

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL**

THURSDAY, 2 MARCH 2023

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

PRESENT:

Councillors T Combellack (Chairman), D Mason (Vice-Chairman), R Adair, B Bansal, M Barney, K Beardsall, N Begum, A Brennan, R Butler, N Clarke, J Cottee, G Dickman, M Gaunt, P Gowland, B Gray, L Howitt, R Inglis, Mrs C Jeffreys, R Jones, R Mallender, S Mallender, G Moore, J Murray, A Phillips, V Price, F Purdue-Horan, S J Robinson, K Shaw, D Simms, Mrs M Stockwood, C Thomas, R Upton, J Walker, R Walker, L Way, G Wheeler, J Wheeler and G Williams

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

L Ashmore	Director of Development and Economic Growth
D Banks	Director of Neighbourhoods
G Dennis	Monitoring Officer
P Linfield	Director of Finance and Corporate Services
E Richardson	Democratic Services Officer
H Tambini	Democratic Services Manager

APOLOGIES:

Councillors S Bailey, B Buschman, A Edyvean, L Healy, J Stockwood and D Viridi

50 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

51 Minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 1 December 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

Councillor Jones voted against the approval of the minutes.

52 Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor thanked Kay Carter from the Nottinghamshire Dyslexia Association for her moment of reflection and informed Council that understanding neurodiversity was very important in a world of instant communications especially in the public sector.

The Mayor stated that she had attended over 100 public engagements so far during her term of office. Since the last meeting of Council, she had attended many Christmas events, carol services, a pantomime performed by the Nottinghamshire Gymnastic Society, and visited Council staff over a number of different locations to wish them a Merry Christmas. The Mayor asked that her thanks be passed on to officers who had also worn Christmas jumpers to raise money for her charities.

The Mayor informed Council about her very different Christmas Day, serving dinners to people in need at the Friary and learning a little about their lives and what had led them to need support, and made a plea on behalf of the Friary for volunteers, warm clothes, bedding and food. The Mayor also referred to the Ukrainian Christmas party and pantomime that she had attended and stated that she had been able to distribute over 100 handmade quilts and reading pillows, made by her local WI, to Ukrainian children experiencing a very different Christmas far from home this year.

The Mayor thanked Councillors who had attended her Christmas Party and hoped that they had enjoyed the entertainment provided by Jonny Victory as much as she had.

Since the new year, the Mayor confirmed that she had visited local food banks and the Ruddington Pantry, which were unfortunately much needed at this current time, and she also relayed to Council her wonderful experiences at the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust reserve at Skylarks. The Mayor concluded by informing Council about her engagement earlier this week to officially open the new leisure centre at Bingham Arena, including the beautiful community hall and enterprise centre, which demonstrated the Council's commitment to providing for the local community during very challenging times.

Before closing, the Mayor referred to her final three charity fund raising events, which were upcoming and encouraged Councillors to purchase tickets to support her efforts. There would be an Easter Fashion Show at Plumtree Village Hall on 6 April, a Sporting Q&A at Nottingham Rugby Club on 18 April, and finally an abseil down Kingsmill Viaduct on 14 May.

53 Leader's Announcements

The Leader congratulated the Mayor on her very full diary of engagements and echoed her positive comments about the new Bingham Arena and Enterprise Centre, which were a tremendous achievement.

As this would be the last meeting of full Council before the May 2023 Borough Council Election, the Leader paid his respects to those Councillors around the Chamber who would be retiring and those that might not be re-elected by their communities. The Leader reflected that whilst the politics of Councillors could differ, being a Councillor was a big commitment of time and energy and thanked all Councillors for their contribution to the Borough and invited them all to return to the first Council meeting after the election. The Leader specifically recognised the incredible work of Councillors Adair and Jeffreys, who were both stepping down at the next election, after many, many years of dedicated

service.

Finally, the Leader thanked his Group for putting their trust in him six years ago by nominating him Leader, in this his last meeting. He thanked his Cabinet and Councillors on the other side of the Chamber for their respect and engagement. The Leader thanked his wife, without whose support he would not have been able to give so much over the last six years as well as Mrs Moore for her wonderful cakes and trifles. The Leader stated that his aim, when he took over this position six years ago was to leave it in a better position than when he took the role on, and he hoped that he had achieved that.

