

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
CABINET**

TUESDAY, 13 JULY 2021

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

PRESENT:

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors R Jones and J Walker

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

D Banks	Director of Neighbourhoods
P Linfield	Director of Finance and Corporate Services
K Marriott	Chief Executive
S Sull	Monitoring Officer
H Tambini	Democratic Services Manager

APOLOGIES:

There were no apologies

11 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

12 Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 June 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 8 June 2021, were declared a true record and signed by the Chairman.

13 Citizens' Questions

There were no questions.

14 Opposition Group Leaders' Questions

Question from Councillor J Walker to Councillor Brennan.

“Point 7.1.4 of the officers’ report states: If the operator is unable to retain memberships through lack of group exercise offering or is unable to generate income from the maximisation of the asset, they are likely to seek a review of the contract management fee or look to the local authority to support their losses in other ways.

How will the Council ensure that it protects taxpayers' money in its negotiations with the operator, during the transition phase following the opening up after Covid?"

Councillor Brennan responded by stating that the issues raised in the question would only come into play if the recommendations in the Rushcliffe Arena Facilities report being considered this evening were not approved, and advised that by approving the recommendations, it would mitigate the need for any lengthy negotiations or transition period, to allow a quick conversion of the facility at a relatively modest cost. That would quickly generate activity and would ensure that no further changes to the leisure contract would be required. However, by way of assurance, Councillor Brennan advised that the Council had a robust contract management framework in place, and this had been augmented during the pandemic by moving to an open book arrangement whereby the Council reviewed information on usage and financial performance on a monthly basis. Furthermore, the Council had worked with Parkwood to critically review and challenge its recovery plan and forecasting to ensure that 'best value' for the taxpayer was being achieved from both a leisure delivery and financial perspective. The Council had also utilised support offered by the Government via Sport England to provide an external assessment of the Parkwood Recovery Plan, which had helped to provide further assurance. Those arrangements would continue during the transition and recovery period and would flow into the new contractual terms as reported to Cabinet in January 2021, which again have been the subject of robust negotiations and demonstrated how the Council was constantly working to ensure best value from its leisure operator. Public leisure services had faced significant financial and operational challenges as a result of the pandemic, causing in some areas unprecedented damage to local facilities. The Local Government Association and ukactive continued to urge the Government to provide additional support to the sector. Rushcliffe had not been immune to those pressures, and the Council continued to work very hard to deliver its Leisure Strategy ambitions and to protect taxpayers' money.

Councillor J Walker asked a supplementary question to Councillor Brennan.

"Will the losses referred to be actual or projected losses?"

Councillor Brennan responded by stating that the point being referred to in the financial implications section of the report would be the consequence that might arise if the mitigating factors did not take place, therefore, if the recommendations were approved this evening, those issues should not occur.

Question from Councillor Jones to Councillor Brennan.

"How is it that the other centres listed in the report can provide bowling facilities when, despite its large number of residents over retirement age, Rushcliffe has failed, and plans to waste its investment in the Arena bowling facility?"

Councillor Brennan responded by stating that although Rushcliffe had a large number of residents over retirement age, that did not necessarily mean that they would take part in indoor bowling, and the declining membership of the Rushcliffe Indoor Bowls Club, highlighted that despite the large number of

retired people in the Borough, the Club was unable to retain or attract new members. The recommendations in the Rushcliffe Arena Facilities report would ensure that the facility better aligned to the Council's Leisure Strategy and would offer greater value for money for the Borough's residents by ensuring that the facility was used more often and by all age groups. Concerns over usage had first been expressed in May 2014, when the report to Cabinet had recognised that membership and usage was declining and that an alternative use might be required. Despite the Council's best efforts to support the Club to increase membership, that had not occurred, and the Council would be negligent if it did not pursue alternative usage strategies for the benefit of the whole community. The other local facilities referred to were created on different business models, and therefore direct comparisons could not be made, for example, the others were generally purpose-built indoor bowls facilities, which were fully utilised with leagues and competitions all year round, whereas in Rushcliffe many bowlers preferred to switch to playing outdoors in the summer months, which left the hall unused. In addition, members of the Rushcliffe Indoor Bowls Club committee had stated that other venues provided scope for more attractive social activities, including a bar, refreshments and spectator viewing facilities.

Councillor Jones asked about the equalities monitoring of facilities.

Whilst not a supplementary question, Councillor Brennan responded by stating that an Equalities Impact Assessment had been undertaken and advised that a recommendation in the Rushcliffe Arena Facilities report was that officer would be working with the operator to mitigate the loss of the facility in its current format by ensuring that alternative activities would be available for people of all demographics and abilities.

