

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
CABINET**

TUESDAY, 8 SEPTEMBER 2020

Held virtually at 7.00 pm and live streamed on the
Rushcliffe Borough Council YouTube channel

PRESENT:

Councillors S J Robinson (Chairman), D Mason (Vice-Chairman), A Edyvean,
R Inglis, G Moore and R Upton

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors B Gray and C Thomas

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

P Linfield

Executive Manager - Finance and
Corporate Services

K Marriott

Chief Executive

D Mitchell

Executive Manager - Communities

S Sull

Monitoring Officer

H Tambini

Democratic Services Manager

APOLOGIES:

There were no apologies.

10 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

11 Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 July 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 14 July 2020 were declared a
true record and signed by the Chairman.

12 Opposition Group Leaders' Questions

Question from Councillor Thomas to Councillor Upton

“In light of government proposals to reduce the opportunities for consultation
on planning applications, how is the Council ensuring that residents fully
understand that the options for growth identified in the Greater Nottingham
Strategic Plan consultation could lead to huge areas for development being
allocated on their doorsteps?”

Councillor Upton responded by confirming that the current Growth Options
consultation for the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan has been publicised as
widely as is possible, subject to national restrictions on activities during the
pandemic. All statutory consultees, local stakeholders and others whose
details were held by the Councils have been contacted directly. There has

been extensive use of social media to publicise the consultation. Alongside a dedicated Twitter site for the Strategic Plan, the Borough Council has promoted the consultation on its own Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts. There was a joint press release by the Councils concerning the consultation and the Borough Council has also published its own press release at the start of the consultation. There was a dedicated website, which provided full details for the consultation and hosted all the consultation and relevant background documents for everyone to view. The Borough Council had written to all Rushcliffe's town and parish councils with details of the consultation and asked them to, where possible, help publicise the consultation and its contents to their communities. The Growth Options was the first formal stage of preparing the Strategic Plan, prior to any decisions being made as to where further development might be located, and there would be further opportunities for Rushcliffe's communities to engage with the plan-making process as proposals emerged over the coming months.

Councillor Thomas asked a supplementary question to Councillor Upton.

"At the next stage of consultation, If Covid restrictions are still in place, will the Council consider targeted leafleting of residents or letters to particular areas, outdoor exhibitions and well publicised online events?"

Councillor Upton responded by stating that going forward it would be possible to undertake outdoor events and exhibitions and online events.

Question from Councillor Gray to Councillor Moore.

"In the Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring 2020/21 – Financial and Covid Update Quarter 1. 4.5 there is mention of a loan to be agreed with the West Bridgford CIL and Special Expenses Group. For transparency and accountability, could the Portfolio Holder explain more about the details of this loan for the benefit of Councillors and the public who are less familiar with this internal borrowing process and clarify that the decision will be referred back to cabinet for ratification?"

Councillor Moore responded by stating that this was not something the Council would ordinarily do but these were exceptional times with the advent of Covid 19. Given that West Bridgford was not a parished area and the Special Expense area fulfilled that function the loan was likely to replicate the terms that had been offered to parish councils, therefore being fair and equitable, as a result of the impact of Covid 19.

Councillor Moore quoted from the Executive Manager – Finance and Corporate Services' correspondence sent to Parish Council Chairmen and Clerks on 23 June 2020:

"To cover temporary in-year losses, loans may be provided, interest free until 31 March 2021 and thereafter a rate of 2.5% will apply (the term of the loan is to be agreed). This will help support your cash flow in the short term as you consider your future budgets and precept requirements going forward."

