

**COUNCIL MEETING
21st May, 2025**

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

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

9. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor reported on the passing of Lindsay Johnston, a former Councillor for Wingfield who served on the Council from May 1999 until May 2016. The Council observed a minute's silence in honour of the former Councillor.

The Mayor was delighted to announce the safe arrival of Councillors Adam and Charlotte Carter's new baby who was born just prior to the Annual Civic Council meeting on 16 May 2025. Members gave the new baby a round of applause.

The reporting of Mayoral Activities would commence from July 2025.

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Beck, Cowen, Garnett, Havard, Lelliott, Monk and Pitchley.

11. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS COUNCIL MEETING

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous Council meeting held on 9 April 2025.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 9 April 2025 be approved for signature by the Mayor.

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Cusworth

12. PETITIONS

There were no petitions to consider.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest to record.

14. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were 4 public questions:

1. Mr Mabbott: At the November 2024 Council meeting I asked whether there were any plans for the '2025 Children's Capital of Culture' to include an event about Gaza. I was told this would be considered and I would be updated. This has not happened. Could the Leader of the Council please provide an update and explain the lack of progress so far?

The Leader apologised that there had been no further correspondence but confirmed that the idea put forward by Mr Mabbott had been suggested. The Leader explained the process for developing the programme. Groups would submit proposals for consideration by both the Cultural Partnership Board and a Youth Programming Panel. These groups made the decision on what events were taken forward.

An Open Call for submissions first opened in summer 2024, and there had been occasional reminders on social media since then. To date, 36 had been received, 27 of which were approved to progress to full application. The Leader advised Mr Mabbott that should he know of a group who would like to submit a proposal, the Cultural Partnership could arrange for the Expression of Interest documentation to be sent by email.

In his supplementary question, Mr Mabbott stated that the inclusion of an event around Gaza would be a great opportunity as many young people had been involved in various protests and meetings about the conflict. Mr Mabbott had seen drawings, paintings, stories and a rap produced by young people which showed that they cared about this. It bothered them and they were not immune to what was going on. In light of this, Mr Mabbott asked if the diversity of the Rotherham community could be embraced?

The Leader stated that a diverse group of young people had been involved in putting the programme together. The Leader could not commit to specific events but if a group of young people wanted to make a suggestion, the team would be happy to talk to them about that and do something that was appropriate.

2. Mr Ashraf: Thousands of Rotherham and South Yorkshire taxpayers and SYPA scheme members have recently signed a petition for divestment of pension investments in Israeli government bonds, etcetera.

After I forward the information to you, can you give serious thought to what is possible for Rotherham Council to action in regard to the petition vis-a-vis SYPA, and reply with your considered response?

The Leader explained that he was happy to receive information from Mr Ashraf and then respond. However he was clear that in agreeing to review the information, the Council could only make recommendations to South Yorkshire Pensions Authority and it would be up to them whether they decided to accept them.

Mr Ashraf thanked the Leader for his response and for the response from Councillor Sutton to a supplementary question at the last Council meeting.

3. Mr Azam: Can you please confirm the current capacity at the following cemeteries:
- Maltby
 - Wath
 - East Herringthorpe - Muslim Section

Mr Azam was not present to ask his question and would receive a written response.

4. Mr Griffin: In respect of the Linkwood Park development in Dalton, is there an agreement in place (under s.38 of the Highways Act 1980 or otherwise) to ensure the roads will be constructed to an adoptable standard within a specified timeframe, without further unnecessary delays for completion, by the developer (Gleeson Homes)?

Mr Griffin was not present to ask his question and would receive a written response.

15. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

16. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL'S STATEMENT

The Leader was invited to present his statement. He shared his concerns regarding the current situation at Liberty Steel. Liberty Steel had withdrawn their original restructuring plan which had been intended to maintain the viability of the speciality steel plants in Rotherham and Stocksbridge. There was still a legal process to run over the coming weeks, but the Leader stated that the potential inability to reach agreement with creditors in court was a matter of grave concern. Over 1500 employees across Rotherham and Sheffield would be rightly concerned about their employment. Earlier in the year, the South Yorkshire Mayor, Oliver Coppard, the Leader of Sheffield City Council,

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Councillor Tom Hunt and the Leader had met with the Business Minister Sarah Jones MP to share concerns about the future of the business. The Leader explained to the Chamber that the situation remained fluid and unclear, but he would be making further representations to the Government to seek to ensure that everything possible was done to protect the future of steel making in the borough. The Leader stressed that in an uncertain world, domestic resilience and sustainable supply chains were as important as ever. The country could no longer rely on imports and exports in the way it had previously done. The future of the Rotherham and Sheffield plants was therefore a matter of national significance. It was vital that everyone did what they could to ensure it was considered as such.

The Leader announced that Councillor Allen and Councillor Taylor would be stepping down from Cabinet at the conclusion of the meeting. He thanked them both for their hard work, commitment and dedication. The Leader subsequently announced his new Cabinet and the portfolio's they would be responsible for:

- Leader of the Council – Councillor Read
- Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – Councillor Cusworth
- Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health – Councillor Baker-Rogers
- Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety – Councillor Alam
- Cabinet Member for Housing – Councillor Beresford
- Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Green Spaces – Councillor Marshall
- Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy – Councillor Williams

The Leader highlighted significant activity from across the borough that had taken place since the last meeting:

- The opening of Vetro Lounge and the imminent opening of Signature Dish at Forge Island.
- A number of events had been held to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of VE Day.
- The first of the baby packs had been delivered.
- The latest stage of the Rotherham Roads programme had been agreed.
- Work on the markets was gathering pace.
- The planning application for the new flood defences at Whiston had been submitted and would be considered in due course.

The Leader of the Majority Opposition Group, Councillor Z Collingham, was invited to respond to the statement. He agreed with the comments made regarding Liberty Steel, stating that it was a massive employer and very important for domestic production. He also passed on his thanks to Councillor Allen and Councillor Taylor for their work on Cabinet.