Finally, he wished all Councillors luck in the upcoming elections.

54 Chief Executive's Announcements

The Chief Executive had given her apologies to the meeting. The Deputy Chief Executive made no announcements.

55 Citizens' Questions

The Mayor invited Mr Robinson-Green to read his Citizen's Question as submitted:

"Will the Council commit to, take active and timely steps to investigate and implement how to end its policy of not adopting open spaces on new developments leading to estates and service charges?"

Your policy currently has the ramifications that local residents must pay extortionate, unregulated, and uncapped fees to private companies for the management of their estates, not just in maintaining the open space, but to get permission to sell or erect a shed in their garden for example. In East Leake the lantern fields development, to get permission for a shed is a cost of £130 every time, roughly equivalent to some smaller feelings' whole monthly Council Tax fee on that estate. This money lines the pockets of private shareholders far away from Rushcliffe. More than half the fees paid on our estate go on administrative and management costs, not the maintenance of open spaces.

It is perfectly possible to use existing means such as Section 106 requirements to request for example 20 years of maintenance and management fees from the developers as a commuted sum, as used to happen before you changed the policy. Stratford-on-Avon District Council are currently out with a public consultation with detailed plans on achieving this. This money stays within the local economy and supports the Council to deliver its services.

For more details on the problems you have caused residents with this please see the details at: <https://www.homeownersrights.net/>

And the Parliamentary briefing at:

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/freeholders-estate-and-service-charges/>

Councillor N Clarke phrased these unregulated charges as recognising 'unforeseen circumstances' in a Growth and Development Scrutiny meeting on 16th July 2020. But to my knowledge, with communications from our elected

councillors and officers, absolutely nothing has been done to find a way out of these ‘unforeseen circumstances’.”

Councillor Upton thanked Mr Robinson-Green for his question and stated that he had some personal understanding of the issues raised and went on to say that the Council acknowledged the challenges around the management of public open spaces and had reviewed the issue at the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group in both 2020 and 2021. This was a national problem in a largely unregulated sector, and it had been rumoured that the new Regeneration and Levelling up Bill would include a code for the management of public open spaces by management companies, but details at this stage were unknown. Councillor Upton indicated that in recognition of the ongoing concerns and issues highlighted, the Council would make a commitment to undertake a further review of the issues highlighted, including reviewing what other councils did. Councillor Upton confirmed that the Council would undertake a comprehensive review, looking at the various management options, and bring it before the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group, which was a cross party group, later this year. Councillor Upton concluded that this issue was also the focus of Councillor Thomas’ motion later this evening and stated that he would elaborate more on this issue at that point in the meeting.

56 Petitions

No petitions had been submitted.

57 2023/24 Budget and Financial Strategy

The Mayor advised that she had been asked as Chairman of this meeting to consider extending the time period for proposing the 2023/24 Budget and Financial Strategy to 15 minutes, and to allow 7 ½ minutes for Group Leaders responding. The Mayor confirmed that she was happy to approve the request.

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough-wide Leadership, Councillor Robinson presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services outlining the Council’s Financial Strategy and Budget for 2023/24.

The Leader stated that this budget had been carefully crafted to represent the diversity of all Rushcliffe’s residents and businesses, and had been developed during very difficult times, with war in Europe, associated high levels of inflation, economic downturn, and rising prices, which affected everyone. Council was reminded that this budget had not been built in isolation, rather it had been built on many successfully years of prudent management by this authority.

The Leader referred to the support being offered to local businesses, including the proposal to freeze car parking charges, with the authority already having some of the lowest charges in the county. Reference was made to the support being given to the Development Corporation, which would be bringing new employment and green technology to Rushcliffe, and it was hoped that some very significant plans shared this week with Cabinet would soon be made

public. Investment was also being made in the Freeport, with significant announcements due in the next week, and the Leader referred to the significance of the HS2 hub scheduled to come into Rushcliffe. It was noted that the significant Business Rate relief was helping local businesses, and that the Council was also offering some businesses rent free periods and rent reviews, which reflected their needs. The Leader advised that 10 out of the 12 units at the new Bingham Enterprise Centre had already been let, which highlighted how well the Council was fulfilling that market.

