

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL
THURSDAY 1 MARCH 2012**

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

G S Moore - Mayor
I I Korn - Deputy Mayor

PRESENT:

Councillors L J Abbey, R A Adair, Mrs S P Bailey, J R Bannister, D G Bell, Mrs D M Boote, S J Boote, N K Boughton-Smith, N A Brown, B Buschman, R L Butler, H A Chewings, J N Clarke, T Combellack, L B Cooper, J E Cottee, J A Cranswick, B G Dale, G Davidson, A M Dickinson, J E Fearon, M G Hemsley, R Hetherington, R M Jones, N C Lawrence, E J Lungley, A MacInnes, Mrs M M Males, G R Mallender, S E Mallender, Mrs J M Marshall, D J Mason, F J Mason, B A Nicholls, E A Plant, F A Purdue-Horan, S J Robinson, D V Smith, Mrs J A Smith, P Smith, J A Stockwood, Mrs M Stockwood, B Tansley, H Tipton, T Vennett-Smith, D G Wheeler

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

3 members of the public

OFFICERS PRESENT:

C Bullett	Deputy Chief Executive (CB)
A Graham	Chief Executive
P Randle	Deputy Chief Executive (PR)
L Reid Jones	Democratic Services Manager
P Sutton	Interim Head of Financial Services
D Swaine	Head of Corporate Services

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Councillors J E Greenwood, K A Khan

OPENING PRAYER

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

43. Declarations of Interest

There were none declared.

44. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 15 December 2011 were received as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

45. **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor informed Council that he had completed 26 engagements since the Council Meeting in December, taking his total to 145. He told Members how special Christmas Day had been serving dinner to 52 disadvantaged people at the Friary Drop-in Centre. He said that Anne Bremner and her team did an amazing job and suggested that Councillors who had not visited the drop-in centre should do so. The Mayor reported that he had carried out his Christmas visit to the Depot and had found the staff to be very positive and enthusiastic. He had recently attended the 20th anniversary of the Tollerton Luncheon Club which had served lunch for the villagers every month for the last 20 years, and also the Victoria Cross presentation at Bingham.

Finally the Mayor informed Council of two events which he had been proud of. Firstly, the Civic Dinner, where canapés with the predinner drinks were made and served by youngsters from Cotgrave Positive Futures. Subsequently two of the young people involved had been offered jobs with local organisations. Secondly, the Mayor had attended Nottinghamshire Cricket Club AGM at which the Chief Executive had praised Positive Futures and the Council, saying that their work had gone a significant way towards Trent Bridge winning the Gold A Test Match programme.

46. **Leader's Announcements**

The Leader informed Council that he was privileged to be invited by South Nottinghamshire College to a dinner prior to their visit to Buckingham Palace to receive their Queen's Anniversary Trust Award. This had been in recognition of the 'Balls to Poverty' campaign.

The Leader notified Council he had signed the White Ribbon campaign pledge against domestic violence against women. He urged other Members to pledge their support to the campaign.

47. **Chief Executive's Announcements**

There were no announcements from the Chief Executive.

48. **Budget 2012/13 and Financial Strategy**

Councillor Clarke presented the report of the Interim Head of Financial Services regarding the Council's financial plans and by way of introduction made the following statement:

"Mr Mayor, this time last year I introduced the budget and financial strategy by laying out the challenges facing the Council at that time. These were considerable, with the need to find significant savings over four years and with the majority of them in the two year period of 2011 to 2013. I proposed, and the Council approved a considered and planned approach to tackling these challenges based on business cost reduction, maximising income and redesigning services. Over the last 12 months, Members and officers have been working with this approach and implementing the four year plan approved by Council last year, with great success. So much so that I am delighted to be able to report that the proposed budget and financial strategy

before us tonight clearly demonstrates that the plan is working. So successful has this approach been that I am able to propose a balanced budget for 2012/13, even though the Council faces additional costs from energy and water and reduced levels of achievable income for planning and building control fees. Also many savings have been found early –eliminating the amount needed from balances in 2011/12.

