly in regard to being able to use the CIL, did this guarantee a primary spot when the Department for Transport funding came forward? He asked if he and Councillor Ryalls could have briefing on the matter.

Councillor Taylor confirmed he would provide a written response and arrange a briefing.

Resolved: That the reports, recommendations and minutes of the meetings of Cabinet held on 20 January and 10 February 2025 be received.

Mover:- Councillor Read

Secunder:- Councillor Sheppard

123. RECOMMENDATION FROM CABINET - BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2025-26 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Further to Minute 121 of the Cabinet meeting held on 10 February 2025, the proposed Budget and Council Tax for 2025/26 was presented to Council for approval. This was based on the Council's Final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2025/26, budget consultation and the consideration of Directorate budget proposals. A review of the financial planning assumptions within the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) had also been undertaken.

In moving the Budget, the Leader gave thanks to the excellent Finance team, Cabinet colleagues, the Chief Executive and especially to Councillor Alam.

The Leader explained that the long shadow of 14 years of Conservative austerity continued to hang over local government with thirty local authorities in receipt of bailouts this year because they could not balance their books. Six English Council were increasing bills by up to 10%. However, since the General Election in July 2024, the new Labour government had delivered a funding settlement for Rotherham that included an extra £14 million of central funding.

The Leader stated that this was not a solution to all problems, but it was the twelfth biggest uplift in funding for a Council anywhere in England. It showed that, instead of having a Prime Minister who redirected money from places like Rotherham to places like Tonbridge Wells, there was now a government that at long last had begun to distribute funding based on

need. It was a government that wanted communities to succeed. The additional funding allowed for:

- £450,000 more to support people facing homelessness.
- £2 million more to support Early Intervention Work with families and children.
- £4 million more for the Schools High Needs Block.

When the Leader had first delivered a budget speech in 2015, £68 million was spent on Adult Social Care. Next year that figure would be more than £120 million. The Budget therefore proposed an increase in the Adult's budget of £17 million, with just 3.5% of that expected to come from higher fees and charges.

The baby packs programme would continue to be rolled out as a basic right for every newborn. The Leader stated that over half of the net revenue budget would be spent on Children's and Adult Social Care to ensure that no one was left behind.

Difficult choices had been made throughout the austerity period but because those difficult choices had been made, the Council were now in a position to do more.

Through the Budget consultation and the consultation on the Council's new Council Plan, residents had expressed their views. The top thing residents wanted to see improved was community safety and tackling anti-social behaviour. As such, it was proposed that employing ten new staff as part of the Street Safe Team would mark a visible change on the principal town high streets. They would have powers to enforce Public Space Protection Orders, tackle dog fouling and illegal parking.

The Budget contained proposals for one hour's free parking in off-street car parks throughout the week. This would support developments such as Forge Island and the new market and library complex. £300,000 was being brought forward from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to support new businesses to open units in the town centre, Swinton, Wath, Maltby and Dinnington.

Residents had also expressed that they wanted the regeneration of the town centre to continue. In the 2024/25 budget, £360,000 was committed to increase cleaning in busy areas. It was proposed that a further £300,000 be committed in 2025/26 to allow for a dedicated team.

This work, alongside the work already done to halve the number of potholes showed the commitment to improve the local environment in every neighbourhood. The budget for replacing road markings would also be doubled.

In regard to supporting residents to be economically secure, proposals were put forward to double the support for low income families when buying school uniforms. Age UK and Citizens Advice would continue to be funded to support older residents access support. Work would commence with Food Works to bring their innovative approach to food security into the Food Partnership.

In setting the proposed 2025/26 budget, Cabinet had recommended to Council a 3% increase in Council Tax, made up of an increase of 1% in the Council's basic Council Tax plus an increase of 2% for the Adult Social Care precept. The Council Tax Support Top-Up would be extended for a further year which would help 4,000 working age households on low incomes and lift 10,000 of them out of Council Tax altogether.

The Leader next raised the Employment Solutions Team proposals. The Budget would make permanent the funding available for this service which had helped more than 1200 people back into work or training. The Leader was surprised that both amendments had proposed removing the funding for this service, especially since 90% of residents consulted in Summer 2024 had said they would rather fund it than cut it. The Leader provided details of a resident, Ann, who had been helped back into work by this service.

The Leader stated that it was not acceptable to let people like Ann fall through the cracks, to make residents who wanted to feel safe on the streets wait longer; to tell residents they could wait longer for Council phones to be answered or to tell employees that they did not deserve to take a share in owning their own companies. It was not acceptable to say that efforts to tackle hate crime should be stepped back, especially after the worst far right riots in the country for many years, including in Rotherham. It was not acceptable to cut support from babies.

In concluding his remarks, the Leader stated that he was proud to propose a budget that stood behind families, supported the high streets and improved communities. He was proud to propose a balanced budget with one of the lowest Council Tax increases anywhere in the country.

In seconding the report, Councillor Sheppard also placed on record his thanks to the finance team and all those involved in the budget setting process. He explained that positive choices had been made in this budget and this was only possible because of the prudent financial choices that had been made by the Labour administration over the past 14 years.

Councillor Sheppard highlighted a number of proposals relating to his portfolio. It was proposed to invest £6 million in the Catcliffe Village (River Rother) Flood Alleviation Scheme; to invest £63,000 to improve drainage at Waleswood Caravan Park and to invest £33,000 in improving the Clifton Park Overflow Car Park and Event Space. There would be investment in the Green Spaces Capital Repairs Programme and in community facilities. It was proposed that the additional temporary

resource that supported residents to complete the application process for Pension Credit be extended.

Two notices of amendment had been received in relation to the Budget and Council Tax 2025-26 proposals.

The first was moved by Councillor Zach Collingham and seconded by Councillor Baum-Dixon on behalf of the Conservative group:

That the Budget and Council Tax 2025/26 report be accepted as proposed, with the exception of the following amendments:

COUNCIL TAX PROPOSALS

Reduce the proposed Council Tax increase from 3% to 2.5%, with the proposed 2.5% increase being made up of a basic Council Tax increase of 0.5% and a 2% increase through the Adult Social Care precept (ringfenced for adult social care).

The reduction in the proposed Council Tax will create a funding shortfall of £0.668m in 2025/26, £0.695m in 2026/27, £0.723m in 2027/28 and £0.752m in 2028/29.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROPOSALS

1. Increase the Roads, Footways and Highway Drainage Repairs to 2028 programme by £1m to provide further investment in the Boroughs Roads and Footways for 2025/26. This increased financial investment will be funded by borrowing requiring £75k per annum of revenue to cover the financing costs.
2. Increase the capital funding for locally defined road safety improvements by £250k in 2025/26 and £250k in 2026/27, to supplement other sources of funding and provide greater capacity for the delivery of interventions requested by members, MPs and the public.
3. Reduce the Strategic Acquisitions Fund capital investment by £500k and amend this so the remaining £1.5m is available to make key strategic acquisitions for regeneration across the Borough, rather than just being targeted at strategic sites in the town centre and around the proposed mainline station site.
4. Earmark £2m of the Council's Budget and Financial Strategy Reserve to create a new Strategic Acquisitions Fund Reserve. This will provide greater capacity to make key strategic acquisitions for regeneration across the Borough as required.

5. Provide £50k of capital funding in both 2025/26 and 2026/27 for a Community CCTV Fund to finance community bids for the installation of CCTV in villages, towns and urban districts to meet demand from communities, alone or on a match-funded basis. This increased financial investment will be funded by borrowing requiring £15k per annum of revenue to cover financing costs.
6. Reprofile the proposed Replacement of Refuse Collection Vehicles to £1m per year from 2025/26 to 2028/29, to enable the creation of a rolling replacement programme. This proposal will create revenue savings from the re-profiling of borrowing, but these will be required to offset the increased maintenance and hire costs as a result of the reprofiled vehicle purchases. It is likely that completion of the move to a rolling replacement programme will reduce the impact of maintenance and hire costs from 2029/30.

PROPOSED REVENUE BUDGET INVESTMENTS

1. Increase the revenue investment proposal for Street Cleansing and Fly Tipping Improvements team by £201,646 from 2025/26 onwards to provide a further 4 members of staff including associated equipment and vehicles to expand the level of impact.
2. Earmark £75k per year to cover the financing costs of the proposed increase to the Roads, Footways and Highway Drainage Repairs to 2028 programme for 2025/26 (as referenced above Capital section 1).
3. Earmark £15k per year to cover the financing costs of the proposed Community CCTV Fund for 2025/26 and 2026/27 (as referenced above Capital section 5).
4. Reduce the revenue investment proposal for the Street Safe Team by £201k from 2025/26 onwards and amend the proposal to trial the effectiveness of a team that deploys to hotspots across the Borough for maximum impact.
5. Reduce the revenue investment proposal for the Employment Solutions Team by £359k from 2025/26 onwards and trial the effectiveness of funding part of this team through base budget.
6. Reduce revenue expenditure on subscriptions across the Council by 15%; £36,158 from 2025/26 onwards.
7. Reduce the revenue investment proposal for Cost of Living Support by removing the £30k for developing the Food Works offer in Rotherham from 2025/26 onwards.
8. Remove the Restorative Hate Crime revenue budget investment agreed as part of the 2024/25 Budget and Council Tax Report. This will release savings of £26,538 in 2025/26, rising to £30,000 from

2026/27 onwards due to impact of removing the service once the current contract ends in May 2025.

9. Remove the Community Wealth Building revenue budget investment agreed as part of the 2024/25 Budget and Council Tax Report. This will release savings of £120k from 2025/26 onwards.

10. Reduce the Baby Packs revenue budget investment agreed as part of the 2024/25 Budget and Council Tax Report by £187,310 from £360,000 to £172,690 for 2025/26 onwards.

In proposing the amendment, Councillor Zach Collingham thanked Judith Badger, Rob Mahon and the finance team for their support. He stated that the Conservative Group did not disagree with everything in the Budget and there were some sensible suggestions. However, it was felt that there were some proposals that were not sensible, some that had been taken too far and some opportunities that had been missed.

Regarding Council Tax, Councillor Collingham stated that the Labour Prime Minister had stated that this would not be going up at all. To increase Council Tax was therefore a betrayal of the people of Rotherham and people across the country who had voted for the Labour Party. It was a lie, and the promise had not been honoured. The government had not provided enough money and therefore the Labour administration had had to increase Council Tax. Councillor Collingham acknowledged that some rise was inevitable but that the rise should be as low as possible.

