



**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL
THURSDAY 24 JUNE 2010**

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Pavilion Road, West Bridgford

PRESENT:

Mrs M M Males – Mayor

Councillors R A Adair, Mrs S P Bailey, D G Bell, S Bennett, Mrs D M Boote, S J Boote, R L Butler, L B Cooper, J A Cranswick, B G Dale, C J Evans, Mrs R E J Godkin, M G Hemsley, T W Holt, Mrs C E M Jeffreys, R M Jones, K A Khan, I I Korn, N C Lawrence, A MacInnes, G R Mallender, S E Mallender, Mrs D J Mason, F J Mason, P F McGowan, B A Nicholls, E A Plant, F A Purdue-Horan, J A Stockwood, Mrs M Stockwood, B Tansley, H Tipton, B Venes, T Vennett-Smith and D G Wheeler

OFFICERS PRESENT:

C Bullett	Deputy Chief Executive (CB)
A Goodman	Member Support Officer
S Griffiths	Deputy Chief Executive (SG)
N Morton	Head of Financial Services
V Nightingale	Senior Member Support Officer
L Reid-Jones	Democratic Services Manager
D Swaine	Head of Corporate Services

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Councillors B Buschman, J N Clarke, J E Cottee, G Davidson, J E Fearon, R Hetherington, Mrs J M Marshall, G S Moore, Mrs J A Smith, P Smith and P W Smith

OPENING PRAYER

The Meeting was led in prayer by the Mayor's Chaplain

10. Declarations of Interest

There were none declared.

11. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 13 May 2010 were received as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

12. Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor referred to a number of events she had attended since the last meeting and made special reference to her Civic Service held at St Mary's Church, East Leake; the Soar Boating Club's birthday celebrations; the

Bingham Town Fair; the Nottinghamshire Girl Guiding Annual Review, the St George's Day parade and the reception for incoming Civic Heads hosted by Gedling Borough Council. She also stated that she had been proud to host a flag raising event at the Civic Centre in support of the Armed Forces Week.

Councillor Mrs Males stated that she had written to Crew 5, part of the Council's recycling service, to congratulate them on their quick response when they had found an unconscious resident in Keyworth.

The Mayor welcomed Liz Reid-Jones, the new Democratic Services Manager, to Rushcliffe. She also stated that the Leader, the Chief Executive and officers were attending the Municipal Journal awards as the Borough Council was a finalist in the 'Council of the Year' award; she wished them good luck.

Councillor McGowan presented the Mayor with a memorial scroll from the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Victoria Cross Committee. Councillor McGowan stated that during his year of office he had attended the unveiling of a memorial to the 28 Victoria Cross holders of Nottinghamshire, 4 of whom were from Rushcliffe.

13. Financial Outturn and Statement of Accounts 2009/10

Councillor Cranswick presented the report of the Head of Financial Services.

He indicated that the accounts had been scrutinised by the Corporate Governance Group. He informed Members of the revenue outturn position and the savings of £1,014,000. He explained that there had been £300,308 savings on services and £713,692 due to one off items of income. He stated that the Local Area Agreement reward grant had been reduced from £174,000 to £130,875, however this did not affect the Council's budgets as the income was transferred to the Local Area Agreement reserve and was for work undertaken by the Local Strategic Partnership. With regard to Capital expenditure there had been an 83% spend of the Capital Programme if the Customer Services Centre Partnership, which had been delayed, was not included.

He thanked all the staff for the tremendous enthusiasm they had shown in achieving this financial result. It was a continuing effort in achieving and maintaining an excellent standard for which all Members and residents were extremely grateful.

Councillor Evans supported the recommendations and congratulated officers on the speedy production of the accounts. However he expressed concerns that in the present climate the Council would face a very challenging year and also that the Cabinet had considered the report before it had been scrutinised by the Corporate Governance Group.

Councillor MacInnes welcomed the savings and also supported the recommendations. He was also concerned about the economic climate and how the government were expecting the public sector to operate with a 25% reduction in funding.

Councillor R Mallender supported the previous comments and did not want the savings to impact on the staff.

Councillor McGowan asked for further clarification on the VAT windfall and was informed that the money that had been transferred into the VAT reserve would be slowly released for general spending over the next five years, at 20% per annum.

Councillor Cranswick agreed with Councillor Evans that Cabinet should have considered the issue after the Corporate Governance Group but reminded Members of the time restraints imposed on the Council.

RESOLVED that

- a. the Financial Outturn 2009/10 and the Statement of Accounts be approved;
- b. the proposed carry forward of £102,083 be approved;
- c. the amount to be transferred to the LAA Reserve be revised to £130,875.