The report shows that nearly £1.7m of savings incorporated into the 2012/13 budget have been identified since the 2011/12 budget was set. This is a massive achievement; Our net budget has reduced in cash terms from £12.4m in 2010/11 to £9.9m in 2012/13. A significant part of this saving relates back to the introduction of a charge for collecting green waste in order to ensure the service could continue. This was a bold decision for the Council but it has clearly paid off, thanks to the magnificent response from our residents and the hard work of our officers.

But we must not be complacent. There is still much to do – we will need to find a further £0.7m next year – and we will continue to need to make bold decisions about different ways of delivering services. Through the budget workshops we have learned that the outlook from April 2013 is increasingly uncertain with the Council facing a significant degree of additional risk from the localisation of business rates and the requirement to adopt a new Council Tax support system. However there will be opportunities too and by promoting business growth we may be able to benefit from additional retained business rate income as well as improving the economic wellbeing of our residents. It is therefore vitally important that we retain the financial strength and flexibility to respond to these new challenges and continue to seek further savings and efficiencies. In short, Mr Mayor, we need to stick to the plan.

I am very mindful of the impact of all this on those whom we serve: our residents. It is therefore no accident that in seeking savings and new ways of delivering services that we have successfully laboured to minimise or eliminate any adverse effects on those residents. It is with this mind that the Cabinet considered the Government's offer of a one off grant equivalent to a 2.5% Council Tax increase if the Council tax were frozen. Whilst it was recognised that accepting the offer would affect our income in later years, I am confident that the Council's finances are strong enough to cope with this and we need to acknowledge the financial pressures faced by our residents in these extremely tough times. The Cabinet therefore recommended to Council that the Council Tax should remain unchanged for a second year at £113.22 for a Band D property. I would remind Members that this means that most of our residents will pay less than £101 per year or the equivalent of £1.94 per week.

The proposed revenue and capital budgets and the medium term financial strategy all reflect these considerations and continue to reflect the Council's priorities.

I believe the proposed budget and Council Tax continues to represent excellent value for money for our residents as it remains one of the lowest in the country and pays for excellent, high performing services. My thanks go to all Members and officers for their continuing efforts to meet the challenges we face. Together I am confident that the Council will emerge revitalised and

ready to continue serving our residents and continue to provide value for money into the future.

Mr Mayor, I have pleasure in moving the recommendations set out on page 1 of the Council agenda”.

Councillor Davidson recognised the hard work of officers and Members at the budget workshops in drawing up the budget, particularly with the pressure the Council was under. He recognised the Council Tax Freeze Grant this year, but stated there it should come with a caveat. Whilst this was a budget the Liberal Democrat Group would support he reminded Council of a previous period where the council tax was not increased for a number of years and then it was necessary to make a large rise to compensate.

Councillor MacInnes stated that the Council had no option other than to accept this budget. He said it was positive that the Council had managed to make savings without upsetting the voluntary sector or losing commitment from staff and the confidence of residents. Furthermore the proposed budget had not attracted any negative publicity. Councillor MacInnes stated that the Council Tax Freeze Grant would be well received by residents, however it was not as good as it seemed. He stressed that the withdrawal of the grant would leave a shortfall in the budget in future years which would place further pressures on the Council. Whilst recognising the limited choices of the Council with regard Council Tax levels he pointed out the amount of additional resources which he considered necessary be required to balance the budget in future years. In relation to the support for affordable housing, Councillor MacInnes felt that the proposed reduction in the capital programme provision for this was significant and should be reviewed by Leader as the Draft Core Strategy targets indicated the need for 324 affordable houses in the Borough per annum.

Councillor S Mallender thanked both councillors and officers for their input into the budget. She was concerned about the future funding levels for local government which would result in increased council tax.