15 **Financial Outturn 2020/21**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Customer Access, Councillor Moore presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services outlining the year-end financial outturn position for 2020/21, linked to the closure of the accounts process and previous financial update reports, including the in-year variances, together with variances resulting from Covid 19.

Councillor Moore referred to the very unusual and challenging year that the Council had faced, and reminded Cabinet that the Council had experienced lost income and increased expenditure, with Table 2 of the report highlighting the main items which had impacted on the current Revenue Budget, and in particular the £1.2m support for leisure facilities.

Councillor Moore referred to Table 1 in the report and to the significant increase in net transfer to reserves, which stood at £7.3m; however, Cabinet noted that £5.9m of that would be required to fund the Business Rates deficit over the forthcoming years. That had been dealt with by the formation of a Collection Fund Reserve, which would release those funds over the next few years. The report also highlighted a number of carry forward requests from last year, totalling £910k.

Councillor Moore referred to the Government led initiatives, which the Council had delivered, and it was noted in Table 3 of the report that £11.1m of Business Rates Relief had been paid to 926 businesses; Table 4 outlined the various Covid 19 related grants available, with £30.8m paid to support local businesses; and Table 5 highlighted £58k being paid for 121 test and trace payments, to support the more financially vulnerable who had been required to isolate due to Covid 19.

Cabinet noted that the Council's overall reserve was healthy; however, this year had highlighted the importance of having sufficient reserves to ensure financial resilience. It was also pleasing to note that the New Homes Bonus had increased by £1.2m, and that would be committed to support Capital schemes.

In respect of the Council's Capital Programme, there was £6.8m underspend brought forward, with the reasons for that highlighted in Appendix C of the report.

Cabinet was advised that the Special Expenses position for West Bridgford was referred to in Appendix D, with the deficit due to loss of income caused by Covid 19, to be covered by a loan, which would be reported to the next meeting of the West Bridgford Special Expenses and Community Infrastructure Levy Advisory Group.

In conclusion, Councillor Moore advised that this was a more detailed report than usual, due to the financial implications of Covid 19, and that to a degree, the Council's reserves had protected it from further financial challenges, and Cabinet was assured that the Council was in a strong financial position to deal with any future issues; whilst continuing to progress with its ambitious Capital Programme. Officers throughout the Council, and in particular, the Director – Finance and Corporate Services and his team were thanked for their hard work in continuing to deliver excellent services to residents and businesses throughout the Borough during this difficult time.

In seconding the recommendation Councillor Edyvean reiterated previous comments regarding the challenging situation that the Council had faced, and the thanks given to officers, and commented that it was pleasing to note that the Council had been one of the top performing in the country in providing support to local businesses and residents.

Councillor Edyvean specifically referred to the reduction in car parking charges of £360k and advised that this was because the Council had offered free or reduced parking charges during the pandemic to support local businesses. Reference was also made to a small shortfall in the Council's property investment, and it was noted that officers had worked with tenants to minimise disruption and offer support, and it was positive that this shortfall was so small. Councillor Edyvean stated that it was encouraging that despite all the pressures from the pandemic, the Council had maintained financial resilience.

The Leader echoed the comments made and referred to the complexities that the Council had faced over the last 18 months, the incredible resilience that the Council had shown and thanked the Director – Finance and Corporate

Services and his team for their hard work during such challenging times. Cabinet was advised that those challenging times would continue, and residents knew that the Council would continue to serve their best interests, and it was noted that when the pandemic started the Council was financially strong and resilient and that had helped during this difficult time.

The Leader referred to the significant impact on the Council's revenues, including the loss of car parking charges, which had been introduced to help local businesses, and that would continue going forward and would be reviewed, as it was important to stimulate the local economy, in all sectors throughout the Borough. Reference was also made to the importance of the Council's well balanced assets portfolio, which had remained resilient.

In conclusion, the Leader noted that the accounts would be subject to cross-party scrutiny at the Corporate Overview Scrutiny Group and the Governance Scrutiny Group.

It was RESOLVED that

- a) the 2020/21 revenue position and efficiencies identified in Table 1 and the Covid 19 related variances in Table 2 be noted, and the carry forwards in Table 6 be approved;
- b) the associated changes to the earmarked reserves as set out at Appendix B including the newly created Collection Fund Reserve as stated in paragraph 4.2 be approved;
- c) the re-profiled position on capital be noted and the capital carry forwards outlined in Appendix C be approved; and
- d) the update on the Special Expenses outturn and loan position at paragraph 4.13 and in Appendix D be noted.