The Conservative Group felt the 3% increase was too high and they felt that it was not being spent in the right way. It was acknowledged that the Chancellor had provided some additional money for Rotherham, but Councillor Collingham stated that this had been stolen from employers through the National Insurance rise that was crippling the economy.

Councillor Collingham explained that the money that had been provided was not what was promised and not what was needed. However, the Conservative Group had different proposals on what they would like to spend that money on, and this was not on up-cycled food cafes and lessons on how not to hate. He proposed that the money be spent on basic services and put back in the pockets of Rotherham residents. Councillor Collingham thought the Labour Group would be supportive of this given the purported struggles inflicted by the Conservative Government over the past 14 years. Councillor Collingham therefore stated it was realistic to only raise Council Tax by 2.5%. This would send a message to every tax payer that they were valued equally, and Rotherham would be out of step for the right reasons. The Council would not be seizing whatever it could like other Labour Council's in the vicinity. By not funding socialist projects, residents could be taxed less and have more money in their pockets.

The proposals in the Conservative amendment dealt with improvements to basic services. This included a further £1 million to provide further investment in the boroughs roads and footways and an increase for locally defined road safety improvements by £250k in 2025/26 and £250k in 2026/27. This could address longstanding issues on the A57, at Treeton Crossroads and in Ulley.

Implementing commercial principles would allow services to be delivered more efficiently and make savings for the tax payer. That was why the amendment proposed a rolling replacement programme for the bin lorries. It would drive down maintenance costs. Further, there was no reason to move the Employment Solutions Team from a grant funded position onto the Council's base budget with no review.

Councillor Collingham stated that the towns and villages throughout the borough were just as important as Rotherham town centre and should be treated equally. It was important to go big and facilitate regeneration across the borough in places such as Maltby, Thurcroft and Dinnington. The amendment therefore proposed an extra £1.5 million to ensure opportunities were not missed.

In relation to the Street Safe Team, Councillor Collingham stated that a targeted team with a specific mission was a better solution than spending £500,000 on an untried, untested model. It was also vital to recognise the demand for CCTV, especially in rural areas. A Community CCTV Fund would be open to bids from community groups and would allow residents to have the CCTV that they wanted. The proposal of £50,000 would fund several small schemes across the borough.

Councillor Collingham welcomed the investment in street cleansing and ground maintenance but stated that this was only included because of the campaign brought by the Conservative Group in 2024 over the neglect in the borough. The Conservative amendment went further than the proposed investment with investment proposals for street cleansing and fly tipping improvements of £201,646 from 2025/26 onwards to provide a further four members of staff including associated equipment and vehicles to expand the level of impact.

The Conservative Group had made choices to have better roads, low tax and a cleaner, safer borough. This would enable the Council to be smart and efficient which was what the public wanted. The Council did not need to be a parent or police officer. Councillor Collingham urged Members to support the amendment.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Baum-Dixon thanked the finance team for their support. He stated that the amendment was a sensible, Conservative proposal. It kept taxes low, ensured value for money, maintained vital services and increased investment across the borough.

Families were struggling with rising costs, and this was made worse by Labour's tax rising budget. It was a Conservative belief that tax payers were best placed on how to spend their own money, not the Council. As such, they were proposing a reduction in the Council Tax increase from 3% to 2.5%.

This sensible approach allowed for investment in services that mattered most to residents such as an extra £1m for road and footway repairs and an extra £500,000 for road safety over two years. Residents also wanted action on crime and anti-social behaviour and therefore £100,000 was suggested for the Community CCTV fund. Expanding the street cleansing team with four extra staff and the investment in CCTV would help prevent fly-tipping, which was a major concerns, particularly in rural areas.

Councillor Baum-Dixon reiterated that investment should be for the whole borough, not just Rotherham town centre. It was therefore proposed that the Strategic Acquisition Fund Reserve be created to support regeneration and development opportunities across the borough with a fund of £3.5 million made available.

The Conservative proposal of a rolling replacement of bin lorries was a smart, commercial and long-term approach that would reduce repair and hire costs. Further, it was felt that it was not wise to spend money on baby packs for families that did not need them. It was therefore proposed to reduce the funding available so that every child born into poverty got the support plus an additional 500 children. This would protect the scheme for those that most needed it whilst ensuring tax payers money was used efficiently in other areas.

Councillor Baum-Dixon stated that the private sector was best placed to deliver jobs, opportunity and prosperity, not government. This was not helped by the increase in employer National Insurance contributions. However, it was important to recognise the importance of helping people into work. Therefore the amendment did not propose cutting the Employment Solutions Team but instead proposed trialling an in-house model with fewer roles whilst keeping the remaining staff covered by grant funding.

Proposals also included reducing Council subscriptions, refocusing the Safer Street Teams to better target high crime areas and removing funding for community wealth building and restorative hate crime programmes.

In concluding, Councillor Baum-Dixon stated this was a sensible, prudent, proportional amendment based on sound Conservative values. It would keep money in residents pockets, cut waste and invest in things that matter across the whole borough.

Members were invited to speak on the Conservative amendment.

Councillor Bacon stated that he fully supported the amendment as it started to address the huge waste in Council services. He stated the 3% Council Tax rise was unnecessary and instead 2.5% was sufficient. Councillor Bacon stated that members voting against the amendment needed to be careful because they were voting against much needed road safety improvements. He stated that investment was needed throughout the borough, not just in the town centre.

Councillor Tarmey said that the amendment included very little. It proposed a higher Council Tax increase than the Liberal Democrat amendment and included spend on things that did not really matter. There were some things that could be supported, such as the CCTV proposal but there were also proposals that were sad. This included the removal of funding for work to reduce hate crimes and the cutting of baby packs.

Councillor Currie believed that the 3% increase proposed by the Labour Group was reasonable and that the Conservative amendment would leave a shortfall. He thought that the Council had done a good job in managing the £200 million cuts from central government over the past 14 years. He thanked officers for their fiscal knowledge in dealing with the cuts.

Councillor Taylor stated that the amendment was predictable and quite boring. It proposed a Council Tax increase of 2.5% just to undercut the Labour proposal, then proposed cuts to fund the shortfall and then proposed random investments with random sums to support those. Councillor Taylor explained that the difference between the Labour Council Tax proposals and the Conservative Council Tax proposals would not even cover a low budget bar of chocolate for a family per week. He acknowledged that some of the proposals could have underlying merit but that the benefits and impacts had not been properly thought through. He thought the bin lorry replacement proposal was ludicrous, would cost more money and would not help with the Council's net zero aspirations. Councillor Taylor also stated that the money proposed by the Conservatives for road safety improvements was not nearly enough for some of the schemes they wanted to deliver. He thought the proposals sought to appease some by sacrificing beneficial measures.

Councillor Cusworth would not be supporting the amendment. She was very proud of the work done with the baby packs and firmly believed it was one of the best things ever done in Rotherham. Councillor Cusworth felt the amendment focused on the south of the borough. She also explained that, whilst the Conservative Group were proud to have put forward a Conservative Budget, the people of Rotherham had not voted for the Conservatives. They had voted for a Labour run Council and the socialist projects that came with that.

Councillor A Carter stated that the Conservative amendment chose to penalise babies and stop projects aimed at reducing hate crimes. This was not the right or conscientious things to do. Councillor Carter also

criticised the Conservative Group for not being ambitious enough when it came to Council Tax. The Liberal Democrat proposal did not increase the basic rate of Council Tax, but the Conservative proposal did.

Councillor Marshall equated the removal of baby packs to the child catcher.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester did not support the Conservative proposal regarding the Employment Solutions Team as he had seen the real difference it could make, especially for people with disabilities. He supported the universal nature of the baby pack scheme which he said overcame power structures within families and gender inequalities. He thought that the Conservative Group did not understand this. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester referenced the proposed removal of funding for restorative hate crime work. 2025 marked the tenth anniversary of the racially motivated murder of Mr Mushin Ahmed and Councillor Bennett-Sylvester thought the removal of the funding by the Conservative Group was disgraceful.

Councillor Thorp responded to Councillor Taylor's comments on the replacement of bin lorries. He stated that a commercial company would never run in the way proposed in the Labour budget. Councillor Thorp acknowledged that a rolling fleet would not produce an immediate saving, but it would be more logical in the long run.

Councillor Steele stated that after all of the cuts from the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition, there was nothing left for the Council to waste. The Labour Budget would look after the most vulnerable. The Conservative amendment focussed on matters in Conservative areas only. Councillor Steele highlighted spend by the Conservative government on things such as the Rwanda scheme. The amount of money wasted by the Conservative government had left the Labour government no choice but to increase National Insurance contributions in order to pay for essential services.

Councillor Hughes would not be supporting the amendment. She stated that it would be great to sort out all of the roads, but successive cuts meant the money was not available to do this. In relation to baby packs, Councillor Hughes said it would cost more to means test. Further, if the parents felt that they did not need one, they did not have to claim one. Councillor Hughes was against the removal of funds for restorative hate crime work having worked previously in that area. Hate was taught and a prison sentence would not rectify that. Confronting offenders with what they had done and teaching them not to hate was a much better approach. In light of this and in light of the events in Manvers in 2024, it was shameful to suggest cutting this.

Councillor Sheppard stated that the amendment was an attack on the vulnerable. It disadvantaged people looking for employment. It disadvantaged people looking for help with food and budgeting. It

disadvantaged victims of hate crime. It took away from babies. In response to Councillor Bacon's statement about being careful when deciding what to vote for, Councillor Sheppard stated that Members voting for this amendment were voting to take help away from vulnerable people.

Councillor Baker-Rogers described the amendment as tragic and if passed, it would be a tragedy for residents. Community cohesion was one of the most important things the Council could do, and the Conservatives were proposing removing support for this. Removing baby packs was penalising babies and was not compassionate.