The purpose of the West Bridgford Special Expense Group meeting would be to agree the terms of the loan given the budget implications for the West

Bridgford Special Expense area. The minutes of the meeting would be published and therefore be transparent, in the same way the Council had been transparent in the first instance that this decision needed to be taken. The agreement of the Special Expense was ultimately taken by Full Council, on a recommendation from Cabinet, and all members were therefore involved in agreeing that as part of the budget setting process. The new Group that had been set-up increased transparency and improved governance in the setting of the West Bridgford Special Expense and the Terms of Reference had been approved at Full Council on 16 July 2020, with amendments to the Constitution, which had again involved all Councillors. The Terms of Reference included the important role of the Finance Portfolio Holder Chairing the Group given that the Special Expense local tax feeds into the Council's capping limit for its overall level of Council Tax increase. In other words, excessive increases in West Bridgford local taxation could result in the Council breaching its own Council Tax capping limit. This was currently being reviewed, with the possibility of some future Government income, and an update would be given at the next meeting of the West Bridgford Special expenses Group.

13 Citizens' Questions

There were no questions.

14 Potential Local Government Reorganisation

The Leader presented the report of the Chief Executive providing an update on proposals for Local Government Reorganisation.

The Leader referred to the significance of this issue for everyone. It was anticipated that the Government's Devolution White Paper would be published in the autumn, which would set out the guidelines for future devolution. The Government's agenda was to simplify the local government landscape, incorporating cost and efficiency savings. Some authorities had already gone through unitarisation and reorganisation and as a proactive Council, it was considered to be both timely and pertinent to prepare the framework to go forward and take an active role in future negotiations. The recommendations contained in the report provided the Council with the framework to move forward and in particular to ensure that appropriate public consultation would take place, which would allow due consideration for affected parties and would respect local democracy. The importance of establishing a framework was reiterated to allow the Council to actively participate in the debate and negotiations going forward.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Mason reiterated the importance of this issue and the necessity to have an appropriate framework in place, together with full public consultation. There were different ways of delivering unitarisation and it was vital that the Council was proactive and involved in every stage of the decision making process, with all councils in Nottinghamshire being involved.

The Leader highlighted the different services provided by the District Councils and County Council, including waste collection and recycling and the fragmentation across the county, with the County Council being the Waste

Disposal Authority and District Councils making the collections. Going forward there would be opportunities to improve those services and the importance of full public consultation on those matters was reiterated. It was important to acknowledge that change would take place, the report set out the Council's position and framework to go forward, and all Councillors would be updated on any major issues at Full Council meetings.

It was RESOLVED that:

- a) the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive be authorised to undertake engagement regarding Local Government Reorganisation options including proper public consultation with all affected parties, and following a clear timescale to be agreed, which allows due consideration for affected parties and respects local democracy;
- b) the Local Government Reorganisation Member Group be re-formed, chaired by the Leader of the Council, to engage with the process and support Rushcliffe Borough Council's involvement in shaping the future of local government;
- c) a budget of up to £60,000 be allocated for working collectively with other local authority partners to identify and consult on the best options for the future;
- d) the Cabinet be updated regularly on the progress of any work; and
- e) preferred options for any future Local Government Reorganisation that affects Rushcliffe Borough Council be referred to Full Council for consideration and debate.

15 Revenue and Capital Budget Monitoring 2020/21 - Financial and Covid Update Quarter 1

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the report of the Executive Manager – Finance and Corporate Services outlining the budget position for revenue and capital at 30 June 2020.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance confirmed that as previously reported the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the Council's finances. The anticipated budget gap had been partially offset by additional Government grants and in-house efficiencies, which had resulted in an overall net in-year budget gap of £422k, which was an improvement from the previous update reported to Cabinet in July 2020. The Capital Programme had a planned underspend of £24.8m largely due to slippage in two major schemes at the Bingham Hub and the Crematorium. The Council had entered into an agreement with Framework, which would lead to an additional investment of £150k to provide accommodation for rough sleepers, which was a commendable investment to help the more vulnerable. The report highlighted the Council's loss of income, additional costs and savings, with the reduction in total income and the support for leisure being the two most significant costs affecting the budget. Savings had been incurred from a number of areas, including increased, garden waste income, housing benefit subsidy, together