With regards to supporting the vulnerable and disadvantaged, the Leader confirmed that £3.7m had been invested in disabled facilities across the Borough, with a further £325k to Hound Lodge, which supported families made unintentionally homeless. £4.7m had been allocated for social housing, and Council was reminded that on the larger sites, 30% affordable homes was the target, and such significant funds helped the Borough to deliver more social housing than any other district in Nottinghamshire.

The Leader referred to the £1m allocated to build a gypsy and traveller site, which would allow the Council to prevent unauthorised encampments around the Borough, which affected communities.

In respect of supporting local communities, £2.7m was being invested at Cotgrave and Keyworth leisure centres, on the back of the successful opening of the new leisure centre at Bingham, with a new community hall planned for Edwalton. Council was advised that the premium on empty properties would be reduced from two to one year to help incentive housing use. The Leader confirmed that £2m would be invested in new waste vehicles to ensure the provision of the best recycling service in the county. £1.1m would be invested in a new website, which given the importance of online communication and information would prove vital going forward. £4m would be allocated for a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) for a site at Flintham, which had proved to be extremely troublesome, blighting communities, and therefore this was a necessary step, and once sold the revenue would be returned. The Leader highlighted that over £23m had been allocated to the Capital Budget, whilst still allowing reserves of £10m over five years.

In respect of income, the Leader advised that the Council had benefitted from many years of successful investment in its commercial estates, generating nearly £2m in rent, whilst providing great job opportunities, and the continued careful management of those investments was commended. The Leader stated that the Council was now mostly self-sufficient, which again was a testament to the Council's Transformation projects. A substantial rise in costs was anticipated, with many inflationary pressures, and to ensure value for money some savings had been proposed, including a reduction to the Councillors' Community Support Scheme from £1000 to £500, as it often remained unspent. The Leader also stated that the YouNG Project was no longer providing value for money, and that support would be reduced.

The Leader reiterated that this was a budget for everyone, with one of the best examples of this being the proposal to freeze Rushcliffe's element of the Council Tax for Bands A to D by using both Council money and Government grants, with Bands E to H also only seeing an average increase of 9pence per

week. Council was reminded that this would again ensure that Rushcliffe had the lowest Council Tax in the county, whilst still leading the way in service provision, and what an incredible testament that was to the administration. The Leader was pleased to confirm that the Council would remain debt free, and able to focus on providing essential frontline services.

The Leader stated that this budget was ambitious, balanced, and inclusive. It was ambitious, as the Council had continued to invest in large projects, spending over £30m, with a further £23m going into the Capital Budget for future investment. The Leader stated that the Freeport, Development Corporation and HS2 would bring thousands of jobs and prosperity to this area. The budget was balanced, with reserves increasing to £10m, to provide security against unforeseen problems, various charges were being frozen, whilst only having a small deficit over the five years, which would be easily fundable. The budget was inclusive, with the Council Tax freeze focusing on those who needed it most, whilst creating the least administration. There would be investment in social housing, in Hound Lodge and in leisure facilities, which would provide income and essential sporting provision for young people.

In conclusion, the Leader thanked the Director – Finance and Corporate Services and his team for preparing an incredibly difficult budget in such challenging times, with many options explored, and Councillors were thanked for attending the Budget Workshops, which highlighted cross-party collaboration. The budget had been scrutinised by the Governance Scrutiny Group and Cabinet and the Leader was proud that this budget would provide the support that residents deserved.

Councillor Moore seconded the recommendation and reserved the right to speak.

