

**Councillor Chris Read – Leader of the Council**

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|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
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24<sup>th</sup> April 2026

Mr Martyn Shepherd

Dear Mr Shepherd

**Council Meeting – Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2026**

Thank you for your question to Council on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2026. I have set out your question and my response below.

***What were the reasons for not distributing the 1400 copies of ‘Voices of Despair, Voices of Hope’ purchased at a cost of £5600?***

I can advise that the reasons ‘Voices of Despair, Voices of Hope’ were not distributed have been previously communicated into the public domain, and directly to one of the co-authors of the booklet.


I can state that the reasons were communicated to a co-author via a Freedom of Information response (ref. FOI-714-15/16) on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015. The booklet was not distributed because it was viewed by Council officers and the government-appointed Commissioners with responsibility for the Council at that time as being unsuitable for use by the Council.

Reasons included:

- an overemphasis on religion/faith (which could be unhelpful or non-inclusive),
- concerns about messages around pregnancy/abortion,
- a focus on graphic personal accounts with limited evidence of recovery / progress,
- lack of signposting to specialist support services,
- triggering images without support information or clear age guidance,
- the intended audience was unclear, and the tone might discourage victims to come forward

It was for these reasons that the Commissioners approved the officer recommendation not to use the booklet 'Voices of Despair, Voices of Hope.'

Yours sincerely



**Councillor Chris Read**  
**Leader of Rotherham Council**