Councillor Z Collingham paid tribute to the Times journalist, Andrew Norfolk who had sadly passed away. He had been a dogged journalist who asked difficult questions of the Council at a time when some people did not want to answer them. His refusal to give up was a big part of why, eventually, the truth behind and extent of Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham was revealed. The Government had declined in January to pursue a national inquiry, and at that time, Councillor Read had said that he was not convinced that it would have been effective or feasible. Since then Baroness Casey had been asked to conduct a rapid audit that was supposed to have concluded within three months, but this was still outstanding after five months. Provision had been made for five councils to conduct local inquiries but just last month, Oldham and others had asked for additional statutory powers that they felt they needed but this was being denied. Councillor Collingham asked the Leader if he felt that it was incumbent on authorities like Rotherham to contact the government and make strong representations that more be done and quicker, in order to support victims and survivors.

Councillor Collingham also referenced the apparent collapse of the Ultimate Battery Company Ltd which had been expected to bring around 500 jobs to the area. It had ceased trading and taken £5.2 million of SYMCA grants and loans with it which had now been written off. Councillor Collingham made a comparison to Vetro Lounge and Forge Island, stating that public money had been entrusted with a developer and private organisation.

Concerns were also raised that the South Yorkshire Mayor had appointed a Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner to carry out his responsibilities, despite Mayor Coppard taking a pay increase to reflect those extra responsibilities. So now there were two people on two separate salaries doing that role. Councillor Collingham asked what actions the Leader would take to make sure that there were governance arrangements in place for these sort of things and to save money where possible and ensure public money was protected.

Councillor Collingham referenced the recent local elections that had taken place in other parts of the country and more specifically, Doncaster. The replacement of both Labour and Conservative Councillors with Reform Councillors showed that there had been a change in public views. The public wanted more action on issues like CSE, on wasted public spending and on other things like blanket solar farms in the countryside. Councillor Collingham stated that those priorities had now been made clear to himself and the Leader. He stated that the Conservative group had been making those arguments in Rotherham for the past four years. He

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therefore asked if the Leader would change what he was doing in anyway? Councillor Collingham stated that this was not aping Reform but listening to residents.

The Leader was invited to respond to Councillor Z Collingham. He confirmed that Louise Casey had been to visit the Council as part of the CSE rapid audit a number of weeks ago. She had spent a full day meeting with the Leader, senior staff, the EVOLVE team, the police and others. The report would contain her findings and the Leader was confident that she was dealing with the pertinent issues with all the certainty that was to be expected. The Leader stated that Baroness Casey was pleased to be able to reflect on the progress that had been made in Rotherham over the last 10 years. The Council had made representations to the Home Secretary in relation to the activities that were taking place in Rotherham. It had been made clear in the letter that the Council were ready to assist the government with any further work and information that they required in relation to the progress made. The Leader did not feel it appropriate to judge the safety of child protection in other local authorities. He did however feel that it was part of Rotherham's legacy that other local authorities, police forces, health authorities and other bodies approach to child protection had changed because of the horrors and lessons from Rotherham.

In relation to the Ultimate Battery Company, the Leader stated that there was always a risk in any set of business support grants like the kind that went to the Ultimate Battery Company. They were commercial enterprises, and the State would not always back winners. There was a careful selection process behind the decisions to make sure that those choices were informed. This was a different process to the Forge Island funding. Vetro Lounge had been provided with capital funding, but the Council would continue to own the assets, including tables and chairs. In relation to business support grants, there were a team of people at the Combined Authority who assessed the risks and the right way to spend the money. Their record was remarkably good in terms of allocating that funding.

The Leader then addressed the comments made about Reform UK. He acknowledged that Labour and the Conservatives had performed poorly in the local elections across the country. Elected Members that had lost their seats in Doncaster were well known to Rotherham Elected Members and they had been dedicated and effective public servants who were caught up in a wave of public opinion that was not created by them. The Leader had smiled at the suggestion that the only people across the country who had got the agenda ahead of the public was the Conservative Group on Rotherham Council. Plenty of other people felt that they were dedicated to delivering services for their residents. The Leader stated that it was right to hear people's upset and anguish – they had been crying out for change for some time and this could be seen in the Brexit vote and the numerous government changes. The Leader stated that his and the Labour group's approach was to be straight with the people of Rotherham. They had

been straight at the election about what they wanted to do, and they had set out a very clear plan on how that would be achieved in the four years that they had been elected for. Whilst the Leader agreed that concerns should be listened to, he disagreed that Reform policies were the way forward. He would not talk more about immigration or fly fewer flags or cut Council staff and services like the Reform Mayor of Greater Lincolnshire had proposed. The Leader did not think those policies would improve the lives of Rotherham residents and to say they would be a lie. Rotherham residents deserved better than that.

Questions on the Leader's statement were invited from all other Members. Councillor Currie placed on record his thanks to the outgoing Cabinet Members and his support for the incoming Cabinet Members.

Councillor Reynolds thanked the outgoing Cabinet Members for their work. In relation to CSE, Councillor Reynolds stated that he had watched a Channel 4 documentary that had mentioned three reports, the Jay Report, the Casey Report and another that had been commissioned by the Home Office. The Home Office report had been suppressed and Councillor Reynolds wanted to know if it was deliberately suppressed by a former Leader of the Council because of the conclusions it had drawn and asked whether he could have a copy. The Leader stated that subsequent reports referenced that report and further reports resulted from the Home Office report. All of the subsequent reports were still published on the Council's website. Additional information on the website would provide Councillor Reynolds with clarity around timings and what information was known when. The Leader confirmed that he did not have a copy of the documentation from the Home Officer and as such, could not provide it.

Councillor Steele asked if the Leader could contact the Secretary of State for Defence and local MP, John Healey, about keeping the much needed local jobs at Liberty Steele. The Leader confirmed he would work with whoever he needed to in order to secure the jobs.