As the proposer of the amendment, Councillor Zach Collingham was invited to reply to the debate. He thanked his members for their support. In response to Councillor Tarmey he stated that the Rotherham Conservatives had no interest in cutting things for the sake of cutting things. They had put forward sensible, costed proposals. He was also surprised to hear that Councillor Tarmey did not think road safety, street cleansing, regeneration etc mattered. In response to Councillor Currie he explained that there was no shortfall. In response to Councillor Taylor, Councillor Collingham criticised his decision to use the word boring. He also expressed concern that Councillor Taylor could not follow their proposals for the rolling replacement of bin lorries. In response to Councillor Cusworth it was noted that baby packs for all was a laudable aim, but sentiment had been put before sense. He did not agree that it was a good use of public money to store any number of packs in a room because they had not been claimed. In response to Councillor A Carter, Councillor Collingham explained that having a 0% rise in Council Tax was not sound financial management. In response to various other comments on baby packs, Councillor Collingham stated that not everyone had had a baby pack growing up and there were numerous other ways of supporting families. In response to Councillor Bennett-Sylvester it was noted that not everything could be provided with a finite budget. In response to Councillor Steele, Councillor Collingham confirmed that a Council Tax rise was inevitable which is why they had proposed a 2.5% rise. Councillor Collingham refuted Councillor Sheppard's claim that it was an attack on the vulnerable. The Employment Solutions Team would still be there, and the baby packs would still be provided to those that needed them.

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

That the Budget and Council Tax 2025/26 report be accepted as proposed, with the exception of the following amendments:

Reduce the proposed Council Tax increase from 3% to 1.9%, with the proposed 1.9% increase being made up 1.9% increase through the Adult Social Care precept (ringfenced for adult social care).

The reduction in the proposed Council Tax will release additional funding across 2025/26 to 2027/28, it is proposed this surplus funding will be added to the Council's Budget and Financial Strategy Reserve. £74,607 in 2025/26, £90,791 in 2026/27 and £29,623 in 2027/28.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROPOSALS

1. Remove the capital investment proposal for the Strategic Acquisitions Fund, this will reduce the Capital Budget by £2m in total, £1m in 2025/26 and £1m in 2026/27.

PROPOSED REVENUE BUDGET INVESTMENTS

1. Remove the revenue investment proposal for the Street Safe Team, this will reduce the Council Budget from 2025/26 onwards by £570k.
2. Remove the revenue investment proposal for the Employment Solutions Team, this will reduce the Council Budget from 2025/26 onwards by £718k.
3. Remove the revenue investment proposal for the Customer Services – Call Handlers, this will reduce the Council Budget from 2025/26 onwards by £62k.
4. Remove the Community Wealth Building revenue budget investment agreed as part of the 2024/25 Budget and Council Tax Report. This will release savings of £120k from 2025/26 onwards.
5. The removal of the proposed capital investment for the Strategic Acquisitions Fund of £2m in total, £1m in 2025/26 and £1m in 2026/27, will release revenue Budget savings of £75k in 2025/26 and £150k in 2026/27.

In proposing the amendment, Councillor Adam Carter thanked Council officers for helping the Liberal Democrat Group bring forward a budget proposal that was prudent and stable. The Liberal Democrats believed that the Council should listen to its residents and deliver what they wanted: Council Tax to be as low as possible. As such, the proposal put forward meant that the basic rate of Council Tax would be cut for the first time in a long time. This was the right approach given that Rotherham was getting £14m extra from the government. More money should be returned to residents and put into reserves.

The Liberal Democrat Budget rolled back wasteful spending on projects that would not make a real difference for residents. This included cutting Labour's "cheapo cops" who would not have the powers required to make the borough better and safer.

Councillor Carter addressed the actions of the Prime Minister, stating that he had cut universal, non-means tested winter fuel payments, had kept the two child benefit cap which kept children in poverty and had increased the National Insurance contributions from employers. This meant there would be fewer jobs and a negative impact on social care, medical care and dentistry. Councillor Carter found it hypocritical of Labour councillors to say that they had residents' back.

With regard to the Employment Solutions Team, Councillor Carter explained that the funding for this had been cut by the Labour government, presumably because they did not believe that it made enough difference. The Liberal Democrats did not believe now was the time to waste money, energy, time and priority on vanity projects that residents did not want. Instead it was time to focus on getting the absolute basics right to support vulnerable residents and improve the quality of life across the borough.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Tarmey explained that the Liberal Democrat Group supported the core budget, and he thanked Judith Badger and Rob Mahon for their hard work. The additional £14 million from central government was most welcome following years of underfunding. However, Councillor Tarmey felt that the Labour Group had chosen to spend money on vanity projects.

Councillor Tarmey stated that employing ten people to wonder around a largely empty town centre, asking people to stop taking drugs without any enforcement powers was not the way forward. In relation to the one-hour free parking proposal, Councillor Tarmey stated that it would have only cost £400,000 to make parking completely free in the town centre which could have saved the hospitality industry and attract new businesses. Councillor Tarmey expressed concern about the type of establishments that would occupy the units at Forge Island.

He reiterated that the Liberal Democrat proposal was the only one to cut Council Tax which was needed when people were struggling. Proposals also included a reduction in debt.

In concluding, Councillor Tarmey stated that the Liberal Democrat proposal was sensible and fully costed. It put more money into reserves. It did not cut services but maintained them. Councillor Tarmey noted that his residents had never asked for more call handlers. Further, there were many national initiatives to get people into work and this did not have to fall solely at the feet of the Council.

Members were invited to speak on the Liberal Democrat amendment.

Councillor Taylor clarified his previous comments on the bin lorry replacement proposals from the Conservatives. He stated that all options had been considered and the most appropriate put forward. In relation to the Liberal Democrat amendment, Councillor Taylor stated that he would not be supporting this.

Councillor Currie was concerned about the cuts to revenue spending, especially to the Employment Solutions Team. He felt that Rotherham was leading the way in the aspect, particularly in helping people with autism into employment. Councillor Currie did not think the private sector would offer the same service. The Council run service was working well and he could not support cutting this. He did however think some of the other ideas were well thought out.

Councillor Zach Collingham failed to see the point of the Liberal Democrat amendment. He stated that the Conservative Group were always open to working with the Liberal Democrat Group but that there was nothing in the amendment to work with. It was not a serious amendment. Councillor Collingham refuted the statements from Councillor Carter and Councillor Tarmey that they were not proposing a rise in Council Tax. They were proposing a rise for the people of Rotherham, but it was a rise that would not keep pace with costs. The Liberal Democrat proposal seemed to cut anything necessary to meet their Council Tax target, without any thought for the wider implications. Councillor Collingham thought the refusal to spend any money improving the town centre contradicted their position on saving Rotherham Post Office. He criticised the lack of positive proposals. He therefore had to presume the Liberal Democrat Group were happy with the way the borough was being run by the Labour Group.

Councillor Reynolds was concerned at the lack of proposals relating to solar panels.

Councillor Baum-Dixon also noted the lack of content and substance in the Liberal Democrat amendment. There was nothing positive in it. He questioned whether the Liberal Democrats would actually not spend any money if strategic development sites became available. He asked if they believed that the streets were safe and if they believed that residents should wait longer for the phones answering. Councillor Baum-Dixon did not believe this was sound, prudent finance.

Councillor Sheppard stated that the brief amendment offered no positive solutions and no creativity. He did not understand why the Liberal Democrats wanted to get rid of the tried and tested Employment Solutions Team in favour of untried alternatives.

Councillor Baker-Rogers criticised the lack of imagination, particularly in relation to what money could be spent on in order to improve services. She also stated that the comments in relation to the town centre were flippant.

Councillor Pitchley stated that the number one complaint received by the Council was in relation to customer service phone waiting times. The Council needed to listen to these complaints and act on them for the benefit of residents. Councillor Pitchley also stated that a key ask from Rotherham's Youth Cabinet was to feel safe in the town centre. The investment in the Street Safe Team was therefore essential.

Councillor Read took exception to the claim by the Liberal Democrats that they were proposing a Council Tax cut. It was in fact a 1.9% Council Tax rise.

Councillor Steele stated that residents were frustrated with the length of time it took to get through to the Council on the phone and this could be fixed but the Liberal Democrats did not want to do this.

As the proposer of the second amendment, Councillor Adam Carter was invited to reply to the debate. In response to Councillor Currie, Councillor Carter stated that whilst the Employment Solutions Team did good work, it was not right for regressive Council Tax to fund it. In response to Councillor Z Collingham's claim that he wanted to work collaboratively, Councillor A Carter stated that he had not received an email or phone call about this. Further, the Liberal Democrats were not just simply swapping Labour's pet projects for their own, like the Conservatives had tried to do. The focus instead was on getting essential basic services right. Councillor A Carter stated that Councillor Reynolds comments did not relate to their amendment. In response to Councillor Baum-Dixon he stated that the Liberal Democrat proposals put more money into reserves. In response to Councillor Sheppard, Councillor A Carter stated that the Liberal Democrats had made the decision to keep Council Tax low. They also felt that the cost of £7000 per new employment through the Employment Solutions Team was too much. In response to Councillor Pitchley, Councillor Carter stated that he was at the Youth Cabinet's takeover meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, but she was not.

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

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

The Conservative amendment was then put to the vote and was lost.

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

Members were invited to speak on the Labour budget proposals.

Councillor Thorp stated that the £17 million going to adult care was needed due to the Labour government increasing costs in relation to employer National Insurance contributions. He also noted that there were around 266,000 people in the Rotherham borough but only a few hundred had responded to the consultation. Councillor Thorp asked how call handling and street safety could both be number one complaints. He again criticised the replacement plan for the bin lorries, stating that it was not how commercial businesses operated.

Councillor Yasseen explained that she supported many aspects of the proposal as it demonstrated strong investment in essential services, particularly around community wellbeing, social care and household support. She was supportive of the 3% Council Tax rise. Not only did Council Yasseen support the restorative hate crime agenda, but she also wished there was more money available for it. Councillor Yasseen fully supported the universal nature of the baby packs. However there were some aspects of the Budget that Councillor Yasseen did not like. These included taking up green spaces for development and the using an enforcement approach for Anti-Social behaviour.

