

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
CABINET
TUESDAY, 8 JULY 2025**

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber Area B, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road,
West Bridgford
and live streamed on Rushcliffe Borough Council's YouTube channel

PRESENT:

Councillors N Clarke (Chair), A Brennan (Vice-Chair), R Inglis, R Upton, D Virdi
and J Wheeler

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor J Walker

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

A Hill	Chief Executive
L Ashmore	Director of Development and Economic Growth
D Banks	Director of Neighbourhoods
P Linfield	Director of Finance and Corporate Services
R Clack	Deputy Monitoring Officer
E Richardson	Democratic Services Officer

1 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 May 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 13 May 2025 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

3 Citizens' Questions

There were no citizens' questions.

4 Opposition Group Leaders' Questions

Question from Councillor J Walker to Councillor Virdi.

"The New Homes Bonus, brought in by the Coalition Government in 2011 and used to incentivise local authorities in England to increase the building of homes in their areas, has disproportionately went to already wealthy authorities such as ours.

How will the imminent loss of New Homes Bonus impact this Council?"

Councillor Virdi thanked Councillor Walker for her question and confirmed that

the New Homes Bonus was an incentive to encourage local authorities to support housing development by encouraging local authorities to build more homes and increase housing stock, supporting economic growth as housing increased jobs, infrastructure and community investment and promoted long-term planning by aligning with government to address the national housing shortage. He was pleased to note that as a forward looking and responsible authority, the Council had done all of the above.

Councillor Virdi disputed Councillor Walker's assertion in the question regarding 'already wealthy authorities such as ours' and said that the Council was a well-run authority which had made sensible operational and financial decisions and which would continue to ensure that it provided excellent services to its residents, enabled economic growth and crucially, balanced its books. He noted that this was against a background, over a number of years, of the Council not receiving significant levels of external funding running into tens of millions which other authorities had received, such as via the Towns or Levelling-up funds. He said, therefore, that such rhetoric had to be corrected and it was important for residents to understand and appreciate the ongoing financial challenges that the Council faced, that such messages were clear and also in liaison with central government, particularly with the likely implications that both Fair Funding and Business Rates reset changes would mean for the Council.

Councillor Virdi added that all types of authority in all areas, specifically those committed to economic growth had generated New Homes Bonus as the Council had and that it was not simply wealthy authorities, however you chose to define them.

Councillor Virdi said that the simple answer to the question was that the Council had prudently set its Medium-Term Financial Strategy and had assumed there would be no further New Homes Bonus from 2026/27 and that it would potentially be losing a significant income stream after 2025/26. He said that as Finance Portfolio Holder and Cabinet member, the Council supported New Homes Bonus continuing as it wanted economic growth and for that economic growth to be supported with funding. He said that the Council would make that point in its response to the Fair Funding Review and that it was the New Homes Bonus which had helped fund the magnificent offices and leisure centre of the Council and that such funding was necessary, even for the longer term with local government reorganization, as capital resources would continue to diminish and capital projects would require funding, hopefully not borrowing, with the Council currently, of course, being debt free.

Councillor Virdi summarised that although it was a significant impact, the Council had mitigated against the loss of the Bonus in its Medium-Term Financial Strategy, demonstrating, once again, its responsible and diligent approach to managing its finances, particularly with the volatility of the current government's decision making.

Councillor Walker asked a supplementary question.

"What are we doing to make sure that we insulate our residents for what is coming down the tracks as was mentioned in the Peer Review"

Councillor Virdi thought he had answered this in his response in terms of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy which was a five year review and that the Council was anticipating and had planned and mitigated for this eventuality and that it knew that there would be an impact, which he would cover in his delivery of the end of financial year report this evening. He said that the Council had created in-year efficiencies which would further help it mitigate some of the financial impact of losing the Bonus.

5 Financial Outturn 2024/25

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance, Transformation and Governance, Councillor Virdi presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services, which outlined the year-end financial outturn for 2024/25, linked to the closure of the accounts process and previous financial update reports.

In introducing the report, Councillor Virdi said that the report had been to the most recent Corporate Overview Group where no significant issues had been raised, and noted that there were challenges to the Council's public finances which meant that it was imperative that it continued to drive improvement and efficiency, including to meet the challenges that lay ahead in relation to the government's financial reforms and local government reorganisation.