17. MEMBERSHIP OF POLITICAL GROUPS OF THE COUNCIL, POLITICAL BALANCE AND ENTITLEMENT TO SEATS

Consideration was given to the report which detailed the membership of Political Groups on the Council, the political balance and the entitlement to seats on, and the proposed appointments to Committees, Boards and Panels.

It was noted that Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 placed a duty on local authorities to set out the principles to be followed when allocating seats to political groups and for these principles to be followed when determining such allocation following formal notification of the establishment of political groups in operation on the Council. It was noted further that there was a requirement on local authorities to annually review the entitlement of the political groups to seats on the Committees of the Council.

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The report stated that the allocation of seats must follow 2 principles:

- a) Balance must be achieved across the total number of available seats on Committees; and
- b) Balance must be achieved on each individual Committee or body where seats are available.

There were three political groups in operation on the Council:

Labour

Leader – Councillor Read
Deputy Leader – Councillor Cusworth
(32 Members)

Conservative

Leader – Councillor Z Collingham
Deputy Leader – Councillor Bacon
(13 Members)

Liberal Democrat

Leader – Councillor Adam Carter
(3 Members)

There were 144 seats available on Committees, Boards and Panels and under the calculations the Labour Group were entitled to 80 seats, the opposition Group (Conservative) 32 seats and the Liberal Democrat Group 7 seats. The seats allocated to the non-aligned Councillors was 25 and the Council had previously enabled these Councillors to take seats on the various bodies as permitted by the Legislation.

Resolved:

1. That the entitlement of the membership of Council be agreed and such entitlements be reflected in Council's appointments of members to Committees (as per the table at 3.2 and 4.2).
2. That approval be given to the appointment of Members to Committees, Boards and Panels, and the appointment of Chairs and Vice-Chairs, as detailed in the Mayor's Letter.
3. That approval be given to the appointment of Members to Joint Committees, as detailed in the Mayor's Letter:

Cabinet – 7L

Leader – Councillor Read
Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People – Councillor Cusworth
Cabinet Member for Adult Care and Health – Councillor Baker-Rogers

Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety – Councillor Alam
Cabinet Member for Housing – Councillor Beresford
Cabinet Member for Street Scene and Green Spaces – Councillor Marshall
Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy – Councillor Williams

Audit Committee – 3L, 1C, 1N-A

Councillor Baggaley (Chair)
Councillor Allen (Vice Chair)
Councillor McKiernan

Councillor Blackham

Councillor Elliott

Independent Members:
Alison Hutchinson
Michael Olugbenga-Bababola

Licensing Board – 11L, 5C, 1LD, 4N-A

Councillor Hughes (Chair)
Councillor Garnett (Vice Chair)
Councillor Adair
Councillor Brent
Councillor Harper
Councillor Monk
Councillor Pitchley
Councillor Steele
Councillor Sutton
Councillor Taylor
1 x Labour Vacancy

Councillor Thorp
Councillor T Collingham
Councillor Reynolds
Councillor Stables
Councillor Ball

1 x Liberal Democrat Vacancy

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester
Councillor Bower
Councillor Currie
Councillor Jones

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Licensing Committee – 8L, 3C, 1LD, 3N-A

Councillor Hughes (Chair)
Councillor Garnett (Vice Chair)

Councillor Steele
Councillor Sutton
Councillor Taylor
Councillor Brent
Councillor Harper
1 x Labour Vacancy

Councillor Ball
Councillor T. Collingham
Councillor Stables

1 x Liberal Democrat Vacancy

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester
Councillor Bower
Councillor Jones

Planning Board – 8L, 3C, 1LD, 3N-A

Councillor Mault (Chair)
Councillor Jackson (Vice Chair)
Councillor Adair
Councillor Ahmed
Councillor Allen
Councillor Cowen
Councillor Duncan
Councillor Sutton

Councillor Fisher
Councillor Thorp
Councillor Bacon

Councillor Tarmey

Councillor Currie
Councillor Elliott
Councillor Hussain

Rotherham Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) – 3L

Councillor Alam
Councillor Cusworth
Councillor Ismail

Staffing Committee – 3L, 1C, 1N-A

Councillor Alam (Chair)
Councillor Read (Vice Chair)
1 x appropriate Cabinet Member as determined by the matter to be considered

Councillor Z Collingham

Councillor Jones

Standards and Ethics Committee – 5L, 2C, 1N-A

Councillor Clarke (Chair)
Councillor Lelliott (Vice Chair)
Councillor Harper
Councillor Keenan
Councillor Monk

Councillor T Collingham
Councillor Hall

Councillor Beck

Parish Councillor Alan Buckley
Parish Councillor Monica Carroll
Parish Council Representative Vacancy

Independent Members:
Mrs. Adela Bingham
Ms. Kate Penney
Mr. Peter Edler
Vacancy x 2

Independent Persons:
Mr. Phil Beavers
Mr. David Roper-Newman

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 7L, 3C, 1LD, 1N-A

Councillor Steele (Chair)
Councillor Bacon (Vice Chair)
Councillor Allen
Councillor Baggaley
Councillor Brent
Councillor Keenan
Councillor McKiernan
Councillor Monk

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Councillor Blackham
Councillor Tinsley

Councillor A Carter

Councillor Yasseen

Health Select Commission –10L, 4C, 1LD, 3N-A

Councillor Keenan (Chair)
Councillor Yasseen (Vice Chair)
Councillor Clarke
Councillor Duncan
Councillor Garnett
Councillor Knight
Councillor Ahmed
Councillor Brent
Councillor Adair
Councillor Harper
1 x Labour Vacancy

Councillor Baum-Dixon
Councillor Fisher
Councillor Reynolds
Councillor Thorp

Councillor Tarmey

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester
Councillor Havard

Improving Lives Select Commission – 10L, 4C, 1LD, 3N-A

Councillor Monk (Chair)
Councillor Brent (Vice Chair)
Councillor Garnett
Councillor Harper
Councillor Hughes
Councillor Ismail
Councillor Pitchley
Councillor Sutton
Councillor Adair
1 x Labour Vacancy