16 Rushcliffe Arena Facilities Review

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Climate Change, Councillor Brennan presented the report of the Director – Neighbourhoods reviewing the Rushcliffe Arena Facilities.

Councillor Brennan referred to the devastating impact of the Covid pandemic on the leisure industry and confirmed that the Council had been working closely with its leisure providers to support them. Cabinet was advised that the Council now faced a number of difficult decisions, in order to maintain a viable facility, available to the widest possible cross section of residents, which supported the Council's aspirations as set out in its Leisure Strategy.

Cabinet noted the underutilisation and declining usage of the indoor bowls facility, which remained largely dormant for approximately a third of the year, as detailed in Table 1.1 of the report. Councillor Brennan advised that despite the best efforts of Rushcliffe Indoor Bowls Club members, Lex Leisure and officers, membership had continued to decline. It was noted that the Club had received significant administrative support on finance, governance and

safeguarding matters, together with ongoing support through investment and marketing in an attempt to encourage and increase membership; however, that had failed to increase numbers. Cabinet noted that Club membership had also declined from 377 members in 2009 to 169 in 2019/20.

Councillor Brennan confirmed that to support the return of a financially sustainable leisure offer it was critically important that gym membership was retained, as it formed the bulk of the operator's income. Cabinet was advised that maintaining a large, underutilised resource was no longer viable and a decision had to be made on the future of the indoor bowls facility, in order to support the Arena and the widest number of residents to adopt an active lifestyle.

Councillor Brennan advised that a number of alternative options had been considered, as outlined in paragraph 5 of the report, and a balanced consideration had been taken between the need to maintain gym membership, financial viability, diversification of the underutilised space to enable a multi-use facility and the extent of the financial investment required to deliver this. Details of the preferred option were highlighted in paragraph 5.1.3 of the report, which would include the change of use of the indoor bowls hall to enable group exercise and sporting and non-sporting events through a quick, simple conversion, which would support the leisure provider to recovery from its losses, encourage the return of existing users and attract new users. The cost of the conversion was anticipated to be £60k and the financial implications were outlined in the report.

In conclusion, Councillor Brennan stated that in undertaking this review, the Council had been left in no doubt as to the strength of feeling of some members of the Club, and whilst for many there had been an acceptance of the situation, for others, the decision to close the bowls hall, if agreed this evening, would be extremely unwelcome, and that was recognised. If the closure was approved this evening, the Council would continue to work with the Club to support members to transfer to other local clubs if they wished to do so. Cabinet was advised that the Council would also continue to work with Lex Leisure to offer alternative activities at the Arena.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Inglis reiterated the need to re-evaluate the use of all facilities, against demand, sustainability and changes in leisure and sporting traits. Cabinet was reminded that the Council had strived to deliver its Leisure Strategy by providing excellent facilities, which could be seen at the Arena, and would be seen at the new leisure centre in Bingham.

Councillor Inglis noted with sadness that despite several years of support from all parties to boost membership, the usage of the indoor bowls facility continued to fall and had diminished to such a level, that a vast space stood empty for several months of the year, and that was not acceptable and a review had been required. It was noted that the local decline in indoor bowls participation was reflected nationally and concerns had been raised in 2014, and seven years later the Council was faced with a very underused facility, which was currently catering to the needs of a much greater and wider section of the community.

Councillor Inglis stated that the report clearly set out the reasons for the proposed recommendations and confirmed that advice had been sought from Sports England and the English Indoor Bowls Association, which had recognised the availability of other nearby centres that were considered to be within a reasonable travelling distance for the members to continue participating and enjoying their sport. Cabinet was advised that the proposals would provide an appealing facility for the wider community, which would deliver activities to a greater demographic of users, which would include Club members and although there was sympathy for members who would find the changes unwelcome, they would continue to be supported going forward.

Councillor Edyvean stated that he shared the disappointment of Club members; however, the evidence was clear, and it was noted that they had received considerable support from the Council. It was acknowledged that there were a number of other facilities close by, including a very well supported club in Loughborough, which was the nearest town for many residents in Rushcliffe. Councillor Edyvean confirmed that going forward alternative activities would be made available at the Arena to that particular demographic.

The Leader advised that he had had the pleasure of sitting on the working group, which had designed the Arena, and a key focus of that group had been to ensure optimum usage and viability of the facility, and all aspects of the facility were reviewed to ensure that it continued to meet that criteria. It was acknowledged that as a Council, difficult decisions had to be made, all its assets had to be analysed, and looking at the usage of the indoor bowls facility, it was a concern that it was not used for four months of the year.