Councillor Virdi referred to the Council's revenue and capital budget positions as well as the reserves and special expenses and was pleased that the final Outturn position was projecting a net revenue efficiency of £2.407 million. Councillor Virdi referred to page 4.5 and Table two of the report which detailed the main variances and said that the primary adverse variances arose from planning appeals and reduced fee income, rent increases from supported housing providers impacting housing benefits along with the cost of maintaining and replacing the Council's fleet and tankers. He said, however, that in counterbalance, there were several areas of efficiencies, including from investment income and treasury activities and unallocated contingency for several projects, savings from the Depot and some additional grant funding. He drew Cabinet's attention to one technical adjustment highlighted at paragraph 4.6 where lease payments had been removed in line with new accounting practices.

Councillor Virdi said that the report highlighted the specific challenges that the Council faced and how it would fund them, for example in relation to carbon reduction, local government reorganisation activities and the simpler recycling measures. He said that all were significant and required reserves to fund them in order to protect the Council and ensure that it was in the best possible place to meet them. In relation to reserves, Councillor Virdi referred to appendix B and pages 21 to 23 which highlighted the overall movement in usable reserves which had increased to £24.28 million from £20.9 million and to paragraph 4.13 which detailed where the reserves were going to be used and what they were required for. He noted that while the Council had reserves, there remained severe service pressures which were being carried forward. He said that the favourable projected position enabled the Council to protect itself from the risks that materialised in what remained a challenging financial environment and to carry forward balances or replenish its reserves for alternative

opportunities such as local government reorganisation.

In relation to the capital programme, Councillor Virdi referred to paragraphs 4.6, Table three and Appendix C and pages 24 to 21 for the overall position. He summarised that the Council had had approximately 58% of the budget spent, which resulted in a £4.308 million underspend which would be carried forward for project rephasing commitments.

In relation to special expenses, Councillor Virdi referred to appendix D and paragraph 4.17 which showed a projected overspend of approximately £50,000, which was mainly due to a shortfall of income from venue hires, but that it was hoped that current refurbishment activities would result in an increase in those income levels.

In conclusion, Councillor Virdi thanked Councillors and Officers, in particular the Director – Finance and Corporate Services and the Finance Team for their work in ensuring and supporting financial process and was pleased to report that the Council had again met its statutory deadline to produce the end of year financial statements and thought that solid finances were the bedrock of a strong performing organisation which the Council was, but that it would not rest on its laurels and would continue its diligent and prudent decision making and innovative approach to remain ahead of the curve.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor J Wheeler said that the report reflected the culture of the Council and demonstrated how every department had played its part in looking for efficiencies. He noted the challenging financial environment, with inflation and growth in wages and the Council receiving less funding in the last budget review. He referred to some other councils who had been poorly run in the past and hoped that the government recognised the work of the Council and funded it correctly to enable it to continue the fantastic work that it did.

The Leader concurred with the comments made and thanked Officers for their hard work.

It was RESOLVED that:

- a) the 2024/25 revenue position and efficiencies identified in Table 1, the variances in Table 2, and Appendix A to the report be noted;
- b) changes to the earmarked reserves as set out at Appendix B along with the carry forwards and appropriations to reserves in Appendix E to the report be approved;
- c) the capital carry forwards outlined in Appendix C and summarised in Appendix F to the report be approved; and
- d) the update on the Special Expenses outturn at paragraph 4.20 and in Appendix D to the report be noted.

6 Rushcliffe Design Code Supplementary Planning Document

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing, Councillor Upton presented the report of the Director – Development and Economic Growth, which outlined the Rushcliffe Design Code Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Councillor Upton said that the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act required every local planning authority to produce a design code, either as part of the local plan or as a supplementary planning document, which was what the Council had chosen to do. He said that there was a requirement for the design code to reflect local architectural character and design preferences and that the Council had appointed a specialist architectural consultant to help with its preparation. He said that it had undergone many hours of scrutiny through the cross party Local Development Forum over the past year and been through several workshops with designers and developers and had six weeks of public consultation. He said that this Design Code would replace the existing one from 2009 and would be user friendly and available online.

Councillor Upton said that it would provide a set of design rules which would form material considerations in the determination of relevant planning applications and would provide greater certainty for applicants as to the Council's expectations for design quality, including a list of mandatory requirements and links to further explanatory guidance.