Councillor J Walker referred to the previous four years of limited options for local authorities in balancing their budgets and that it was difficult to make a significant impact to real people as budgets were already predetermined. Councillor Walker agreed that Rushcliffe was a great place to live and stated that the Council had balanced its budget in part by “farming out” services, which other Councils had kept in house, and without having key expenses on services such as adult care, the Council had weathered the economic storm. As well as the good budgeting that had taken place, Councillor Walker stated that the Council had been able to balance its budget through the sale of significant expanses of Greenbelt, and the associated influx of houses had brought New Homes Bonus revenue, whilst increasing its tax base, and if a Council such as Rushcliffe could not balance its budget, then no Council could. Councillor Walker acknowledged that this was partly due to prudence; however, it was also down to good fortune, with an affluent Borough, significant areas of land to sell for housing and only a small number of services to fund. Council was advised that it should not be complacent and should lose this self-congratulatory attitude, and rather be grateful for having such favourable circumstances, to ensure that it did not fall victim to the fate that other authorities had. Councillor Walker stated that the Council Tax freeze was in fact a hidden rise, and next year it would be double, as this hidden rise had been funded by the Government and this Council. Councillor Walker concluded by advising that the Labour Group would abstain from voting on this

budget and gave particular thanks to the Director – Finance and Corporate Services and the Service Manager – Finance for their support.

Councillor Jones thanked officers for their hard work and agreed in general that the Capital Programme was balanced; however, whilst reference was often made by the majority group to Rushcliffe having the lowest Council Tax in the county, Councillor Jones stated that was referred to without explanation or qualification of the reasons why. The Council saved expenditure by not tending common areas on new estates, with residents paying management companies instead, and Councillor Jones stated that this was a policy choice. Significant housing development had resulted in increased Council Tax revenue of 2% per annum and Council was reminded that Rushcliffe had many more properties at a higher rateable value than other councils in the county, which provided much higher income, and that should be recognised. Councillor Jones advised that Rushcliffe also had more parish and town councils and did not have to provide as many services. Councillor Jones supported the proposal to reduce the time for imposing the premium on empty properties and noted the Government grant and Council funds being used to freeze Council Tax for Bands A to D; however, whilst that was popular now, it would not be so next year, when payments would be doubled. The uncertain economic climate was appreciated, including increased costs, which were necessary, and Councillor Jones agreed that the principles of the General Fund balance were clear and safe, and it was pleasing that there was no external borrowing, although the predicted fall in total reserves was not good. Councillor Jones welcomed the reduction in the Community Support Scheme to £500 per Councillor and to make the charge for any additional green bin the same as the first. Reference was made to the West Bridgford Special Expenses, and Councillor Jones reminded Council that last year the Liberal Democrat Group had opposed the offloading of the costs of Rushcliffe wide events onto the West Bridgford Special Expenses budget, and this was still unsatisfactory. Councillor Jones stated that the Council had received £15m for land at Sharphill, with a further £5m to come, and although there were plans to spend £500k on a community hall at Sharphill Country Park, the rest had been put into the General Fund, rather than for local facilities in West Bridgford. Reference was made to the Capital Building Programme, and that the £4.7m allocated for social housing was less than the over £5m allocated last year, and Councillor Jones asked for an update and how this would translate into number of dwellings and that its implementation be prioritised. In conclusion, Councillor Jones stated that he fully supported the development of a gypsy and traveller site and agreed that it was critical that the Council acted quickly to stop random applications.

Councillor R Mallender reiterated the thanks given to officers for their hard work and also gave thanks for the opportunity for all Councillors to attend the Budget Workshops, as it was very useful for all Councillors to understand those very complex financial matters. Councillor Mallender stated that there was much to be commended in this budget, including the opportunities for de-carbonisation highlighted in a number of projects, that the £810k for Climate Change action remained, although it was uncertain why it referred to zero expenditure for that, when money was supposed to be spent to make the required changes to move towards the Council being net zero by 2030. Councillor Mallender advised that the Green Group was not happy with the freeze of car parking charges, and

whilst understanding the reasoning behind it, stated that it would be better to work with other authorities to improve public transport. Councillor Mallender also welcomed the change to the Empty Homes Premium. In conclusion, Councillor Mallender advised that he was happy to note that the Council was not knowingly investing in businesses, whose activities would pose a risk of serious harm; however, some of the businesses that the Council invested through were not so clear and it was important that the Council checked to see that those businesses were doing the same.