Councillor Blackham
Councillor T Collingham
Councillor Fisher
Councillor Reynolds

1 x Liberal Democrat Vacancy

Councillor Bower
Councillor Elliott
Councillor Ryalls

Co-optees

Lauren Hickey
Mike Hemmingway
James Newman

Improving Places Select Commission – 10L, 4C, 1LD, 3N-A

Councillor McKiernan (Chair)
Councillor Tinsley (Vice Chair)
Councillor Adair
Councillor Ahmed
Councillor Allen
Councillor Cowen
Councillor Jackson
Councillor Lelliott
Councillor Mault
Councillor Rashid
Councillor Taylor

Councillor Castledine-Dack
Councillor Stables
Councillor Thorp

Councillor C Carter

Councillor Beck
Councillor Jones
Councillor Sheppard

Introductory Tenancy Review Panel – 2L, 1C, 1N-A

Chair and Vice Chair to be drawn from members of the Improving Lives Scrutiny Commission or Improving Places Scrutiny Commission

Councillor Sutton (Chair)
Councillor Jackson (Vice Chair)

Councillor Tinsley

Councillor Ryalls

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Joint Consultative Committee – 3L, 1C, 1N-A

Councillor Alam (Chair)
Councillor Cusworth (Vice Chair)

Councillor Steele

Councillor Z Collingham

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester

Health and Wellbeing Board – 2L

Councillor Baker Rogers (Chair)
Councillor Cusworth

Councillor Ismail (Observer)

JOINT AND COMBINED AUTHORITIES

South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Board 1L

Councillor Read
Councillor Cusworth - Substitute

South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Audit, Standards and Risk Committee 1L

Councillor Baggaley
Councillor Allen - Substitute

South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1L, 1C

Councillor Steele
Councillor McKiernan - Substitute

Councillor Bacon
Councillor Baum-Dixon - Substitute

South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority 1L, 1C

Councillor Taylor
Councillor Ball

South Yorkshire Pension Authority – RMBC Chair for 25/26 1L, 1C

Councillor Sutton (S41 responsibilities)
Councillor Fisher

South Yorkshire Pension Board –1L

Councillor Beresford

South Yorkshire Police and Crime Panel 1L, 1C

Councillor Harper
Councillor Baum-Dixon

Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation Joint Committee 1L

Councillor Baker-Rogers

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Cusworth

18. RECOMMENDATION FROM CABINET - NEW COUNCIL PLAN AND YEAR AHEAD DELIVERY PLAN

Consideration was given to the report which presented the Council Plan 2025-2030 for approval. The Council Plan had been recommended for approval to Council by Cabinet on 19 May 2025. The accompanying Year Ahead Delivery Plan had been approved at the same meeting.

In January 2022, the Council adopted a Council Plan for 2022-25, including a suite of performance measures. To enable the Council to work towards the Council Plan outcomes and achieve the commitments, annual Year Ahead Delivery Plans were developed, setting out the key activities to be delivered. The Council Plan came to an end in March 2025.

Informed by public consultation, a new Council Plan had been developed for 2025-30 and was attached at Appendix 1 of the report. The Council Plan was a key document which set out the Council's vision for the borough and priorities for serving residents and communities. The Plan provided the medium-term basis for targeting resources, informing the budget-setting process and planning cycles and ensuring that residents can hold the Council to account for delivery. The Council Plan included a suite of performance measures and targets for monitoring purposes.

The Council Plan was framed around five outcomes:

- Places are thriving, safe, and clean
- An economy that works for everyone
- Children and young people achieve
- Residents live well
- One Council that listens and learns.

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Three cross-cutting policy drivers ran throughout the Council Plan, informing ways of working and helping the Council to achieve better outcomes:

- Expanding opportunities for all
- Recognising and building on our strengths to make positive change
- Focussing on prevention.

To enable the Council to work towards the Plan outcomes, a Year Ahead Delivery Plan, attached at Appendix 2, had been developed, setting out the key activities to be delivered over the next year (April 2025 – March 2026).

During the meeting Cabinet Members highlighted achievements relating to their portfolios from the previous plan and highlighted the outcomes that would be worked towards as part of the new plan:

Councillor Taylor, Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy highlighted the vast improvements to the brought roads, the government investment that had been secured, the opening of the Forge Island development and the success of the Employment Solutions Team. The new Plan would cover the development of Wath Library, Riverside Gardens and Rotherham Market. £300k would be invested in community facilities and work would start on the Health Hub for the Town Centre. Support would be provided for up to 20 businesses to improve shop units in the town centre and on other principal high streets through the new 'shop units grants' programme.

Councillor Cusworth, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, highlighted the millions of pounds of investment in Children's services and the high quality services provided by the Family Hubs network. The Children's Capital of Culture initiative was well underway and successful. Further, an additional 50 school places had been created for children with additional needs. Councillor Cusworth highlighted some of the activity in the new plan that would support Children and Young People. This included ensuring 90% of families registered their children with the Family Hubs network within 6 months of birth; the completion of the work on the Special Educational Needs and Disability Centre at the Eric Manns Building and the delivery of Independent Travel Training to at least 30 children and young people. Work would also be undertaken to improve play areas, improve the time taken to issue Education, Health and Care Plans and to deliver Baby Packs.

Councillor Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, noted the ambitious Council Homes Delivery Programme which had achieved over 650 new homes across the borough, against a target of 1000 by 2027. High quality homes had been delivered in the Town Centre. Work had also been done to reduce the number of homeless people staying in hotels. The Council

had also received the Northern Housing Award for Best Affordable Housing Development for the East Herringthorpe 'No Gas' Scheme. As part of the new Plan, a new Housing Allocation Policy would be agreed, and work would start or be completed on a number of new housing developments.