Councillor Bower expressed concerns regarding the Street Safe Team proposals. Due to his personal experience of doing the role in a neighbouring authority, Councillor Bower thought the £1 million spend over two years was a waste of money as it would not work. One problem was that a team of ten would not be big enough. A second issue was that there was no provision for a support team who could do the background work for applications for injunctions and Criminal Behaviour Order's. It was not realistic to expect the Street Safe Team to do this as well as patrol the town centres. Councillor Bower's third issue with this proposal was that fines and tickets would not stop anti-social behaviour. These types of proposals were often seen as instant solutions by the public but that was not the case.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester stated that he would be supporting the budget proposals. He particularly approved of the retention of support to enable residents to claim pension credit. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester stated that independent members could support the budget whilst still disliking certain parts of it and they could continue dialogue outside of the chamber to shape future proposals (such as a reduction in garden waste fees.) He had some concerns relating to the length of time taken to deliver capital projects and the lack of advertising of Rothercard discounts. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester was happy at the lack of ring-fencing on the funds provided by government. He expressed his wish that in future budgets, HRA funding be used to employ more Area Housing Officers to allow Neighbourhood Officers to focus on neighbourhood issues, not housing issues. More needed to be done to narrow the gap between those neighbourhoods with and those without.

Councillor Z Collingham stated there were some aspects of the budget he could happily support, especially in relation to adult social care and children and young people's services. However, he felt that this could be done whilst investing more in basic services and by taxing less. It was not the only role of local government to make sure no one was left behind. It also needed to provide basic services. Councillor Collingham was also sceptical of the Street Safe Team. He did not think the proposed resource was enough to adequately address the issue of safety in town centres. In relation to the Employment Solutions Team, Councillor Collingham stated that this was not the only service available to those seeking employment help. He believed that the service was only helping around two people a month into work, and this was not good value for money. In relation to the baby packs, Councillor Collingham stated this was a political policy and not the only way of helping families. It was appropriate and necessary to means test this and the Council should be more than able to put those processes in place.

Councillor Ball stated that the Council had earned £5 million in interest. It had earned £1.67 million from lending money since March 2024. However it also continued to borrow heavily, including £45 million from SYMCA in 2023. The Council was still paying that back at a cost of £4.6 million over three years to the taxpayer. £10 million was paid to SYMCA from the Council for the Supertram that, in Councillor Ball's opinion, barely served Rotherham. He asked if this was moral and if scrutiny or anyone else would take look into the matter. Councillor Ball asked how the Labour Group could justify a 3% increase in Council Tax when Sir Keir Starmer had promised that Council Tax would be frozen. The Rother Valley MP had said in 2023 that Council Tax would be frozen in that year.

Councillor Taylor stated that he would be supporting the Budget. He thanked all those that had worked hard to ensure that the Council was in a strong financial position. The proposed Council Tax increase was one of the lowest in the country but whilst it was important to balance the budget, more needed to be done which was why the proposed budget went further and invested in the borough. For example, there would be investment in business centre upgrades, investment in road markings and investment in the Employment Solutions team. Councillor Taylor was very supportive of the one hour free parking proposal as this had been requested by local businesses.

Councillor Cusworth was in favour of the Budget and spoke from her perspective as Cabinet Member for Children and Young People. She was surprised that the baby packs had sparked so much controversy as they had been so well received by families and the front line services involved. Councillor Cusworth highlighted that children's social services had improved greatly over the past year despite the increasing demand. The numbers of Children in Care and children subject to Child Protection Plans had safely reduced. The work done through Early Help and through various strategies had been paramount to this. The Department for Education had extended the Family Hubs and Start for Life funding for

another year. Councillor Cusworth explained that the residential care home programme would continue. There would be investment in in-house residential complex needs facilities and in a new education system. The new system would bring together data from various services such as home to school transport, education attainment and children's social care. The budget also contained a proposal to double the value of the Council's existing school uniform voucher scheme from £35 to £70 for eligible children.

Councillor C Carter stated that there was plenty in the Budget to agree with. However, she could not support it due to the 3% Council Tax increase during a cost of living crisis, especially when the Council had received an additional £14 million from the government. The Liberal Democrat Group had voted to lower the basic rate of Council Tax whereas Labour were spending on vanity projects that would result in future debt. Councillor Carter stated that the budget was about choices and Labour had chosen to hike Council Tax and spend money on schemes that were not in the Council's remit.

Councillor Baum-Dixon stated that the Council needed to be more commercial and look at things in a different way. In relation to baby packs, Councillor Baum-Dixon reiterated that he was not against helping children in poverty but there were better ways of delivering the schemes, such as removing some of the items that were not needed such as teething rings and soft edge bumpers. He also highlighted some of the hidden costs involved in storing the boxes, in running the website and in procurement. Councillor Baum-Dixon stated that the Employment Solutions Team was not good value for money, and it would be better for it to be provided by the private sector. In relation to previous comments that the Conservative amendment only helped those in the south of the borough, Councillor Baum-Dixon explained that the Conservative Group had predominately been elected in the south of the borough, presumably because they felt let down by the Labour Council. An example of this was restricting the Strategic Investment Fund to the town centre, rather than extending it out to places such as Dinnington and Maltby. Councillor Baum-Dixon stated that there was nothing in the budget for rural areas, despite the majority of the borough being rural. He also expressed concerns about the Street Safe Team.

Councillor Bacon stated that residents across the borough were getting a bad deal with these budget proposals. He criticised Labour's interpretation of the consultation responses as being too selective, stating that residents did not want to see pet projects in the town centre or cycle lanes. They wanted road safety which was not just repainted road markings. Councillor Bacon thought that raising Council Tax should have been a last resort, but he said this was not echoed by the Labour Group or some of the independent members. He thought the Budget was wasteful, a betrayal of communities and was overreaching. Councillor Bacon would be voting against the Budget.

Councillor Currie stated that he would like to see a return of the Finance Scrutiny Panel so that matters discussed during the debate on the budget, such as baby packs, employment solutions etc, could be scrutinised in more detail outside of the budget setting process. Councillor Currie believed that there had not been enough scrutiny of the budget proposals. If there had been a Finance Scrutiny Panel, experts could have been brought in to discuss the Street Safe proposals for example.

Councillor Baker-Rogers expressed her support for the Budget and for the universal approach to the baby packs. Everyone she had spoken to, including residents, professionals, health visitors, midwives had said that it was a brilliant idea.

Councillor Steele, in response to Councillor Currie, confirmed that the budget proposals had been to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board. He thanked scrutiny and finance officers and the cabinet members for facilitating the scrutiny process. It was confirmed that the Street Safe Team proposal would be reviewed by scrutiny after 12 months. Councillor Steele was in full support of the baby packs and the inclusion of teething rings. There was also nothing wrong with trying to keep children safe in their own homes. Councillor Steele stated that the budget created by the Labour Group protected the most vulnerable.

In his right of reply the Leader addressed the comments made. In response to Councillor Z Collingham, the Leader stated that it was a compliment to be accused of making socialist proposals, especially as they only cost 12p more a week than the Conservative proposals. In response to Councillor C Carter, the Leader explained that the Liberal Democrats were not reducing the basic rate of Council Tax because there was no such thing as the basic rate of Council Tax. He stated that the Liberal Democrat proposal would not have lowered Council Tax bills. In response to Councillor Yasseen, the Leader confirmed that the Council Tax rise was the third lowest in the country to date. In response to comments from members of the Conservative Group on the public consultation, the Leader stated that there had been a budget consultation and a consultation on the new Council Plan and the Council were responding to the challenges set out in those consultations. In relation to Councillor Thorpe and Employment Solutions, the Leader stated that residents had responded nine to one in support of helping people into work rather than cutting the service.

Regarding the comments on the Street Safe Team, the Leader stated that some comments suggested it was too big whilst others suggested it was too small. He explained that the Team would not stand in isolation and would be working with a range of other Council and partner services. The Leader agreed that it would not fix all problems, especially not drug abuse. However, the aim was to provide some reassurances to residents and to provide intelligence back to services. The Leader thanked Councillor Bennett-Sylvester for his comments on the Garden Waste Collection discount for Rothercard users. In response to Councillor Ball,

the Leader explained that a tweet from 2023 stating that Council Tax would be frozen in that year did not apply to 2025. That was a commitment made when Labour were in opposition and had not been made aware of the full extent of the financial situation.

Regarding Employment Solutions, the Leader explained that 450 people per year were helped into work or training. This worked out at around £1700 per person and the Leader believed that no national scheme would be able to deliver that value. In concluding, the Leader stated that this was a good set of budget proposals that would help those with less the most.

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

For: The Mayor (Councillor Cowen), Councillors Adair, Ahmed, Allen, Baggaley, Baker-Rogers, Beck, Bennett-Sylvester, Beresford, Brent, Clarke, Currie, Cusworth, Duncan, Foster, Garnett, Harper, Havard, Hughes, Hussain, Ismail, Jackson, Jones, Keenan, Knight, Lelliott, Marshall, Mault, McKiernan, Monk, Pitchley, Rashid, Read, Sheppard, Steele, Sutton, Taylor, Williams and Yasseen.

Against: Councillors Bacon, Ball, Baum-Dixon, Blackham, A. Carter, C. Carter, Castledine-Dack, T. Collingham, Z. Collingham, Reynolds, Tarmey, Thorpe and Tinsley.

Abstain: Councillor Bower.

Councillor Monk declared a personal interest in this item on the grounds of a close family member who was a business operator in the borough. As this was a non-pecuniary interest Councillor Monk remained in the chamber and voted on the item.

124. CALENDAR OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS FOR THE 2025-26 MUNICIPAL YEAR

Consideration was given to a report, submitted in accordance with the rules of procedure as detailed in the Council's Constitution, that set out the proposed Calendar of Meetings for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

Resolved: That the Calendar of Meetings for the 2025-26 Municipal Year be approved.

Mover: Councillor Sheppard

Seconder: Councillor Read

125. CABINET'S RESPONSE TO THE IMPROVING LIVES SELECT COMMISSION SCRUTINY REVIEW - PREPARATION FOR ADULTHOOD

Consideration was given to the report which presented Cabinet's response to the Improving Lives Select Commission Scrutiny Review on Preparation for Adulthood. Preparation for Adulthood had been an on-going area of interest for the Improving Lives Select Commission (ILSC) over recent years, following the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities inspection in 2021. In discussions with the Improving Lives Select Commission, the Rotherham Parent Carers' Forum highlighted that a greater focus was required to identify what was in place, to support successful preparation to adulthood for children and young people in Rotherham with SEND and consider whether there were any gaps in the available provision.