with management applied cost savings and efficiencies. In respect of net revenue efficiencies for the year to date, that was projected at £624k, with a pressure of £2.5m due to Covid-19, which equated to £1.9m. It was noted that the Council had received £1.52m in Government support, which had brought the projected budget gap down to £422k. The year-end figure would be updated by any further Government funding and the speed of recovery from the impact of Covid-19. Delays to Capital Receipts of £20m were expected, with some income being moved to the following year. It was confirmed that Nottinghamshire County Cricket Club had repaid the loan of £55,000 on 7 August 2020. In respect of Business Grants, it was noted that over £18m had been paid, which equated to over 91% of eligible businesses in the Borough. £389k in hardship payments had been made in relation to Council Tax support, with over 2,400 households benefitting from those payments. In respect of Discretionary Grants, 189 claims had been made, with £814k being paid to 62 claims, which equated to 84% of the available funds. It was pleasing to note that additional efficiencies had been identified, and together with Government support that had resulted in the budget gap for revenue being more manageable. Reference was made to the normal external financial pressures that affected the budget and it was reiterated that it was important that the Council continued to maintain a tight control over its finances, expenditure and reserves.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Edyvean referred to the challenge of managing the budget in such difficult times and commended and thanked officers in the Finance team for their hard work. Whilst the Council should not be complacent, the projected budget gap was significantly better than earlier projections and could be managed through further tight control.

It was RESOLVED that

- a) the projected net effect of in-year efficiencies (£0.624m) and Covid-19 pressures (£2.564m) and Covid Government funding (£1.518m) resulting in an expected net revenue position for the year of £0.422m be noted;
- b) a projected £2.864m net surplus on Business Rates as a result of additional S31 reliefs be noted and this surplus be transferred to the Organisation Stabilisation Reserve to offset the expected Collection Fund deficit in later years;
- c) the capital underspend of £24.8m as a result of planned programme slippage be noted; and
- d) the projected Special Expenses position with a projected deficit of £0.119m for the year be financed by a loan from the Council, with terms to be consulted on with the West Bridgford Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Special Expenses Group.

16 Covid-19 Budget 2020/21 and Medium Term Financial Implications

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the report of the Executive Manager – Finance and Corporate Services providing an update on the budget position reported to Cabinet on 14 July 2020 of the projected impact of Covid-19,

together with an update on the expected budget for the year 2020/21 and the remainder of the current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

The Portfolio Holder for Finance confirmed that two budget-briefing sessions had been held to update Councillors and those had been well attended. In March 2020, Full Council had approved the Council's annual budget; however, the impact of Covid-19 had resulted in financial pressures from loss of income and additional support costs. The Cabinet had received regular updates on those figures, together with details of the Government funding received. A number of changes had been made to budget projections to cover additional costs and reduced income and it was too early to speculate when some form of 'normality' would return. Prudent estimates had been made upon the levels of income expected in line with Government guidance. In respect of the current budget position, the report highlighted the ongoing work being undertaken on income streams and expenditure, including the leisure contract, which was a significant expense. As leisure facilities started to reopen fully again, the Leisure Centre Contract would be reviewed on 30 September and 31 December 2020, with details reported to Cabinet and the Corporate Overview Group. It was expected that as revenue streams returned the support package for leisure would be reduced; however, it should be noted that a cost of over £1m for the financial year was expected. In respect of the Capital Programme, the new Bingham Hub was out to tender, and there was progress with the Abbey Road development, with some positive signs of recovery. It was noted that the Capital Programme was £38m, which equated to a significant sum of money to invest in the local economy. Reference was made to the agreed repayment policy for the Arena, which would allow officers the flexibility to extend the repayment period if required. The report highlighted the Council's revised Transformation Policy, which included a savings target of £500k, based on efficiencies and increased income. It was noted that if there was a second wave of Covid-19, the current budget gap of £422k could rise to £1.7m and it was vital that the situation continued to be monitored. As expected, there had been an increase in demand for the Council's Hardship Fund, with 2,293 claims in the last year, and this fund had provided much needed support to residents who were struggling financially. This was an extremely difficult time for all local authorities, and it was important to acknowledge that this Council had and continued to be well managed with a healthy level of reserves, which in the short term had enabled it deal with this economic crisis, whilst still delivering its corporate objectives. However, it was acknowledged that the Council could not be complacent; Government funding had been welcomed, although future support would be limited, and officers were thanked again for their hard work and dedication.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Inglis referred to the unprecedented events that had occurred this year and the significant impact on the economy to the entire country and beyond. It was fortunate that this forward thinking Council had an excellent business acumen and had made prudent investments, brought in income from its assets and maintained a healthy level of reserves, which had proved invaluable. The significant challenges for the Council over the past six months were acknowledged; however, due to its resilience and management skills the budget had remained strong. The hard work and commitment of the Executive Manager for Finance and Corporate Services, his team, and the Portfolio Holder for Finance to address the issues that Covid-19 had presented was commended. The work