Councillor Baker-Rogers, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health, welcomed the activities and themes within the new Council Plan. Reflecting on the previous plan she noted the success of the Baby Pack initiative and the improvements in Health Visitor checks and Adult Social Care visits. Key activities from the new Plan that were highlighted included supporting 1000 residents to set a quit smoking day; the start of work on the Town Centre Health Hub and improvements to Rothercare. Councillor Baker-Rogers also confirmed that the building work for the Castle View Day Service would be completed in 2026.

Councillor Alam, Cabinet Member for Finance and Safe and Clean Communities, highlighted the activities related to keeping residents safe such as agreeing a new Community Safety Strategy and tackling hate crime and anti-social behaviour. Work would also be undertaken to issue a minimum of 60 fixed penalty notices for fly tipping.

During the debate on the item, Councillor Thorp and Bacon raised concerns around the consultation. Councillor Thorp stated that the questions were put in a way so that the right answer was received. Councillor Bacon said that the consultation should have been more ambitious and should have been sent to more people. He questioned the level of investment in the town centre and why that was not being shared out across the borough. Councillor Bacon also asked if the new Cabinet Member with responsibility for transport would commit to sorting out dangerous roads.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester stated that there was an error in the Plan. Thrybergh Country Park had not yet been awarded Green Flag status. Councillor Bennett-Sylvester did support the Plan but wanted to see more empowerment for neighbourhoods and a less risk averse approach to capital projects. He also supported the town centre investments but wanted to see more residential development in the town centre instead of on green spaces.

Councillor Reynolds asked for further information regarding the CCTV investments. The Leader explained that some of the CCTV was monitored by South Yorkshire Police in Doncaster. However all CCTV could be accessed from one location to help with efficient evidence collection.

The Leader confirmed that the reference should have been to Ulley Country Park and that would be corrected in the final version of the Plan. He agreed that lessons had been learnt in terms of capital project delivery and that he wanted to see more movement in that respect. In terms of

land for residential development, due to changes in national policy, more land would need to be made available across the borough.

In responding to the comments on the consultation, the Leader stated that responses had been received from every high level postcode in the borough. He also stated that if Members had wanted more responses, they could have gone themselves and asked their residents to complete the consultation. The consultation had been online and through the post. In response to Councillor Thorp's question about "trade-offs" and whether this was an appropriate way to ask a question, the Leader stated that it had to be presented in this way because that was the way it worked in terms of service provision. The Leader also confirmed that he was proud of the work being done to regenerate the town centre.

Resolved:

That Council adopt the Council Plan 2025-2030.

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Cusworth

19. APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Consideration was given to the report which stated that the Council was required to appoint a Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service under Section 4 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. In addition the post was responsible for various other Proper Officer functions under the Council's Constitution including being the Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer. Full Council had this function under the terms of the Constitution and Legislation.

On 23 January 2025, Staffing Committee approved the recruitment process for the Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service. A detailed recruitment process was undertaken, including technical interview, partner interview, and a cross-party Elected Member interview ahead of the Senior Officer Appointments Panel, which had led to the appointment of the new Chief Executive, John Edwards. It was also recommended that the Council appoint Mr Edwards as the Head of Paid Service.

The salary for the post of Chief Executive was £188,061. A returning officer fee was paid in addition to the above salary, where appropriate, and was a variable payment in accordance with the type of election.

The Council noted the 9 years exemplary service of the current Chief Executive, Sharon Kemp OBE, and formally thanked Ms Kemp for her dedicated service to Rotherham.

The Mayor asked those present to join her in wishing the Chief Executive well in everything she did going forward and also in thanking her for all she had done for the Council over the last nine years. Sharon had joined the Council during intervention and led the day-to-day management of the

Council, supported by the Strategic Leadership Team. In 2022 the Council was awarded LGC's "Most Improved Council" and again recognised in 2023 by the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge as "Impressive". These were all achievements that the Council were extremely proud of, and which would not have been possible without Sharon's commitment and leadership. The Chief Executive had also been shortlisted for the MJ Chief Executive of the Year award. This recognition highlighted her leadership, commitment to public service and dedication to improving Rotherham. The Mayor wished her every success for the awards ceremony.

Members from across the Chamber expressed their support for the appointment of John Edwards as Chief Executive. They felt he would bring the necessary experience and knowledge to continue improving the Council and Borough.

Members also wished to offer their thanks to Sharon Kemp for her service. They noted how she joined the Council when it was in a chaotic place. She had led from the front with professionalism, commitment and confidence. Members felt that she had been a champion for elected Members who always acted with diplomacy and bravery. The vast improvements to Council Services, specifically Children's Services and governance were commended.

Resolved:

That Council:

1. Appoints John Edwards to the post of Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service (including Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer).
2. Formally records its thanks to current Chief Executive, Sharon Kemp OBE, for her 9 years dedicated service to Rotherham.

Mover:- Councillor Read

Seconder:- Councillor Z Collingham

Following the vote, the Mayor presented the outgoing Chief Executive, Sharon Kemp OBE, with a civic gift on behalf of the Council and Members joined the Mayor in a round of applause.

20. NOTICE OF MOTION - AMENDMENT OF THE FLAG AND LIGHTING UP PROTOCOL

An amendment to the original motion was accepted by the mover and seconder of the original Motion and, therefore, further to Procedure Rule 18(15) the amendment was incorporated into the Motion for debate (inclusions highlighted in bold italics).

The original Motion was moved by Councillor Baum-Dixon and seconded by Councillor Z Collingham. The amendment was moved by Councillor Jones and seconded by Councillor Elliott.

The substantive motion was therefore:

This Council notes:

The flying of flags on Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) buildings has, on several occasions, caused significant controversy.

Decisions around which flags to fly have often unintentionally upset residents and various community groups, leading to unnecessary division.

These decisions have also consumed considerable Council time, officer resources and public funds that could have been better spent on delivering key services.