The Improving Lives Select Commission agreed to hold a spotlight review on preparation for adulthood which took place on 15 February 2024. Planning sessions were held in advance of the spotlight review meeting to determine the scope of the review. Briefing materials and resources were circulated in advance of the review session, to inform key lines of enquires (KLOEs). The review itself took place over a single afternoon, with many partners present to provide a range of perspectives and information. This work enabled the sub-group to establish an understanding of the services that were being delivered in Rotherham to support preparation for adulthood.

The recommendations from the sub-group were presented to Cabinet on 14 October 2024 and Cabinet provided a response on 20 January 2025.

Resolved:

That Council note Cabinet's response to the recommendations as summarised in the Cabinet Response to the Recommendations from the Scrutiny Review - Preparation for Adulthood for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) report, attached at Appendix 1.

Mover: Councillor Cusworth Second: Councillor Baker-Rogers

126. APPOINTMENT TO VACANT COMMITTEE SEATS

Consideration was given to the report which explained that the Health Select Commission, the Improving Lives Select Commission, the Licensing Board and the Licensing Committee currently had vacant seats. As these had been vacant for longer than three weeks, Council were asked to appoint to these seats. As per the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990, if a group failed to express its wishes within a period of three weeks of being notified of the allocation or vacancy, the Council could make such appointments. There

was therefore no political proportionality requirements for the vacant seats.

Nominations had been received and these were listed in Appendix D of the Mayor's Letter. During the meeting Councillor Fisher was nominated for the Health Select Commission.

Resolved:

That Council appoint the following Members to the vacancies:

1. Councillor Thorp – Licensing Board
2. Councillor Currie – Improving Lives Select Commission
3. Councillor Fisher – Health Select Commission

Mover: Councillor Read

Secunder: Councillor Sheppard

127. AUDIT COMMITTEE

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

Mover: Councillor Marshall

Secunder: Councillor Baggaley

128. 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

Secunder: Councillor Cusworth

129. 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 Hughes

Secunder: Councillor Beresford

130. PLANNING BOARD

Councillor Williams reminded Members that the seminar on the changes to the National Planning Policy Framework would be held on Thursday 6 March 2025.

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

Mover: Councillor Williams

Seconder: Councillor Mault

131. STAFFING COMMITTEE

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

Mover: Councillor Read

Seconder: Councillor Jones

132. STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE

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

Mover: Councillor Monk

Seconder: Councillor Clarke

133. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSONS

There were 9 questions for the designated spokespersons:

(1) Councillor Ball noted the data sharing assisted bin collection collaboration between RMBC and SYFR had now started so asked how could this be promoted more as it would ultimately save lives?

Councillor Knight, Designated Spokesperson on South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority, confirmed the Fire Authority very much welcomed the collaboration with the Council around assisted bin collection data, which it hoped would make hundreds of people safer by allowing the service to offer Home Fire Safety Visits to residents who may be at greater risk of fire. The Fire Service had already promoted this initiative in the local press and online and would now use the initiative as a case study to encourage other partners to securely share appropriate levels of data where there was a clear public safety benefit.

In a supplementary question Councillor Ball gave praise to Barry Connolly and his team they had got this well organised. He, therefore, asked if the Spokesperson could provide assurances that this would be effectively monitored and reviewed to ensure it delivered real safety improvements to the residents of Rotherham and how would he let all Members know.

Councillor Knight was sure the communication would be forthcoming when it was available in terms of the data collected. He provided some additional background information in that the service had data from 900 residents of 7,000 and there was an incremental proposal to contact more residents in stages up to October 2025. That would obviously promote a discussion or a response from those residents and that data would then be shared in due course.

(2) Councillor Ball referred to Labour's plan to ban zero hours contracts which would directly impact SYFR. He asked what would be the financial cost of replacing this flexible workforce and how did the service plan to fund it without cutting other vital services or increasing taxes?

Councillor Knight, Designated Spokesperson on South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority, advised the service only had a very small number of zero hours contracts in place - almost exclusively relating to its contingency fire crew arrangements. The service would look to put in place alternative contracts of employment should it be required to do so, and this would have limited impact on the service's financial position.

In a supplementary question Councillor Ball expressed his worry about a possible strike happening where there was not cover anymore. He asked the Spokesperson to explore a little further into if there was a house fire in say Maltby, where there was not the contingency crew, who and how were they going to get an adequate response to that house fire when it needed three appliances to get to.

Councillor Knight explained that if this actually was a problem then clearly it was an issue that needed to be raised. He would question this with the Chief Fire Officer so asked Councillor Ball to forward him by email the exact wording and he would raise it with him at the next meeting.

Councillor Knight further reiterated that there were around forty zero hours contracts across the whole of South Yorkshire and as indicated in his previous answer, if it was necessary, further on-call fire officers would be recruited with little impact on the financial position.

(3) Councillor Ball asked what steps could be taken to strengthen collaboration between SYFR and Councillors to improve community safety and ensure local concerns were addressed effectively?

Councillor Knight, Designated Spokesperson on South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority, explained the service and its managers continued to work closely with all four local authorities in South Yorkshire to improve community safety and address local concerns. This included local managers working with partners and Councillors at both a ward and a district level. Councillors could continue to support the work of the fire service by championing safety campaigns and emergency prevention initiatives in their local areas.

In a supplementary question Councillor Ball asked, given the importance of strong collaboration between ourselves and South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service in addressing community safety, could the Spokesperson inform the Councillors present today who the area manager was for Rotherham so that they could be contacted.

Councillor Knight was unable to confirm the person by name for Rotherham, but was aware there was a Senior Leadership Team led by the Executive Leadership Team. He was sure the information would be available online, but would respond to Councillor Ball in writing.

(4) Councillor Ball referred to how recently 205 high-rise buildings in South Yorkshire were inspected, with 177 having fire safety issues. He asked how many high-rise buildings in Rotherham were inspected, how many had issues and what actions have been taken to address them?

Councillor Knight, Designated Spokesperson on South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority, confirmed there was only one building in Rotherham that fell in the scope of this audit. The building was Local Authority owned and no issues were identified by inspecting officers.

In a supplementary question Councillor Ball noted Rotherham had one with only two turntable ladders in the whole of South Yorkshire to deal with issues. He asked if there was a call to that one building in Rotherham where would they go and could the Spokesperson name the building.

Councillor Knight believed Councillor Ball knew the answer to the question.

(5) Councillor Ball asked what mechanisms did the Police and Crime Panel use to ensure that the Police and Crime Commission's policies on performance-related pay for police officers were transparent and aligned with the force's strategic objectives?

Councillor Harper, Designated Spokesperson on the Police and Crime Panel, confirmed that South Yorkshire Police did not have a performance related pay arrangement in place for Police staff. Police officers' pay was subject to national agreements and Police regulations and was, therefore, outside the Mayor's control.

(6) Councillor Ball asked how did the Police and Crime Panel ensure that the Police and Crime Commission had robust systems in place to prevent and address police misconduct, particularly in sensitive areas such as child protection?

Councillor Harper, Designated Spokesperson on the Police and Crime Panel, explained the role of the Police and Crime Panel was to scrutinise all decisions or actions in connection with the discharge of the Police and Crime Commissioner's functions. The Police and Crime Commissioner was only responsible for conduct matters relating to the Chief Constable.

The Police and Crime Panel were assured that the Mayor, in his wider responsibility for ensuring an efficient and effective police force, facilitated regular conversations between SYMCA (the Policing and Reform Directorate) and both the Force leadership (Chief Constable and Deputy

Chief Constable) as well as the Head of the Professional Standards Department to gain oversight and assurance over work in this area.

In addition, the Mayor supported the discipline process by providing (and paying for) legally qualified chairs (old regulations), legally qualified advisors (new regulations), independent panel members and Police appeals tribunal (PAT) chairs.

(7) Councillor A. Carter asked what impact would the Pensions Authority Investment Measures being behind target over recent time periods have on the pensions of those in the scheme?

Councillor Sutton, Designated Spokesperson on the South Yorkshire Pensions Authority, confirmed investment performance which could vary significantly from quarter to quarter did not impact the benefits payable to members of the scheme which were set out in statute. Investment risk within the scheme was borne by employers.

In a supplementary question Councillor A. Carter pointed out that given the fact that the Pensions Authority have targets on when they needed to specifically hit certain fund levels at certain time points, was the Spokesperson assured that being behind on the investments at that point, in recent times, would mean that that this would be met and what were the risks to the Pensions Authority and, therefore, the Council as one of the participants.

Councillor Sutton confirmed that this question would be responded to in writing.

(8) Councillor A. Carter asked with regards to the Authority's ambition to achieve net zero, currently being at risk of not being delivered in time, what actions have you as the representative taken to make sure this aim was delivered on time?

Councillor Sutton, Designated Spokesperson on the South Yorkshire Pensions Authority, confirmed the Pensions Authority regularly discussed progress to achieve its net zero goal which was agreed by Councilors in the knowledge that it was likely to be very difficult to achieve. A review of the investment strategy was being undertaken this year which would consider what changes to the strategic asset allocation could be undertaken which might accelerate progress to net zero while at the same time delivering the returns required to ensure that funds were available to pay pensions and maintain stable employer contributions.

In a supplementary question Councillor A. Carter asked had the Pensions Authority, therefore, as part of its ambition to achieve net zero given the targets being reached, looked at other measures they could take now such as investing elsewhere into making sure this was as timely as possible achieving this.

Councillor Sutton agreed to respond to this supplementary question in writing.

(9) Councillor A. Carter asked what calculations had the Authority undertaken to understand the impact on the climate of its investment strategy?

Councillor Sutton, Designated Spokesperson on the South Yorkshire Pensions Authority, confirmed the Pensions Authority undertook analysis when reviewing its investment strategy and as part of the actuarial valuation to understand the impact on its assets and liabilities of a number of different climate scenarios. This analysis would be updated over the course of 2025/26 and the current version was summarised in the Authority's Annual Climate report available on its website.

In a supplementary question Councillor A. Carter assumed that you as our representative agreed achieving net zero and having climate ethical investments for our pensions fund was important. He asked would the Spokesperson undertake or have you undertaken in your time there, undertake challenge to the Pensions Authorities to make sure that it divests from fossil fuel industries to make sure the pension fund was ethically, environmentally ethically achieving its goals while making sure that those involved in the pension scheme were able to get their pensions safely.

Councillor Sutton assured Councillor Carter that there were challenges raised over everything at the Pension Authority, and should this remain the case going forward challenges would continue.

134. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS AND CHAIRPERSONS

There were 31 questions for Cabinet Members and Chairpersons:

(1) Councillor Bacon asked would the Council finally implement a Public Space Protection Order on the Todwick A57 to crack down on the out-of-control racing?

Councillor Taylor, Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, considered Councillor Bacon's use of language in his question to be interesting with inference that the Cabinet Member had suggested painting a few lines that would be the ultimate solution to road traffic safety, which the Cabinet Member had not suggested at all. He suggested Councillor Bacon, therefore, watched this back.

The question did say would the Council finally implement a Public Space Protection Order which inferred there had already been quite considerable discussion. In the meetings the Cabinet Member had attended discussing this particular issue, including one with relevant officers, the Public Space Protection Order had never been mentioned.

The Council were aware that there was the possibility that one could be imposed and address the situation on the A57. This was, therefore, one of the items that was under consideration along with others, which was an ongoing process.

In a supplementary question Councillor Bacon confirmed it was difficult to decipher as first what the Cabinet Member was saying it was not mentioned and then later said it under consideration. Clearly the Council needed to use all tools available to it, so he wondered what the Cabinet Member's thoughts were on the use of a Public Space Protection Order against other tools.

Councillor Taylor clarified by confirming that he had not said it had not been discussed, he confirmed that in meetings he had attended it had not been discussed, of which there were many.

A Public Space Protection Order was one of the tools that was under consideration, but it was dependent on reaching certain criteria under the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014. If this criteria was met then it was a measure that would be considered in more depth. These kind of orders had been used in the other parts of the country, but what impact they have had would need to be considered in the findings to hopefully come to a satisfactory solution as it was a real problem to the people on the A57.

(2) Councillor Bacon asked how much money was spent in Rotherham town centre compared to communities such as Aston and Todwick?

Councillor Read, Leader of the Council, explained it was quite difficult to estimate how much Council money was spent in any given ward because it followed individuals by and large rather than places which meant data sets were needed that did not really exist.

On a rough calculation it was expected the Council would spend £1.8 billion over the course of the next three years over both its revenue and capital programmes and approximately 0.35% of that would be spent on regeneration schemes in the town centre.

In a supplementary question Councillor Bacon referred to vast sums going into Rotherham town centre, meanwhile communities like Aston and Todwick were only receiving pennies to pounds. He was wondering if the Leader would look at this and see how the spending could be balanced throughout the borough.

Councillor Read explained how more than 99.5 % of all the money the Council spent was not just spent on regeneration scheme in the town centre. It was spent on by and large individuals, residents and families in the places where they lived.

Referring back to the discussions during this meeting the majority of the regeneration money for the town centre was externally funded and intended for regeneration purposes.

It was hard to make a case that those regeneration schemes should be redirected into a village outside the town centre and say the Council decided to build a cinema and some restaurant units in Todwick village for example.

It was likely people would find that a bit of a challenge to understand why that was the case. It was actually residents that set the task of regenerating the town centre and one the Council was undertaking in a prudent way and bringing in additional investment to do so. This made up a small proportion of the money that was spent right across the northern part of the Borough.

(3) Councillor Thorp referred to Broom Lane crossing having had a lot of media attention on X due to how unsafe this crossing had become, both at the morning school run and then again when parents were collecting their children at the end of the school day. This was worse after the crossing attendant gave her notice, so what was the Cabinet Member going to do?

Councillor Taylor, Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy, explained in the immediate term Officers were liaising with the Central Neighbourhood Policing Team, who were prepared to deploy their team to this location for some limited periods.

This may assist in providing some community confidence and a short-term improvement in driving standards. It would also give a better indication of the situation there.

The Cabinet Member did not share the same links on X so was not aware of the conversations going on. He was aware through the consultation process that there were opportunities within that programme to implement something that had a true beneficial effect.

In a supplementary question Councillor Thorp confirmed he had spoken to the Cabinet Member about this and submitted questions into SYMCA on the CRSTS funding which should be able to include making safer crossings and safer access to schools for children under active travel. He asked the Cabinet Member if he agreed with him that that was a good way to try and go to get funding for this instead of taking it as just a little side line to the cycle lane funding.

Councillor Taylor agreed with anything that improved the safety standards on roads, but there were certain criteria that had to be dealt with within those bidding processes. The design was underway after the first stage of consultation and there would be a further period of consultation to

examine to see whether there was an appropriate means to address the issue in that area.

In addition, the Crossing Warden post had been out to advert since the 6th January, 2025 on a rolling programme until the position was filled.

(4) Councillor Thorp would receive a written response to his question from the Cabinet Member for Finance & Safe and Clean Communities.

(5) Councillor Bacon asked how many times had the Leader of the Council, as a portfolio holder, reported to the SYMCA's scrutiny board as per Government scrutiny guidance?

Councillor Read, Leader of the Council, confirmed he had been as many times as Councillor Bacon had invited him to go, which confirmed he had not been whilst in this portfolio role.

In a supplementary question Councillor Bacon reiterated that he had not received the answer he expected. Government guidance of the scrutiny protocol issued in November was very clear in that it was for portfolio holders of the Mayoral Combined Authorities to go to these meetings whether they were invited or not. The portfolio holders had responsibility and should be answerable to scrutiny. No doubt that invitation would come, but he asked would the Leader make sure that where there was an opportunity to attend he would go to scrutiny?

Councillor Read responded by confirming all Leaders were very happy to go to scrutiny. Councillor Bacon appeared to indicate that Leaders should simply turn up to scrutiny meetings just on the off chance that there was something that could be raised.

The MCA board meetings were all public meetings and open to public questions at the beginning. The Leader would be very happy to see Councillor Bacon there.

(6) Councillor Bacon asked how important was SYMCA to Rotherham Council?

Councillor Read, Leader of the Council, confirmed the SYMCA were fairly important to the Council.

In a supplementary response Councillor Bacon did not expect the Leader's response considering the millions of pounds that they were being given every single year, but on this did the Leader think it acceptable that for one of his representatives, who was supposed to attend the Audit Committee, had not attended a single meeting in six months and only half of those times sent a representative?

Councillor Read started with the first part of Councillor Bacon's question in that Rotherham was a net beneficiary to the tune of tens of millions of pounds a year from membership of SYMCA. The contributions that the Council made were overwhelmingly for transport purposes because SYMCA was the transport authority, and those payments were required either way or under any other kind of transport authority arrangements.

Perhaps Councillor Bacon was misled in his understanding of how that worked. The Leader was happy to talk to Audit Members of the Committee who took those roles very seriously. If there was a difficulty or a challenge that somebody was facing against attending those meetings, then this was perfectly understandable.

The Leader found it odd that Councillor Bacon would seek to criticise other people when he had not managed to invite him to a meeting or turn up to one of the other meetings to ask the burning questions he had.

(7) Councillor Thorp had asked how many children in RMBC care were housed outside Rotherham. The Cabinet Member had said that £4.4 million could be saved if they were cared for in Rotherham and the supplementary question had asked how many could the Council bring back into Rotherham with the facilities. No number was given to the question. He asked was this an impossible question to answer.

Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, explained it was not possible to give a specific response to how many children could return as this was such an individual care planning issue. The Council would not wish to move children on a large scale as this would not be supportive to their needs. As indicated previously, the Council were trying to locate more children within the borough where this was possible and appropriate for them.

The numbers of children coming into care was reducing, but if a child was brought into care, then ideally they should be placed within the borough if appropriate.

It was more difficult to start bringing children back from out of the borough. Sometimes this worked and sometimes this could be a really positive move for them. The thing with residential care was that it was always hoped that this would eventually be a step down to foster care.

Councillor Cusworth was appreciative of Councillor Thorp's interest in the particular issue, but there must have been some sort of a revelation as the Conservative Group had voted against every single proposal before the Planning Board to have residential homes within the borough of which Councillor Thorp was a member.

In a supplementary response Councillor Thorp believed the Cabinet Member's statement to be incorrect. Before he became an Elected Member, Councillor Bacon had actually voted for a children's home. The

only property that had been to Planning Board while he was a member was a property on Broom Lane, which was a semi-detached. He had asked for Housing Officers to attend to ascertain their views, but they did not turn up.

(8) Councillor Thorp asked if children who were within RMBC care placed in homes within Rotherham in private children's homes or were the service actually having to hire in outside contractors to do this job. These contractors obviously must be purchasing homes in Rotherham, making them as homes or were the service actually pressing ahead with a new home. He further asked was there a new one coming up shortly?

Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, explained yes there were some children placed within Rotherham Borough living in independent residential homes. These homes could set up as private businesses and had been the market for the past fourteen years under the Conservative Government, of which there had been much profiteering.

However, there were some good providers out there, albeit expensive, but the Council had good relationships and confidence in some companies who had residential homes for children where some of Rotherham's children were placed.

The decision was always made in the best interest of the child involved at the time and place was based on available options. There was huge pressure on the placements and demand for them was high. This was why the commercial element of care had come forward and every Local Authority across the country was in the same position obtaining placements for children.

Rotherham was much further ahead than other Authorities in that it was looking to provide its own in-house residential care so hopefully when the next application came before Planning Board, Councillor Thorp would be supportive.

In a supplementary question Councillor Thorp asked if the service had a further home coming forward and hoped this was going to be rolled out as this was something the Council needed.

Children needed these homes and if it was the right house in the right place then Councillor Thorp would be in favour. He asked, therefore, if when the application came forward that the right people be in attendance to answer questions and could this be arranged.

Councillor Cusworth confirmed the Council had a strong Commissioning Team in Children's Services led by Helen Sweaton and a great deal of work was undertaken before an application was put before Planning. There were lots of consultation with Ward Members as long as they were

not on Planning. Every effort would be made to ensure the right people were in attendance, but officers from the service were usually present.

(9) Councillor Bennett-Sylvester would receive a written response to this question.

(10) Councillor Bennett-Sylvester would receive a written response to this question.

(11) Councillor Thorp asked why did so many of RMBC consultations have the main agenda set out beforehand or the questions set so that only one outcome could come from it. Just like this question, as he could only see one consultation that had not followed that path.

Councillor Sheppard, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Neighbourhood Working, confirmed every consultation was undertaken for a specific reason and that meant the consultations were different as they were tailored to the issue that was being considered.