In supporting the budget Councillor S Boote acknowledged the significant work put into the development of the budget proposals by both Members and officers. He said that it was sensible to accept the Council Tax Freeze Grant as it was available for one more year only. He outlined a financial and economic case for a small increase in the precept in the coming year, but recognised the political dimension of the Council which overrode the financial and economic arguments for a rise. He reiterated that the Council should not repeat the situation of the 1990s whereby council tax was frozen for a number of years, followed by a significant increase. Councillor S Boote acknowledged the role of parish councils in providing many local services, and also the high property values and consequently high council tax bandings which he considered produced a windfall in council revenue, meaning that the average council tax revenue per household in Rushcliffe was the highest of any district in Nottinghamshire.

Councillor Cranswick stated that the current position was fundamentally different from that of the 1990s, as across the country services were being run more efficiently with less money. He stated that this was the purpose of business re-design of services within the Council where changes could reduce

costs and maximise income. He agreed that staff morale was remarkably high and thanked staff for their contribution. In summing up Councillor Cranswick stated it was important the Council should 'stick to the plan', and in doing so we would continue to be a lead performing Council.

In concluding Councillor Clarke stated that he was grateful for the support of Council and reiterated that it was important to stick to the plan. He recognised the Council Tax Freeze Grant would affect the financial position in future, but the Council was aware of this and could plan accordingly.

Councillor Cranswick pointed out that Appendix E in the report was in fact Appendix B, which was noted.

RESOLVED that Council approve:-

- a) The General Fund Budget for 2012/13 (as detailed at Appendix B)
- b) The Special Expenses for West Bridgford, Ruddington and Keyworth (as detailed at paragraph 17)
- c) A 0% Council Tax increase for 2012/13
- d) The Capital Programme 2012/13 – 2016/17 (as detailed at Appendix D)
- e) The Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Borrowing Indicators 2012/13 (as detailed in Appendix E)
- f) Receipt of the report of the Council's Responsible Finance Officer (as detailed in Appendix A)
- g) Receipt of the Medium Term Forecast (as detailed at Paragraph 21).

49. **Council Tax Resolution 2012/13**

Councillor Clarke presented the report of the Interim Head of Financial Services which set out the Council Tax Resolution 2012/13. This consolidated the precepts of Nottinghamshire County Council, Nottinghamshire Police Authority, Nottinghamshire Fire Authority, the Borough Council and individual Parish and Town Councils. He reminded Members that the Council had agreed a Council Tax freeze with the County Council and Fire Authority doing the same. He stated that it was unfortunate that Nottinghamshire Police Authority had agreed to increase their precept by 3.93%, when they had been offered 3% grant from the Government. He expressed concern that this may reflect on the Council as the bills were posted out from the Council, therefore it was important that a clear explanation was given to residents.

Councillors Davidson, MacInnes and S Mallender supported the recommendation.

Councillor Fearon said he was disappointed that the Police Authority had increased their precept. He recognised the good job they were doing in increasing front line resources, but was of the opinion that the Police needed to do more to operate more efficiently. He suggested that this be monitored through the partnership working arrangements in place.

Councillor Adair concurred with Councillor Fearon and stated that in his view the police authority's actions amounted to taking money away from vulnerable people, when alternatively it could have used the grant available from government.

The Mayor reminded Council that the debate was about the Council Tax Resolution and not the Police Authority's precept.

The Mayor also explained on a point of clarification that paragraph 1(d)(v) of the report should refer to Appendix A(ii) and not Appendix C.

RESOLVED that Council approve the Council Tax Resolution for 2012/13 as detailed in Appendix A of the report.

50. Pay Policy Statement 2012/13 – Referral from Cabinet

Councillor Clarke presented the report of the Head of Corporate Services detailing the Council's Pay Policy Statement for 2012/13. He explained that under Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011 a local authority was required to publish a Pay Policy Statement by 31 March each year. Furthermore the Statement must set out the Council's policies relating to the remuneration of its senior officers, remuneration of the lowest paid employees and the relationship between the remuneration of its senior officers and the remuneration of its employees who were not senior officers.

Commenting further Councillor Clarke said that it was important to have an open and transparent approach to the Council's pay and reminded Cabinet that the policy did not propose numbers or percentages, but related to the policies regarding pay.