14. **Annual Scrutiny Report 2009/10**

Councillor Bennett, Chairman of the Performance Management Board, presented the 2nd Annual Report of Scrutiny. She stated that the scrutiny process was well established in Rushcliffe and could be seen in how the Council made decisions. Improvements to services evidenced how well scrutiny was working. She referred to the wide range of activities undertaken by the four Groups.

With regard to the Performance Management Board she stated that when considering performance there was always more to congratulate officers about rather than to ask why things were not performing as well as expected. She highlighted the importance of the work carried out by Member Panels.

Councillor Hemsley, Vice Chairman of the Community Development Group, and Councillor Purdue-Horan, Vice Chairman of the Corporate Governance Group, highlighted the work undertaken by their groups and thanked Members for their attendance. Councillor Hemsley spoke of the work undertaken by the Group's Member Panels.

Councillor Lawrence, Chairman of the Partnership Delivery Group, highlighted the valuable work undertaken with partners in the community and informed Members how the Group had developed new procedures for the scrutiny of external partners.

Councillor Evans felt that all the Scrutiny Groups were working well and welcomed the work undertaken by the Chairmen. He felt that the work of the scrutiny groups was invaluable especially as residents would be expecting the Council to deliver value for money services.

Several Members supported the comments regarding the value of Member Panels and Working Groups.

Councillor Jones felt that scrutiny should be non political and that all Members should embrace the principles.

In conclusion Councillor Bennett stated that each Scrutiny Group was carrying out a valuable function, considering a wide range of topics including the difficult task regarding local government finances. She thanked all the Members and officers who supported scrutiny.

RESOLVED that

the Annual Scrutiny report for 2009/10 be noted.

15. **Leadership Model and Executive Arrangements**

Councillor Cranswick presented the report of the Head of Corporate Services regarding the future arrangements for the Council. He confirmed that legislation stated that local authorities must consult with their residents regarding having an elected Mayor or a Leader and Cabinet model. He stated that the Authority had operated the Leader and Cabinet model since 2000, one year earlier than required, which had worked well. When the issue had been considered by Cabinet it was felt that the current arrangements should be supported, subject to the results of the consultation.

Councillors Evans, MacInnes and R Mallender supported the recommendation as they believed that the current arrangements worked well. It was felt that the Mayoral system had been abused in other areas of the country and would not benefit Rushcliffe.

Following a statement regarding the old committee model Councillor S Boote felt that this was not a workable arrangement for a modern council. He stated that Rushcliffe had a record of considering how things operated and reviewing and changing the arrangements when necessary. He felt that it was vital that the executive arrangements and scrutiny were kept separated and that the process should be open and honest.

In conclusion Councillor Cranswick said that, following the consultation, the subject would be presented to Members again. He thanked Councillors for their support for the current arrangements.

RESOLVED that Council

- a) agree the consultation action plan as set out in the report; and
- b) supports Cabinet's view that, subject to the results of the consultation to be undertaken, the Leader and Cabinet Model would be most likely to assist in securing continuous improvement in the way the Council's functions are exercised.

16. **Petitions Duty and Scheme**

The Council considered the report of the Head of Corporate Services regarding legislation which required every local authority to adopt a petition scheme setting out how it would handle petitions, including a facility for e-petitions by 15 December 2010. Councillor Cranswick informed Members that each local authority could determine the number of signatures required, although the threshold must not exceed 5% of the population. He stated that for Rushcliffe a 2% threshold was proposed, as well as keeping the existing arrangements for local submissions.

In support of the recommendation Councillor Evans felt that the Government were creating a standard for all authorities.

Councillor MacInnes felt that this was an opportunity to re-invigorate democracy at a local level and would allow for more public engagement. He supported the view that petitions should be inclusive and that they could either be presented on paper or by electronic means.

Following a question regarding the deadline for e-petitions the Head of Corporate Services explained to Members that officers were investigating the options of integrating this with the update of the Council's new website or joining a county wide procurement initiative.

RESOLVED that Council

- a) agree the draft Petition Scheme as attached at Appendix A subject to the existing Constitutional arrangements remaining in place in relation to petitions that fall below the stated thresholds; and
- b) authorise the Head of Corporate Services to make the necessary changes to the Constitution to facilitate the implementation of the scheme.

17. **Questions under Standing Order 11 (2)**

1. **Question from Councillor K A Khan to the Deputy Leader of the Council**

Is the Deputy Leader satisfied with the introduction of Charges for the use of the Car Parks after 6 pm in West Bridgford?