However, the Council's Consultation and Engagement Framework set out the standards to be achieved, including being clear about why a consultation was being held and what impact it may have. The framework clearly stated that:-

- Consultation needed to take place when proposals were still at a formative stage.
- The Council should enter into the consultation with an open mind.
- Consultation needed to take place before decisions have been made.

Many consultation exercises have led to improvements in the decision-making process, for example, town centre redevelopment plans were changed to better reflect the needs of visually impaired people following a consultation exercise. Meanwhile, Wath Town Centre scheme was changed following feedback from the community with the library being moved to the ground floor of the development.

Finally, in the Budget item this was an open ended consultation, as was the Council Plan and the Council were already acting upon some of the issues raised with the investment in the Street Safe Team.

In a supplementary question Councillor Thorp asked if it was possible for the Council to look back at the way these consultations were set out. There were certain consultations that when you start to answer them you could not move forward unless you answered the questions in the way the Council wanted or gave the answers that they wanted. Now whether this was Council policy or not would the Cabinet Member please look into this because in certain consultations this was not happening.

Councillor Sheppard asked Councillor Thorp if he had specific details to share as there would be different responses to different questions. If evidence could be provided the Cabinet Member would certainly look into it.

(12) Councillor Ball would receive a written response to this question.

(13) Councillor Ball would receive a written response to this question.

(14) Councillor Yasseen asked why was there no prior consultation with Ward Councillors before the Selective Licensing Cabinet report was published and in most cases not even before the Selective Licensing public consultation?

Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, confirmed the Cabinet report in September was to seek approval to consult on the proposed Selective Licensing areas. All Members would have been aware that it was coming from the Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

All Ward Councillors for the affected areas were emailed directly on the 19th December 2024, prior to the consultation going public on the 6th January 2025. The email gave information on the proposals, directed Councillors to the dedicated webpages and made an offer to attend Community Action Partnerships (CAP Meetings) to discuss the proposals in more detail. The Cabinet Member was informed by officers that they did not receive a response from Councillor Yasseen.

In a supplementary question Councillor Yasseen pointed out about having a neighbourhood working agenda and would have liked to have seen this being brought forward for an agenda where regular slots were provided. The Neighbourhood Office should have been aware of this if it was something affecting a particular ward. Where it would have made a difference was if Ward Members had been involved from an earlier point in this consultation. It could have helped and given better understanding why the Council was reluctant to support a more tailored and area specific approach across Rotherham and not what seemed like with a select group of VIP landlords.

Councillor Allen reiterated that an offer to come out to Community Action Partnerships or ward briefings if required was made. This had only been taken up in one area, but the offer was there as the Council was in no way restricting who it talked to about these proposals.

(15) Councillor Yasseen asked on behalf of a resident from Boston Castle, why, when Rotherham's Selective Licensing scheme had failed for the last ten years, should good tenants and landlords pay for the Council's failure for another five years?

Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, confirmed under the 2020-25 selective licencing declarations, 2,021 full proactive property inspections under the Housing Act's Health and Safety Rating system where 69% of properties (one in seven properties) in selective licensing areas had Category 1 or 2 hazards present. This was not the Council failing, this was landlords failing their tenants. It was also pointed out that the fee for selective licensing did not have to be passed on to tenants, but some landlords chose to do so and good landlords could receive a rebate on the fee they paid when properties were well managed and in good condition.

In a supplementary question Councillor Yasseen asked how could the Council justify stricter regulations and private landlords while neglecting compliance in its own properties? For example, there had been a 12% drop in meeting decent home standards in 2023/24, which obviously in terms of the context could potentially lead to inevitable negative impact on Council tenants.

Councillor Allen confirmed this was a valid question which highlighted the difference between social and private rented sector properties and the management of them. The Authority had flagged up that change in the number of properties meeting the decent homes standard because it was recognised there had been a numerical error made. From the 12% drop the Council was already on its way back up to 100% compliance.

Also as a Local Authority, with every other authority in the country, the Council was subject to regulation by the Social Housing Regulator who would have their own programme of inspection. This again highlighted the parity there between the private and the social sector. So it was not just about justifying anything, this was about good practice in housing management aimed at improving the living standards and health of local residents.

(16) Councillor Ball would receive a written response to this question.

(17) Councillor Ball would receive a written response to this question.

(18) Councillor Yasseen referred to tenants' fear that the proposed increased selective licensing fees would push rents up, making them unaffordable and push some of Rotherham's poorest tenants into homelessness. With the Council already struggling to accommodate rising homelessness cases, could the Cabinet Member guarantee that those affected would not end up in Carlton Park hotel or other hotels due to an inability to pay higher rents?

Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, reiterated what she had just said in answer to the last question. Fees do not have to be passed on to tenants. The landlord could decide as part of their social conscience to not do so.

Rotherham Council had a Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy which quite clearly stated the intention to stop the routine use of hotels as temporary accommodation. However, when someone presented as emergency homeless would people rather see the Council turn them away instead of using a hotel as the only available option.

The current license fee of £521 had been a feature of the housing market for the last five years without significant homelessness being attributed to the declaration and the new fee was subject to consultation.

The alternative to this sort of scheme was that significant numbers of Rotherham residents were forced into accommodation that was not safe and not fit for human habitation. Councillor Yasseen would form her own view about whether she was able to tolerate that, but for the Council that would be unconscionable.

In a supplementary question Councillor Yasseen explained she had dealt with lots of complaints with the largest landlord locally, which was the Council. She went to many places which were regarded as not habitable, but they were not always in the private sector.

The Cabinet Member agreed that hotels were not a sustainable solution and were expensive. Councillor Yasseen asked would the Council recognise that it was in the best interest of tenants that private landlords were seen as a key partner in addressing social housing needs and adopt a more asset-based approach instead of treating them as Adversaries.

Councillor Allen confirmed work had taken place with landlords and they have been invited to training sessions to explain the purposes of selective licensing. The Council had also tried to get them to have a self-regulated approach around selective licensing but, unfortunately there had been negligible uptake on that. This was not just about landlords, this was about the housing conditions that people encountered.

The Cabinet Member had also brought a number of photographs that showed the sort of hazards found in private sector properties. This was not about an adversarial relationship with landlords as the Council was always available to talk with them.

(19) Councillor Yasseen asked why did the Council not commission an independent body to undertake public consultation on Selective Licensing as was proposed in the relevant Cabinet report of 16th September 2024?

Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, confirmed this was explored before starting the consultation and private companies were approached to quote to deliver the process independently. However, no company could deliver the full consultation specification and, therefore, this could not be progressed.

In a supplementary question Councillor Yasseen asked if the Cabinet Member thought on reflection that maybe the Council should have gone independently as she had been to drop-ins, reviewed the website and organised her own community meetings yet it felt that an independent approach would have been better. Residents felt that this was not undertaken as the Council were frightened of what the responses might have been and may not have received the right answers to the questions asked. Therefore, there was loaded bias.

Councillor Allen explained the suggestion would not have been put in the September 2024 Cabinet report to use an independent body to do the consultation if it had not been meant. This was clearly the intention at the time and the Council would have preferred that route. However, feedback through the comments so far from the consultation had criticised the consultation methodology. However, from the latest update on 27 February, thirty-five emails about the proposals had been received for the Selective Licensing areas and of those only six mentioned their dissatisfaction with the online survey. So, it appeared that some have criticised the consultation whilst many have been able to engage without any concern.

(20) Councillor Ball would receive a written response to this question.

(21) Councillor Yasseen asked how did the Council justify proceeding with the current Selective Licensing consultation that had been publicly criticised for being misleading, confusing, and inaccessible to many residents?

Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, confirmed the consultation would be reviewed to inform the Council's final decision on whether to implement the Policy or not. Some have criticised the consultation, whilst many others have been able to engage without any concern. All of this would be considered when the Council made its final decision.

In a supplementary question Councillor Yasseen confirmed she had spoken to hundreds of people now and even in the meeting a few weeks ago at a drop-in session there was nearly one hundred people present. So there was a body of people that actually were criticising it.

Even now after having raised it in these drop-ins the Council website was incorrect. For example the northern part of Boston Castle Ward had been renamed Eastwood, which was in Rotherham East Ward.

Given this confusion and misleading description, did the Cabinet Member not think the Council should show more due diligence and consider essentially addressing some of these mistakes that were still there on the website. Councillor Yasseen had raised this at several meetings now.

Councillor Allen was always interested to hear that there were errors on consultation documents and indeed any correspondence that the Council actually sent out. She herself had not been in those meetings where the specific details had been raised, but asked Councillor Yasseen to let her know and she would be more than happy to take them up with the service concerned.

(22) Councillor Yasseen asked why were areas such as Kimberworth and Clifton not clearly referenced in consultation documents for Selective Licensing, leading to residents, especially tenants, receiving inaccurate or misleading information?

Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, confirmed she had learnt as part of the Selective Licensing consultation that Jordan was a hamlet of Kimberworth which she had to go back and clarify. So she expressed some personal sympathy with some of the confusion about the areas that were identified.

Councillor Allen went on to confirm the Council was made aware early in the consultation that not all residents, tenants and landlords realised via the correspondence that the boundaries of the areas proposed had changed.

Once this feedback was received by the Council on the Sunday 26th January, the changes were made to the website and was amended to make this more explicit. These amendments were made on the first working day after the initial email, which was Monday 27th January, 2025.

The original hard copy leaflets produced and delivered to 16,000 addresses referred to 'Eastwood/Town Centre' for the proposed areas which included Clifton and referred to 'Masbrough' for the area which included some areas of Kimberworth. Maps of both areas were included in the correspondence to show the full extent of the proposal and the Online Survey included all the individual areas by name.

In a supplementary Councillor Yasseen believed this whole consultation had been rushed and, therefore, mistakes were being made. A failure to generally explore alternative approaches with tenants, landlords and residents had been a missed opportunity and she hoped that this was not going to be a forever missed opportunity.

In light of the Government introducing the Renters' Rights Bill, what was the rush, why was it being pushed forward with a poor defective licensing scheme when time could be given to reflecting on what was needed. She agreed with the Cabinet Member that no-one should live in a house that

was not habitable and the Council should strive to be raising housing standards. This, however, was not the way to do it.

Councillor Allen did not feel the consultation was being rushed. The report in September was seeking permission to go out to consult. A statutory ten-week consultation would have been implemented by the 17th March and the results of that consultation would be brought in June.