In conclusion, Councillor Upton thanked Harper Parry Architects for their technical expertise, the Local Development Forum for their hours of scrutiny and Officers Emma Fawcett and the Planning Policy Manager for their hard work and rigorous overview.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Brennan noted the extensive work and consultation in the creation of the Design Code and thought it to be accessible, easily readable, very well presented and user friendly, enabling applicants to identify the relevant areas for relevant developments that they wished to bring forward. She said that it provided a starting point and demonstrated the Council's ambition that future developments in the Borough should be of a very high standard that reflected the communities alongside which they were being built and should produce great living spaces for residents.

The Leader echoed comments made and said that the Code was important in helping to ensure that the standard of design in the Borough remained high.

It was RESOLVED that:

- e) the proposed revisions to the Rushcliffe Design Code Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) be supported;
- f) the Director– Development and Economic Growth be granted delegated authority to adopt the Rushcliffe Design Code SPD, and to publish an Adoption Statement at the point of adoption; and

- g) the Director– Development and Economic Growth be granted delegated authority, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing, to make any necessary final minor textual, graphical and presentational changes required to the SPD prior to adoption.

7 Management of Open Spaces

The Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough-wide Leadership, Councillor Clarke MBE presented the report of the Director – Development and Economic Growth, which provided an update on the management of open spaces on new developments within the Borough.

In opening his comments, the Leader said that he would first like to suggest alterations to recommendation a) in replacing the word ‘adopt’ with the word ‘endorse’ and adding wording that Cabinet ‘gives delegated authority to the Director for Development and Economic Growth to make updates in line with the core principles of the guide’, as this reflected that it was a living document.

The Leader said that Cabinet had decided not to adopt open spaces on new developments due to the considerable financial burden that would place on the Council and said that since 2011 open spaces had been the responsibility of the developer. He noted that various concerns have been raised as to how the management of those open spaces took place and as such he had hosted a roundtable with residents and a cross party of Councillors and representatives from housing developers and management companies and had written letters to The Secretary of State for Housing and Communities, which had been passed on to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Housing and Local Government Department who he was in conversation with.

The Leader highlighted that the Good Practice Guide had four themes, which were service, fairness, transparency and community and these sought to reflect the issues and concerns raised by residents to assist in discussions with government and the possibility of regulation of the management of open spaces. He said that the Guide provided a good basis in the start of ensuring that good practice was maintained and to reassure residents that the Council understand and acknowledged their concerns.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Upton highlighted that the management of open spaces was a national issue and not just pertinent to the Borough and he was pleased that the Council was at the forefront of preparing a guide. He hoped that there would be some national regulation of the sector in the future. He said that the Guide was advisory and whilst not legally enforceable was good to have.

Councillor Upton noted that housing developments and design had changed over recent years with the introduction of community areas which the residents were responsible for and paid for, but often which non-residents could use. He hoped that the government would pick up the challenge and that developers would get on board with the Good Practice Guide and hoped that a copy would be shared with prospective buyers by the developers and solicitors and that copies would be made widely available and given much publicity.

The Leader clarified that the Guide applied to freehold property as opposed to leasehold property.

Councillor J Wheeler said that the Guide aimed to provide clarity about what the Council wanted both for residents and management companies for open spaces and encouraged developers to look at both how they were managing the spaces and how they were communicating with residents to avoid confusion and promote openness. He said that a development may not always look like the brochure in early days but this could change as the environment developed and that positive communication could help avoid future issues.

Councillor Brennan reiterated comments about working with developers and management companies which Officers were doing and said that as Chair of the Fairham Growth Board conversations were already taking place with those developers who had been responsive and happy to work with the Council about providing information to residents. She said that the Guide was written in plain English and was clear, was a great initiative taken by the Council and provided a good step forward.

The Leader emphasised that it was an ongoing process.

It was RESOLVED that:

- a) the Good Practice Guide for the Management of Open Spaces to allow officers to engage with developers and management companies be endorsed and that delegated authority be given to the Director for Development and Economic Growth to make updates in line with the core principles of the Guide; and
- b) the Leader be requested to continue to lobby Government to regulate the governance of management companies to ensure transparency and remove charges unrelated to the direct management of open spaces.

The meeting closed at 7.43 pm.

CHAIR