Answer by the Deputy Leader of the Council

Yes

Supplementary by Councillor K A Khan

To what extent is he aware that there was inadequate publicity for the charges and the only signs warning people were A4 sheets wrapped around and tied to the posts in the car park. As a consequence a significant number of residents accustomed to parking free after 6pm have been fined. There should have been large notices announcing these charges and on the council's website

Answer by the Deputy Leader of the Council

In the first ten weeks of evening parking charging 8,333 tickets were purchased, only 4% had received a notice and there had only been 10 complaints to the Council. I do not feel that this indicates that a large number of people did not know about the charges. If there had been a large sign some people still would not have read it. The introduction of charges was agreed by Council as part of the budget and it is on target to meet predicted income.

Supplementary by Councillor K A Khan

As there had only been a small number of people inconvenienced, primarily through poor signage, would the Council refund the fines paid as a goodwill gesture.

Answer by the Deputy Leader of the Council

No.

2. Question from Councillor R M Jones to the Deputy Leader of the Council, in Councillor Fearon's absence

Would the Portfolio Holder for the Community, Councillor Fearon, describe the extent and duration of thefts during this year of playground equipment in the Council's parks?"

Answer by the Deputy Leader of the Council

There have been a total of five separate thefts from 4 playgrounds over a four week period.

Supplementary by Councillor R M Jones

When will the equipment be replaced and are there any measures to reduce the chances of it happening again?

Answer by the Deputy Leader of the Council

Preventing a re-occurrence is difficult as the equipment is sectional in order to be replaceable if damaged. Items such as slides are predominantly made of metal, but the re-sale value of items of play equipment and anti-theft measures will be considered as part of future major improvement projects. However there will be a balance between preventing theft and inferior performance and operational damage to the likes of plastic slides. We have delayed replacement in order to determine that the spate of thefts has passed and will aim to make removal as difficult as possible when installed.

Supplementary by Councillor R M Jones

Given the lack of explanation to the public on site at the playgrounds and on the News Section of the Council's website, why does the Council not announce these awful events and is this further evidence that the Council's highest priority is its image?

Answer by the Deputy Leader of the Council

The Council does not advertise that equipment has been stolen on the website. People recognise the fact that it takes time to replace stolen items. All thefts have been reported to the police, who requested additional surveillance, which is felt inappropriate. The police have stated that in addition to this, they will monitor activity at local scrap metal dealers.

Supplementary by Councillor R M Jones

The playground equipment is part of important Council services, so the Deputy Leader's suggestions that it is not appropriate to explain this to the public is unbelievable and is he not aware that in the absence of an explanation many residents assume inappropriately that it is damage by teenagers, as I found out by asking?

Answer by the Deputy Leader of the Council

The Deputy Leader agreed that this could be considered.

3. Question from Councillor S J Boote to the Deputy Leader of the Council

What is set to replace the Regional Spatial Strategy, and what plans is the Council making to regain control of its planning strategy?

Answer by the Deputy Leader of the Council

The Leader has been lobbying past and present Ministers to have the number of houses required removed and to allow this Council, in conjunction with the residents, to decide the way forward. The Leader has written to Eric Pickles to pursue probable options that would enable the Council to develop a strategy, which would allow a sensible figure for housing to be evolved, that would roughly be aligned to applications received. We have undertaken work which will be presented to the Local Development Framework Group. They will consider a plan regarding house building to be presented to Council. The Leader is optimistic that the Council could have a sensible plan in place earlier than the proposed Local Development Framework. As the Council has only recently been informed that the proposed figures are to be abandoned as much work as possible has been undertaken to achieve a suitable planning policy.

Supplementary by Councillor S J Boote

The Deputy Leader use the word 'we'. When did any discussion take place, when was a vote taken and on whose authority was the letter to Eric Pickles written.

Answer by the Deputy Leader of the Council

From previous discussions by Councillors it is clear that this is what Members had asked for. The Local Development Framework Group will now consider the way forward.

Supplementary by Councillor C J Evans

It would seem that the letter from the Leader to Eric Pickles, and the leaflet, discusses the Council's policy and that these have been written on behalf of all Members without their agreement. Has Cabinet had been discussing this issue in private and agreed what the policy would be.

Answer by the Deputy Leader of the Council

This is not the Council's policy. The Cabinet feels that this is what the Council wants, to be able to determine its own policy and not have the number of houses imposed on the Borough. As yet no-one is aware of what will replace the Regional Spatial Strategy and an opportunity has been taken to produce some ideas to be presented to Government. It will be the Local Development Framework Group who will move the policy forward.

Supplementary by Councillor S J Boote

The letter to Eric Pickles refers to Rushcliffe as an excellent rated Conservative Council, does the Deputy Leader agree it is not just the Conservatives but the officers who make the Council excellent.

Answer by the Deputy Leader of the Council

It is the excellent work of the officers, under the direction of the Councillors.

The meeting closed at 8.35 pm.

MAYOR