So, between the 17th March and the beginning of June, there would be time to reflect upon the consultation outcomes. The current scheme would cease at the end of March and there was a requirement to take a mandatory three-month break. This would be happening and time would be given to reflect on what had come back via the consultation and this would be included in the final report that would be presented in June.

(23) Councillor A. Carter thanked the Cabinet Member for his email last week confirming that the parking changes at the shops on Brinsworth Lane would start on 10th March. Given the year delay, would the Cabinet Member commit to doing a thorough review into delays and stakeholder communication issues, so these could be improved upon for future projects?

Councillor Sheppard, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Neighbourhood Working, confirmed the complexity of the Brinsworth Lane project lay in the private sector land ownership matters which required resolution prior to the project commencing. Whilst every effort was made to communicate this, these challenges perhaps could have been better anticipated in order to manage expectations.

It was good practice to evaluate the successes and potential for improvement as projects drew to a close and this would be undertaken on the Towns and Villages programme.

In a supplementary question Councillor A. Carter asked when that review came would the Ward Members be consulted and could the Cabinet Member confirm the results of any consultation on any review.

Councillor Sheppard confirmed as soon as this information was available he would be happy to share that with Ward Members.

(24) Councillor A. Carter asked regarding Selective Licensing, what steps had the Council taken to engage and seek views of tenants directly affected by the proposed new Selective Licensing scheme?

Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, confirmed the Council was very keen to hear tenants' views to balance the consultation feedback and would ask Members to encourage private tenants and residents in proposed areas to participate in the consultation.

The online consultation survey was available for private tenants to express their views anonymously if they preferred. 16,000 information leaflets have been posted out to every postal address in the proposed areas to advise of the proposal, including maps and basic information, with a QR code link and a web address to access the online consultation survey. The leaflet also offered access to a paper version of the survey and invited tenants to six consultation events in the proposed areas to let them speak to officers directly. A further consultation day on 1st March 2025 was added and publicised in the local press and on social media to allow anyone who had not been able to attend previous consultation events.

To complement the leaflets, similar information had been displayed on lampposts in each of the areas and two paid advertisements and an editorial in the Advertiser, have informed residents of the proposals and the ways to become engaged in the consultation.

In a supplementary Councillor A. Carter explained having gone to the consultation event in Brinsworth found it was poorly attended with only a handful of tenants present.

Councillor Carter hoped that the online consultation had elicited more views from tenants certainly and throughout the borough and in Brinsworth. He had a number of concerns regarding the consultation in that the areas looked at for selective licensing were often more deprived areas.

Lots of the consultation literature sounded quite technical and very much in Council speak and from his experience in Brinsworth of the areas that were proposed the issue on those streets was engagement with Council services.

Councillor Carter, therefore, asked would it not be better to proactively knock on the doors of those residents and would the Cabinet Member agree that any new Selective Licensing should be paused until the Renters' Rights Bill had come into force and the Council could then evaluate the impact this was having on residents.

Councillor Allen noted the point about the areas being amongst the most deprived. This, indeed, was one of the criteria for an area being included in a selected licensing declaration.

Some door knocking had been undertaken, but the Cabinet Member was listening and would take this back to the survey and see if more could be facilitated.

Councillor Allen hoped this had been demonstrated in her answer to Councillor Yasseen that the consultation was not being rushed, that it was in accordance with the statutory consultation period, there would be that mandatory three-month break and a further couple of months before the report was brought back for final approval.

(25) Councillor Ball would receive a written response to this question.

(26) Councillor A. Carter asked with the introduction of RSV vaccination in certain groups, what had been the impact in the borough so far on deaths and pressures on health and social care services?

Councillor Baker-Rogers, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, confirmed the RSV vaccination program was introduced in the UK in September 2024 and was targeted at older adults aged seventy-five plus and pregnant women to provide protection to their infants.

The vaccine programme was the responsibility of NHS England and the question should be addressed to the regional screening and immunisation team who should be able to provide data on uptake and the impact so far.

(27) Councillor A. Carter asked would the Cabinet Member support RSV vaccination to health and social care workers, and other frontline Council staff?

Councillor Baker-Rogers, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, confirmed the national RSV vaccination program was targeted at two vulnerable cohorts, infants under the age of one year (protected through vaccination of the mother during pregnancy) and those aged over seventy-five.

There was no evidence to support a more universal approach, so in this case the Council would not support the vaccination of health and social care workers.

In a supplementary question Councillor A. Carter asked was this the same strategy applied with the flu vaccination as he was aware of a number of organisations and companies that offered this staff to reduce sickness during that winter period.

Councillor Baker-Rogers believed this to be the case, but would confirm for definite in writing.

(28) Councillor Ball would receive a written response to this question.

(29) Councillor A. Carter asked with the Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders project set to conclude in September, what was the strategy to continue supporting affected children beyond this time?

Councillor Cusworth, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services, confirmed One Adoption South Yorkshire (the regional organization that managed adoption processes for the Borough) funded a two-year project attempting to identify the prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) in adopted children and supported the development of pathways to meet their needs. This had been led by Chris Clark from Doncaster Council, which hosted the One Adoption Service and would conclude in March 2025.

It had been difficult to establish the prevalence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders in South Yorkshire as indeed was the case across the country. With the ending of the project for this very small group of children, it had been recognised by both Public Health and ICB colleagues that this was potentially a broader public health issue.

There would continue to be representation from the Best Start and Beyond Public Health team in the working groups for the One Adoption Project and the programme lead would provide details of progress.

In addition, there would continue to be Public Health membership in South Yorkshire groups with focus on FASD including the Local Maternity and Neonatal System (LMNS) Prevention steering group; South Yorkshire Safeguarding In the 1st Year of life group and the ICB led South Yorkshire FASD Prevention Group. The output from these groups was largely focused on prevention and raising awareness. The project lead, Chris Clark, was working with the Assessment and Diagnosis Group to identify leads to continue practice as business as usual once the project had ended.

The Public Health Team have an e-learning package which had been widely promoted and there had been encouraging take up of this offer.

A Community of Practice had been created for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders run by NHS England Sheffield. This was provided via Professor Mukherjee, who has developed a pathway for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders assessment and diagnosis and all four areas within South Yorkshire have access to the monthly supervision. Awareness raising and training would continue to be delivered by the project until the summer.

Councillor Cusworth also gave further assurance that this was something she was very passionate about and since the new research where more children may be affected than initially thought, it was something that she would closely monitor.

In a supplementary question Councillor A. Carter welcomed the prevention work and identification on the increased prevalence of incidents happening in the region, country and world. He asked about the process of how these children were going to be identified moving forward, for them not to be lost in the system in the first place and whether this was prevention during the antenatal period and then referral into service. He

asked was this a specific service or what extra support could be given to that neonatal infant and onwards and whether this had improved to what had been available prior to this trial.

Councillor Cusworth confirmed she would provide more information in writing on the actual process. The balance was for children receiving support that they needed regardless of the diagnosis or the cause of that need, versus campaigns around the dangers of consuming alcohol during pregnancy and the impact that that might have in trying to campaign and lobby from a public health point of view.

(30) Councillor A. Carter asked how did the Council identify, interact, and support unpaid carers within the borough?

Councillor Baker-Rogers, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, confirmed the Council had a variety of ways in which it identified, interacted and supported unpaid carers within the Borough as the Council recognised the invaluable contribution carers made and wanted to ensure they were fully supported to sustain their caring roles for as long as they were able and willing to do so.

The Adult Social Care Teams were fully trained to recognise informal carers where referrals were received for adults who had presenting needs for care and support and/or where carers were referred or self-refer for assessment and support.

The Adult Care and Integration Service had recently established Carers Link Officer roles to enhance the offer further and to ensure informal carers received the support they need at the earliest opportunity. Types of support offered were dependent on the individual circumstances of the carer and could include the provision of information and advice, one off support services, carers breaks, registration with commissioned Carers Emergency Scheme as well as ongoing support linked to the carers' specific individual needs.

In a supplementary question Councillor A. Carter asked if the Council was sure it was adequately capturing the full amount of unpaid care within the borough and if yes how sure could the Council be and if no was there anything that should be done additionally to proactively do this. He further asked how this could be facilitated for those who were doing a good service for their families, their friends, and therefore by extension as a whole being unpaid carers.

Additionally, he asked how were the Council then being able to support them moving forward perhaps into a time where they needed to balance other varying roles alongside their care and responsibilities.

Councillor Baker-Rogers confirmed the Council had recently updated its web page information to provide full information to carers about the support available via the Council and other commissioned services and

groups such as the Making Space Dementia Cafes and Carers Forums. The web pages also included information about financial, emotional wellbeing support and training available to carers as well as links to the Carers Directory and Carers Newsletter, which was published bi-annually.

In terms of how many carers were reached a definitive number could not be provided, but the Council was doing as much as it actually could to reach out to unpaid carers so that they could find out about the support that was offered by the Council and other third parties in the town.

(31) Councillor A. Carter asked what was your view on the current waiting times for NHS talking therapies within the borough and was the Cabinet Member helping to ensure these waits were as low as possible?

Councillor Baker-Rogers, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, confirmed Talking Therapies for Rotherham residents are provided by the Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber NHS Trust (RDaSH). Targets for assessment and treatment were four weeks, and eighteen weeks respectively. Currently the service was achieving:-

- telephone or on-line assessment for individuals within days of referral.
- face to face assessment within 7-8 weeks.
- 10-14 weeks for remote counselling.
- 30-35 weeks for face-to-face counselling.
- 12-16 weeks for remote CBT.
- and 16-25 weeks for face-to-face CBT.

Councillor Baker-Roger's assessment would be that some of those timeframes were being met, but it also depended on how the service was actually delivered. There was work to do to improve, but the Cabinet Member was committed to reducing those timeframes.

In a supplementary question Councillor A. Carter was pleased to hear the targets were often less than the eighteen-week target. At the risk of straying into his own professional experience in healthcare Councillor Carter expressed concern about NHS Talking Therapies and their target levels being far too long. He asked would the Cabinet Member agree those targets set as an ICB and as a Council everyone should try to make sure that those waiting times come down. From experience this could lead to much more prolonged and mental health medications that could be addressed through talking therapy.

Councillor Baker-Roger's simple answer to this was yes when it was possible to do so.

135. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items to consider.