This Council recognises:

The intention behind flying flags has often been to show solidarity with countries, peoples, and causes.

However, this practice has now gone too far. What was once a symbolic gesture has become a source of conflict, with inconsistent and politically charged decisions causing angst and upset.

A consistent and neutral approach is now needed to restore clarity and unity, ensuring public buildings reflect locational identity and civic unity, rather than political or subjective choices.

This Council therefore resolves:

To ask officers to provide Cabinet with an amended Council Flag and Lighting Up Protocol for approval that:

1. Restricts the flying of flags on all RMBC buildings and sites to the following:
 - a) The Union Flag
 - b) The Flag of England (St George's Cross)
 - c) The Yorkshire Rose
 - d) The official Coat of Arms of Rotherham
 - e) ***All UK Armed forces flags, including those flown on nationally recognised days of commemoration or remembrance***
2. Withdraws from the current practice of flying any other flags, including in connection with specific events, causes, or international matters.

3. States that the Council acknowledges the importance of supporting causes and showing solidarity with global and local issues, but that it recognises this support and solidarity can be shown in other appropriate and inclusive ways that do not involve the use of flags on public buildings.

Final Statement:

This motion is not a rejection of any cause or group.

It is a measured response to reduce division, avoid unnecessary controversy, and return focus to core Council priorities.

A copy of the Council's current Flag and Lighting Up Protocol had been included in the agenda.

On being put to the vote, the motion was lost.

21. NOTICE OF MOTION - UPHOLDING INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN GAZA

It was moved by Councillor Yasseen and seconded by Councillor Tarmey that:

That this Council notes:

- The ongoing concern of Rotherham residents about the continued attacks on Gaza, blocking of aid and suffering of the Palestinian people, as demonstrated in last year's petition signed by over 4,000 residents and the flying of the Palestinian flag outside the Town Hall.
- Rotherham residents have been campaigning tirelessly for a year and half demanding an end to the genocide in Gaza. Through protests, petitions, public meetings and community-led actions, they have consistently raised their voices in solidarity with the Palestinian people and called for justice, peace and meaningful political intervention.
- The ongoing genocide and humanitarian crisis in Gaza has resulted in the loss of over 50,000 Palestinian lives, mostly women and children, with entire families wiped out and communities reduced to rubble. The scale of devastation is unimaginable, with hospitals, schools and places of worship targeted, leaving a trail of destruction and trauma that will endure for generations.
- That more than 2 million people are now trapped in dire conditions, facing acute shortages of food, water, and medical aid. The deliberate use of starvation as a weapon of war is not only abhorrent but a clear violation of international humanitarian law.
- Recent findings that UK firms exported military items to Israel despite a suspension of certain arms export licences, raising concerns about compliance with international law.

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- Statements from UK MPs and organisations such as Amnesty International acknowledge that Israel's blockade of Gaza constitutes a breach of international law.
- Calls from MPs across party lines, urging the UK government to recognise the State of Palestine and with immediate effect demand the end of the genocide, and reassess its foreign policy stance.

That this Council believes:

- That international humanitarian law must be upheld and Israel should facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza.
- That the UK government should ensure its foreign policy and trade practices do not contribute to violations of international law.
- That recognition of the State of Palestine could contribute to a just and lasting peace in the region.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

1. Request the Leader of the Council to write to the Foreign Secretary and local Members of Parliament conveying the content of this motion, and requesting:
 - The Labour Government urgently calls for immediate international action to stop the genocide in Gaza.
 - The deliberate targeting of civilians, civilian infrastructure, use of starvation as a weapon, and mass destruction of infrastructure must end now.
 - Express their solidarity with all civilians affected by the conflict and support efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza.
 - Write to the UK government to review its arms export policies to ensure compliance with international law and prevent complicity in potential violations.
 - That the UK government formally recognise the State of Palestine, aligning with international consensus.

On being put to the vote the motion was carried.

22. MINUTES OF THE CABINET MEETING

Consideration was given to the reports, recommendations and minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 14 April 2025.

Councillor Bennett-Sylvester asked a question in relation to Minute 148 – Economic Inactivity Trailblazer. He asked if the percentage of economically inactive people in Rotherham was impacted by people having to move away for higher value jobs and education? Councillor Bennett-Sylvester also asked if the figures included carers and volunteers and whether those figures were being monitored.

The Leader explained that work was ongoing regarding the creation and development of high value jobs which were much needed in the borough. Pathways for residents into those jobs were being looked at. In terms of carers and volunteers, the Leader agreed that there were different categories, and it was a crude way of measuring. However, the headline numbers had improved. It was confirmed that the purpose of the scheme was to help those that wanted to work to get into work.

Resolved: That the reports, recommendations and minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 14 April 2025 be received.

Mover: Councillor Read

Seconder: Councillor Cusworth

23. HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

Councillor Baker-Rogers provided an overview of the work being done by the Health and Wellbeing Board, particularly in relation to the development of the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

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

Mover: Councillor Baker-Rogers

Seconder: Councillor Cusworth

24. LICENSING BOARD AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

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

Mover: Councillor Hughes

Seconder: Councillor Beresford

25. PLANNING BOARD

Councillor Williams, the outgoing Chair of the Planning Board, placed on record his thanks to all members that had served on the Planning Board and all the officers that had supported the Board during his tenure as Chair.

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

Mover: Councillor Williams

Seconder: Councillor Mault

26. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items to consider.

27. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSONS

There was one question:

Councillor Ball: Following the devastating 2022 Kiveton Park illegal waste site fire, which required a two-month multi-agency response and exposed critical safety failures, why has your Labour administration failed to enforce robust bylaws or secure additional SYFR resources to prevent future industrial blazes in Rotherham, and what immediate, measurable actions will you commit to at this meeting?

Councillor Ball was not present to ask his question and as such would receive a written response.

28. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS AND CHAIRPERSONS

There were 19 questions:

1. Councillor Bacon: Given Aston & Todwick residents are paying ever increasing amounts in council tax, can the council ensure that it at least gets the basics right and empties the public bins?

Councillor Alam stated that yes, the Council were doing this.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Bacon stated that no, the Council were not doing this. He stated that if the Council had extended their consultation, residents would have been able to state that. Councillor Bacon stated that it was clear that the Council were not emptying the bins as there had been reports in Aston, Swallownest and Brinsworth. He stated that the Cabinet Member should know this.

Councillor Alam explained that since 2020, the Council had increased the number of bins on the streets from 2,402 to 2,536, many of which were double the capacity of the original bins. During the same period, it had increased the frequency of street bin emptying which had resulted in a 73% decrease in reported complaints.

The Council were also taking robust action with over 4,500 littering tickets issued during the last financial year. Councillor Alam stated that whilst the Labour administration had been investing in frontline services, Councillor Bacon had been voting against it.

2. Councillor Bacon: What progress has been made on the PSPO for the Todwick - Aston A57 and other road safety concerns such as the Ulley/Treeton cross roads?

Councillor Taylor explained that officers were continuing to work with South Yorkshire Police on what the correct method of stopping the illegal car events was. It was not as simple as simply putting a notice on it. There were implications about going over the border into Bassetlaw. Councillor Taylor explained that the Council did not want to rush into a decision and

that decision be ineffective. This had happened in other parts of the country.

In relation to the Ulley/Treeton crossroads, Councillor Taylor confirmed he had been in numerous discussions and visits over the years, including a visit to the location with the local MP a few weeks ago. As Councillor Bacon was aware, the Council had to use criteria to prioritise the allocation of funding and, unfortunately, based on collision date, there were greater priorities elsewhere. Congestion schemes had not been and were not currently a priority for government funding.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Bacon referred to Councillor Taylor's comments regarding not making a hasty decision and stated that this situation had been going on for years. He asked if the incoming Cabinet Member could commit to reviewing the legislation around Public Space Protection Orders because Councillor Bacon felt that there was a clear case for a PSPO on the A57.

Councillor Taylor could not respond on behalf of the incoming Cabinet Member but did state that he used that road regularly and felt that Councillor Bacon was overblowing the situation. He stated that he was not dismissing the concerns and work was ongoing. Councillor Taylor referenced schemes in Bradford and London that had not worked and explained that the Council did not want to be in that position. Discussions were ongoing on finding the right solution.

3. Councillor Thorp: Can you confirm what procedure RMBC follow, once someone has missed a council tax payment. including the time frame before that debt is passed to any form of debt collection?

Councillor Alam explained that the Council had a robust process in place to address collection of a missed Council Tax payment.

The Council's process for addressing a missed Council Tax payment varied, as the dates available for liability order hearings were gained through agreement of the Magistrates' Court. As such the Council was not able to fully control the timeline. The Council held on file mobile phone numbers for most council tax accounts and the service endeavoured to use these before it resorted to the statutory enforcement notices, to try to minimise the number of cases taken through the liability order process. Where the Council did not hold a mobile number for that customer, it had no choice but to issue the statutory reminder notice.

Clearly the Council would try to ensure that everyone paid as quickly as possible, but if all else failed, it could take about 80 to 90 days after the missed payment date before enforcement agents were engaged.

Councillor Alam stated that it was a slightly complicated process, but he would be happy to provide Councillor Thorp with more detail in writing.

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In his supplementary question, Councillor Thorp asked for that written response. He also asked for confirmation that the Council did not just go straight to enforcement action.

Councillor Alam confirmed that he would provide the written response, and that enforcement action was a last resort.

4. Councillor Reynolds: We recently passed a motion stating, brown fields first, green fields last resort, for Solar Panels. How is this being enforced?

Councillor Taylor reminded Councillor Reynolds that the original motion resolved to:

adopt a political stance in favour of small, discrete, solar panel installations, supporting their installation on:

- *Rooftops of commercial, residential, and public buildings.*
- *Car parks through the development of solar canopies.*

And to encourage the use of brown field land for large-scale solar farms.

Councillor Taylor confirmed that the Council were also taking forward a number of its own solar installation schemes including rooftop installations at Wellgate Multistorey Car Park, Riverside House, Thrybergh Country Park and Rother Valley Country Park. There were also plans in the pipeline for other solar installation at Springwell Gardens, Swinton Customer Service Centre and Library and solar canopies at Riverside House and Drummond Street Car Parks.

The Council did offer a paid pre-application service and always encouraged developers to consider any available brownfield sites ahead of green field sites for these types of development.

Planning applications for renewable energy schemes on rooftops and car parks were also encouraged through pre-application discussions subject to other material planning considerations. However, Planning applications were determined on their own merits after having regard to national and local planning policy. Despite the “political stance” endorsed, there was no such national or local planning policy that would require a sequential test approach to any proposals for solar farms and so this was not something that could be given weight in the determination of a planning application.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Reynolds displayed a leaflet that was encouraging farmers to sell their land for solar panels at a rate of £1000 per acre. He asked what progress was being made on the brown field sites and whether the market would have solar panels installed. Councillor Reynolds also asked for a comparison between the cost of installation on brown field sites and on selling farmland to a private company with no interest in the country.

Councillor Taylor confirmed that solar panels would be installed on the markets. Regarding the leaflet, Councillor Taylor stated that commercial transactions between a farmer and a private company could not be controlled by the Council. It would be decision for the farmer to take on what benefitted them.

5. Councillor Reynolds: Why are we completely refurbishing the whole outdoor Market area – new block paving, new street furniture, etc. when around the corner is a firebombed gym or a pop-up park that shows no sign of popping soon?