Councillor MacInnes stated that the residents received good value for money and that the Council was not in the same position as larger unitary authorities who paid large salaries. Furthermore the Council did not have a reputation for large pay offs or extravagance. He commented that this was the second year of a pay freeze for staff and it was likely that this would continue.

Councillor S Mallender said she was supportive of open government. She continued saying it was Green Party Policy that the highest paid employee should not be paid more than ten times the lowest. She stated that the Council was within the band and offered good value for money.

In concluding Councillor Clarke said that the policy highlighted the Council's open, transparent and fair approach to pay.

RESOLVED that Council approve the Pay Policy Statement 2012/13.

51. Corporate Strategy 2012 – 2016

Councillor Clarke presented a report of the Head of Corporate services detailing the Council's Corporate Strategy for 2012 – 2016. The report explained how the Strategy had been reviewed taking account of the prevailing climate. Councillor Clarke stated that it was important to recognise as the Council's first priority, supporting economic growth and by doing this could ensure the Borough prospers. He reminded Councillors that the Corporate Strategy was a live document recognising that the Council prided itself in being able to react to changing circumstances.

Whilst supporting the key themes, Councillor Jones pointed out that the Council provided many more services than those included in the Corporate Strategy. Commenting further he said it was important that Members had information about all services and that staff didn't feel their services were unimportant if not included in the Corporate Strategy. He drew attention to the discussion at the recent Performance Management Board where a reduced basket of performance indicators was considered, and asked that future reporting of indicators included the number on which they were based in addition to the percentage. He stated that this information would help Councillors understand the Council services and be able to explain this to residents.

Councillor Bannister moved the following amendment to add an additional strategic task either to 'Our Residents' theme or 'Our Council' theme:

'Establish a Member Working Group to examine local democracy in the Borough, which in turn may make proposals for change. In particular the Group would look at representation in West Bridgford.'

Commenting further on the amendment Councillor Bannister explained that the first task of the group would be to assess the demand in West Bridgford for a properly constituted and resourced body capable of representing the interests of the West Bridgford residents. Following on from that the group would consider structure and accountability, and consult local people. Furthermore it would be necessary for the group to estimate costs and investigate funding sources and then report back on its findings.

Councillor Bannister stated that West Bridgford would soon have a population of 50,000 and could be a district in its own right. He gave examples of other similar town and parish councils which were operating successfully. He stressed that he was of the opinion that the people of West Bridgford or its constituent parts should have the opportunity to make a decision on whether an organisation was required and if so, what type.

Councillor Plant stated that the amendment was not to ask the member group to decide what type of body should be set up in West Bridgford but was to establish whether there was demand for a properly constituted body to represent its residents. She stated that along with other councillors, she felt that there was a democratic deficit in West Bridgford: it was the largest town in Rushcliffe with a rising population, but had the least level of democratic representation. She reminded Councillors that there was an increase in housing developments and the night time economy. She re-iterated that there were examples of smaller communities represented by a parish or town council, through which residents had the opportunity to influence and shape the community in which they lived. Commenting further, she said that the Council had given support to many Parish Councils to produce a parish plan, but there was no appropriate body in place in West Bridgford to produce such a plan. Given that the amendment was in the spirit of the Localism Act she urged Members to consider support.

Councillors S Mallender and Davidson stated that they would support the amendment.

Councillor S Boote reminded councillors that this issue had been raised a number of times previously and he hadn't been aware of any enthusiasm from the Labour Group who had voted down a similar amendment in the past. He acknowledged that pressure had been building to look at West Bridgford and in reality the Borough Council had been doing the work of the town council.

Councillor Lawrence believed that it would have been more appropriate for it to be considered by a scrutiny committee, such as the Community Development Group rather than debated at Council.

Councillor Jones agreed that it would have been better to have had advance notice of the topic, but didn't agree that Council was the wrong place to discuss it. He stated that significant effort had been put in to the West Bridgford Area Forum but this was not on a statutory basis.