On a more positive front, Cabinet noted that outdoor bowling was very popular throughout the Borough, with many indoor bowling club members using those outdoor facilities; however, that impacted on the usage at the Arena. The Leader thanked officers for the support that they had given to the Club to try to improve its sustainability, as given that a Council strapline was 'Great Sport', it was pleasing to note that all Council facilities were made available to everyone. Cabinet was advised that the Council faced challenges as it came out of the pandemic to ensure that use of the Arena was maximised, and the growing demand for exercise classes for all ages had to be met, and the proposed option would meet those demands.

In conclusion, the Leader advised that officers would work with Lex Leisure to ensure that activities were available to mitigate the loss of the indoor bowling facility, and reiterated that although this was a very difficult decision to make, the Council would always have an emphasis on providing the best facilities it could for everyone in the Borough.

It was RESOLVED that:

- a) the closure of the current indoor bowls facility be approved;
- b) a basic conversion of the hall to a multi-functional sports and event space at a cost of £60k be approved; and
- c) officers' work in mitigating the loss of the facility in its current format be

supported, by offering further support to remaining Bowls Club members including exploring the introduction of short mat bowls at the Arena.

17 **Covid-19: Update Report**

The Leader presented the report of the Chief Executive, providing an update on the work completed to date on response and recovery due to the Covid 19 pandemic since May 2021, and detailing an outline of plans to support the recovery from Covid 19.

The Leader highlighted the key headlines in the report, which reflected the work undertaken both internally and externally by the Council during the pandemic. Cabinet noted the changes to lockdown levels since 17 May 2021, the overview and lifting of some restrictions, including the recent confirmation by the Government that the lifting of restrictions scheduled for 19 July 2021, would now go ahead, details of which were highlighted in the report.

The Leader referred to the importance of the financial support given to businesses throughout the pandemic, including business rate grants, the work of the High Street Ambassadors in helping the public and businesses to comply with restrictions, additional work for Environmental Health due to an increase in non-compliance, and digital support grants. Of the £106k allocated to the Council in the Welcome Back funding, Cabinet noted that six of the larger town/parish councils had each received £10k.

In respect of leisure, the significant impact to this sector could not be underestimated and the Leader confirmed that since some restrictions were lifted on 17 May 2021, usage of the facilities has been very positive throughout, and activities including golf at Edwalton had also increased significantly, and it was hoped that trend would continue.

The Leader referred to a number of grants that had been distributed, including funding for food parcels for vulnerable households, together with summer activity and food programmes for children eligible for free school meals. Cabinet noted that since November 2020, over 6,500 payments had been made, with £15m of Government grants paid out to businesses, and a Special Hospitality Grant was also being allocated from remaining discretionary funds, with details of all grants highlighted in the report. The Leader thanked the Director – Finance and Corporate Services and his team for their hard work and diligence during this challenging time.

Cabinet was informed that in respect of events, Proms in the Park would now take place in September 2021. The Leader was pleased to confirm that events including the Outdoor Theatre and Sunday Cinema would be held in August 2021.

In respect of track and trace and mass vaccinations, the Leader advised that the Gamston vaccination centre had administered more than 50,000 vaccines. Cabinet noted that although the track and trace testing centre had been closed at the Arena, as its use had declined considerably, mobile testing sites were available at Cotgrave and Bingham and had been well received. The Leader

referred to the Isolation Scheme for people on low incomes, which had now been extended to include parents/guardians of children who had been told to self-isolate and it was pleasing to see those payments of £500 being made to those in need.

In conclusion, the Leader referred to the impact on service performance from Covid 19 and reiterated the importance of the scrutiny groups in monitoring performance through a suite of performance indicators.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Edyvean reiterated the importance of monitoring and responding to the impact of Covid 19, as the challenges already faced would continue going forward; however, the success of the vaccination programme was welcomed, and it was hoped that progress would continue.

Councillor Moore stated that it was very pleasing to see renewed optimism and flourishing businesses throughout the Borough and the speed with which the business grants had been paid out to businesses in Rushcliffe had proved to be a lifeline to so many of them.

The Leader stated that he had recently met with a number of businesses in Cotgrave and had been encouraged to hear from them that business was going well, they were recruiting and were very optimistic for the future and had thanked the Council for its support during the pandemic.

It was RESOLVED that the work of officers of the Council and partners in responding to and supporting the recovery from Covid 19 be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.46 pm.

CHAIRMAN