of other Council employees who had been seconded to help administer the grant claims so efficiently and expediently for the benefit of residents and businesses was also acknowledged. It was noted that difficult times still lay ahead, and the Council would continue to work hard to ensure that through prudent management of resources, the Council would remain resilient.

The Leader reiterated the comments made, and in particular thanked the Executive Manager for Finance and Corporate Services and his team for their hard work and asked that those thanks be passed onto his team on the behalf of Cabinet. Locally, the key importance of revitalising the economy and getting people back to work was acknowledged, as was the vital role that Councillors would play in encouraging that. It was pleasing to note that the leisure centres had reopened, with increased use of some facilities including Edwalton Golf Course and it was hoped that would be sustained. The Council remained ambitious, with a high profile Capital Programme in place, which would allow local residents to see the benefits from those capital investments.

It was RESOLVED that the following be approved for submission to Full Council:

- a) the revised projections to the 2020/21 revenue budget and remainder of the current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as referred to in Appendix A of the report, as a result of the impact of Covid-19;
- b) the revised projections to the Capital Programme for 2020/21 and the impact on the Capital Programme over the MTFS as referred to in Appendix B of the report;
- c) the changes to the Transformation Strategy as referred to in Appendix C of the report;
- d) the Council Tax Hardship Fund Policy Paper as referred to in Appendix D of the report and its current application;
- e) the strategy of utilising in-year budget efficiencies, the Organisation Stabilisation reserve, reviewing the use of existing reserves, reduced use of Voluntary Revenue Provision and therefore use of New Homes Bonus; as fiscal levers so the Council balances the budget and delivers its corporate objectives, as referred to in paragraph 4.8.6 of the report; and
- f) the transfer of three reserves totalling to £0.524m, as referred to in paragraph 4.8.7 of the report, to the Organisation Stabilisation Reserve from 2020/21 and the revised anticipated position over the next five years as referred to in Appendix E of the report.

17 **Statement of Community Involvement**

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning presented the report of the Executive Manager – Communities providing an update on the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) for Planning Policy and Planning Applications.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning confirmed that it was a statutory

requirement that the Council should have a SCI, which set out how the Council would involve local residents in relation to planning consultations and planning applications. The current SCI had been adopted by Cabinet in March 2019; however, due to social distancing requirements imposed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the SCI was no longer up to date and an Addendum had been drafted. The Addendum set out how the Council would ensure effective consultation on planning issues was maintained, in line with social distancing requirements, and it would be removed once those controls were no longer required.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Edyvean stated that it was important to ensure that appropriate consultation processes were maintained, and the Addendum highlighted how that would be effectively managed going forward.

The Leader reiterated the importance of ensuring that appropriate consultation continued and welcomed this pragmatic approach.

It was RESOLVED that the Statement of Community Involvement for Planning Policy and Planning Applications Addendum – Implications of the Coronavirus Pandemic be adopted.

The meeting closed at 7.38 pm.

CHAIRMAN