Councillor Vennett-Smith stated that if Council was not the appropriate place to discuss this, the Mayor would not have allowed the debate. He was of the view that West Bridgford had been under-represented for some time, but thought that there had been some reluctance on the part of West Bridgford councillors to have a lower tier of governance. Commenting further he said that it was important that the issue had been raised at Council, so that Council could debate it. He also felt it was timely as due to the Local Government Boundary Commission review currently taking place.

Councillor MacInnes was of the view that the issue would not be debated fairly if it was considered by a scrutiny group and that a task and finish group was more appropriate.

Councillor Clarke reminded Members that they had the opportunity to comment on the draft Corporate Strategy and these had been included as appendix two of the report. He could see no mention of the West Bridgford issue in that appendix.

As a point of order Councillor MacInnes stated that as part of the consultation on the Strategy he had raised the issue with officers however it had not been included in the table of responses appended to the report. In response the Chief Executive said that the draft Strategy including the consultation responses had been published for a considerable time and as such he was unsure why Councillor MacInnes had not raised this before.

In conclusion Councillor Clarke re-iterated that he could find no reference in the appendix to the proposal to set up a member working group. He reminded Members that there were a large number of Councillors representing West Bridgford and that this did not constitute a democratic deficit. He said it was important the problem was defined before the solution was sought.

The amendment was put to the vote and declared lost.

Councillor S Mallender proposed an amendment to insert the word 'sustainable' in the first key theme to read:

*Supporting **sustainable** economic growth to ensure a prosperous and thriving local economy’.*

Councillor Cranswick proposed that the word ‘sustainable’ be inserted as follows:

*‘Supporting economic growth to ensure a **sustainable**, prosperous and thriving local economy.’*

The amendment was put to the vote and carried.

The main motion, as amended, was put to the vote and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED that Council agrees the Corporate Strategy 2012-2016 and its publication with the key themes being:

- a) Supporting economic growth to ensure a sustainable, prosperous and thriving local economy
- b) Maintaining and enhancing our residents’ quality of life
- c) Transforming the Council to enable the delivery of efficient high quality services.

52. **Questions Under Standing Order 11(2)**

- a) Question from Councillor S J Boote to Councillor J N Clarke

What does Councillor Clarke think about the proposal by Nottinghamshire County Council to return to the committee system of governance, and what lessons could there be in this for Rushcliffe Borough Council?"

Councillor Clarke replied by saying that this was a decision for the County Council to make and he would not like to pre-empt it.

As a supplementary Councillor S Boote asked to what extent was Councillor Clarke aware that Members of his own Group supported the return to the committee system and its return to Rushcliffe.

Councillor Clarke replied stating that he supposed there must be some support.

- b) Question from Councillor Davidson to Councillor Clarke

What benefits might follow from allowing other councillors and members of the public at Cabinet meetings to express their views about items on the agenda?

Councillor Clarke said that he would not want to quantify the benefits of a decision that had not been made and that this was a constitutional issue.

As a supplementary Councillor Davidson asked if Councillor Clarke could explain what he thought would be the benefits of using the wider knowledge and expertise of non-executive councillors.

In response Councillor Clarke said that he was sure they could impart their knowledge and expertise in the member groups and committees in which they were involved.

c) Question from Councillor Jones to Councillor Bell

What progress has been made to urgently establish sustainable gypsy and traveller sites which meet the Council's obligations and no longer leave residents vulnerable to ad hoc settlements?"

Councillor Bell responded by saying that good progress had been made on policy 8 of the Draft Core Strategy and once the Core Strategy was adopted it would be one of the priorities for officers.

As a supplementary Councillor Jones asked what was the timescale or whether this was only an aspiration.

Councillor Bell confirmed that this was not an aspiration and that the Local Development Framework Group was considering this in due course. He said that this should not be considered in isolation as it is part of the housing growth agenda. Furthermore, this issue was important to the residents of Rushcliffe and he was pleased it had been brought up. Councillor Bell continued by saying there would be an opportunity for councillors to make recommendations about appropriate sites when the matter was discussed at the Local Development Framework Group meeting.

Councillor Jones thanked Councillor Bell stating that he was pleased to have received such a helpful and comprehensive response.

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm.

MAYOR