Councillor Taylor explained that the Rotherham Markets & Library redevelopment was a key project in the regeneration of the town centre. It was the heart of retail provision and a community asset to be proud of. The Centenary Markets is over 50 years old and in need of a new lease of life. It was appropriate that the public realm was renovated around the markets area, so that there was a comprehensive approach to the regeneration. Councillor Taylor stated that to say this work should not be done because other areas also needed regeneration was quite ridiculous. Councillor Taylor also confirmed that other issues were being dealt with.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Reynolds asked how much it cost for the refurbishment of the outdoor market area and how much it would have cost to make the area boarded off look tidy.

Councillor Taylor stated that, in relation to Rhino's, of course the Council wanted to redevelop it. There was a Planning permission in place and the Council had also served a S215 notice on the owner of the pub which led to a successful prosecution in July 2024 which resulted in a fine of £1,848 being imposed by the courts due to non-compliance. Any further action was currently on hold due to the building going through probate but clearly the Council would do all it could to bring that site back into use.

The Snail Yard project had been underway since 2021 when the former Primark building was demolished. The project encountered difficulties when the appointed contractor went into administration. The project was now being delivered by the Council's own Highways Delivery Team and was due for completion this summer.

6. Councillor Tinsley: Will the Council commit to not purchase any properties on the Highfield Park development Maltby. Until further information from the Current EA investigation is released and any potential measures are put in place on the adjoining former Maltby Colliery Site?

Councillor Tinsley was not present to ask his question and as such would receive a written response.

7. Councillor Tinsley: What powers will the Street Safe Team have to deal with ASB. When they come into post later on this year?

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Councillor Tinsley was not present to ask his question and as such would receive a written response.

8. Councillor Tinsley: With the implementation of software (confirm) for Regeneration and Environment. This saw a reduction in previous street bin schedules across the borough. Would you agree that bin scheduling should of remained at previous levels with a view to have increased or reduced the emptying of bins once we had relevant data and feedback?

Councillor Tinsley was not present to ask his question and as such would receive a written response.

9. Councillor Tinsley: Dust and detritus regularly blight Maltby roads due to being both a main throughfare to the cost and to the nearby motorway network. As well due to having both a nearby Quarry and the Maltby Restoration Site. Will the Council commit to regular proactive road sweeping. As the current road sweeping policy is to sweep roads once a year?

Councillor Tinsley was not present to ask his question and as such would receive a written response.

10. Councillor Currie: Last year we encouraged our hard-to-reach groups to be involved in the 'our places ' neighbourhood all borough consultation , we only know that Keppel ward made the highest contribution, we would like to know the outcome of the survey including every answer to every question?

Councillor Read explained that a summary of the responses had been produced. He was seeking advice from the Information Governance Unit as to what information from the survey could be shared with members whilst still ensuring that GDPR was complied with.

In his supplementary, Councillor Currie explained that he was asking this question as the hard to reach groups were saying they were not being heard again. Councillor Currie asked if the responses from the Keppel ward could be shared with him so he could see if the responses by the hard to reach groups had been incorporated. He also wanted to know how much money would be spent in his ward because of all the work the ward members did to get consultation responses.

Councillor Read explained that the first part of the money had been allocated in line with the published Cabinet report. No further decisions had been made about how to spend the rest of that money. A further Cabinet report would come forward with that detail in the coming months.

11. Councillor Currie: Since the cabinet past the £200K investment into the 'black hut' community resource in Kimberworth park , we have been trying to get an assurance on a start date for the agreed work ,please could this date be given to all ward councillors ?

Councillor Read explained that a scope of works had been defined and a procurement package was to go to the market which was currently being prepared. Once the full procurement activity was concluded, it would define the timeline of works. Consultation and engagement would take place with the operators of the Black Hut and Elected Members once the timeline was known. All work was to be completed no later than the end of the financial year.

12. Councillor Ball: Labour insists that selective licensing is the solution to poor housing conditions, yet even after a decade of costly schemes, your own report admits continued high levels of property failure. Isn't it time to admit that punishing decent landlords while driving up rents for low-income families is simply failed Labour dogma?

Councillor Ball was not present to ask his question and as such would receive a written response.

13. Councillor Ball: Given that Rotherham has some of the worst health inequality outcomes in South Yorkshire, and your board has had years of Labour leadership, why should residents trust this Council to deliver on the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy when past performance has been so poor?

Councillor Ball was not present to ask his question and as such would receive a written response.

14. Councillor Ball: Rotherham received over £450,000 from Sport England to tackle inactivity, yet the borough still suffers from among the lowest physical activity levels in the region. Where has the money gone, and why should taxpayers believe this Labour Council will do any better with future grants?

Councillor Ball was not present to ask his question and as such would receive a written response.

15. Councillor Ball: With the Council admitting it had to subsidise failed selective licensing inspections from general funds, and facing rising costs, why are you not publishing a full audit of where nearly a decade's worth of licensing fees have gone? Is Labour once again hiding poor financial management from public view?

Councillor Ball was not present to ask his question and as such would receive a written response.

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16. Councillor Ball: With £5 billion PIP cuts hitting Rotherham's 24,200 claimants, and your Deputy Leader resigning in protest, why haven't you opposed these reforms publicly as urged on 9 April 2025

Councillor Ball was not present to ask his question and as such would receive a written response.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 11(8), the following questions were not put verbally at the meeting but would be responded to in writing:

17. Councillor Ball: Despite the Health and Wellbeing Board's focus on mental health, with only 31% of employment outcomes sustained via Individual Placement Support by December 2024, why has your administration failed to enhance job support for those with severe mental illness, and what urgent steps will you take?

18. Councillor Ball: The 9 April 2025 motion to condemn welfare cuts and protect Rotherham's 1,640 residents projected to fall into poverty was rejected, why are you prioritising political loyalty over the wellbeing of our most vulnerable?

19. Councillor Ball: Rotherham's £4.39m Household Support Fund allocation this financial year is a 12% cut from the previous £4.98m awarded under the last Government, despite rising poverty due to the winter fuel cuts, rising unemployment and upcoming disability payment reductions. How will you protect vulnerable residents from the impact of this reduced support during worsening economic hardship?