Councillor Thomas agreed with Councillor Jones that Rushcliffe's demographics, housing mix and general affluence influenced its ranking in the Council Tax league tables, quoted the statement in the report that "The overriding Rushcliffe principle is that the Council aims to stay in the lower quartile for Council Tax" and asked if that should override everything else. Councillor Thomas referred to the complexity of the budgeting process and the skill of officers in navigating it when there were so many external uncertainties that could affect it, and it was noted that no external borrowing was expected to be necessary in the medium term. The Leake Independent Group supported the proposals for use of the Council Tax Support Fund plus additional Council provision to ensure that Bands A to D received no increase in the Rushcliffe portion of their Council Tax and hoped that the principle would be replicated in future years. However, given the County Council, Police, and Fire Authority increases, Councillor Thomas stated that this would sadly be a drop in the ocean compared to the overall increases in people's bills. In respect of the Empty Homes Premium, Councillor Thomas was pleased to see that a scrutiny item was now scheduled to look in more detail at the impacts of using differential Council Tax rates to incentivize bringing housing into use, which would cover all types of empty homes. Councillor Thomas noted the availability of £4.5m to provide support to Registered Housing providers and that options for spending this were to be assessed, although she considered this to be another pot where the Council held money that was difficult to spend and asked if this could come to scrutiny to get some urgency behind the development of those plans. Councillor Thomas referred to recycling and concluded by advising that there were many gaps in the Council's recycling provision, and it should be looking at ways to implement for instance food waste recycling.

Councillor Butler welcomed the budget, referred to the previous reference to adult social care and clarified that no district or borough councils were responsible for that provision. Councillor Butler reminded Councillors that it was a legal duty for the Council to set a budget and to abstain would be inappropriate. Reference was made to the challenges being faced by all local authorities, whilst trying to deliver services and Councillor Butler advised that Rushcliffe must be doing something right, as so many people wanted to live in the Borough. This positive budget was welcomed, the Council was debt free, and was investing throughout the Borough, whilst freezing Council Tax for Bands A to D and Councillor Butler thanked all those involved, included Councillors who had attended the Budget Workshops.

Councillor Clarke reiterated previous comments that Rushcliffe was a great place to live and stated that Rushcliffe had one of the most enviable financial status in the country. Councillor Clarke noted comments made about building

on the Greenbelt, and income generated from the NHB; however, he reminded Council that new homes also required services, which increased costs and stated that Rushcliffe had built 9,000 house to help Nottingham City Council. Councillor Clarke stated that this budget was about providing value for money and good financial management. Council was advised that recycling food waste would be addressed in the future, following the completion of the Environment Bill. Councillor Clarke stated that everyone should be proud of this excellent budget and this Council.

Councillor Barney referred to the difficult decisions being faced by all local authorities and stated that this Council should celebrate that it had a balanced budget and did not have to face making cuts to frontline services.

Councillor S Mallender asked if the new waste vehicles would have the capacity to collect both food waste and a separated doorstep glass collection and in respect of the various playground refurbishments, sought assurance that they would include inclusive play equipment, as it had been mentioned that disabled facilities in Rushcliffe were not as good as in the City, with the exception of Rushcliffe Country Park. Councillor Mallender commended the proposal for the gypsy and traveller site and that the 30% affordable housing allocation would continue.

Councillor Gowland advised that Nottingham City Council was now trialling food waste collection. Councillor Gowland stated that the Council no longer supported public spaces, nor owned its own housing and felt that it was a pity that the Council had no control over this. Rushcliffe was very fortunate to benefit from having a large Council Tax base, which allowed it to be in such a positive position. Councillor Gowland confirmed that the Labour Group had participated positively in the Budget Workshops and been happy to put ideas forward.

Councillor Simms agreed that this was an excellent budget, with the Council run prudently, and after years of seeing first hand repeated budget cuts at other authorities, it was welcomed that this Council would not have to cut budgets or jobs, whilst providing important services, and no Councillors should abstain from voting.

Councillor Inglis referred to the capital investment planned for the Keyworth leisure centre, which showed the commitment to maintain that facility and was welcomed by local residents. In respect of the new waste vehicles, Councillor Inglis confirmed that three trucks had already been replaced, as part of the previous capital budget. In respect of future investment, Councillor Inglis advised that currently electric vehicles were not compatible; however, that would continue to be looked into as the Council moved to being zero carbon by 2030. In respect of recycling going forward, Councillor Inglis stated that all Council in Nottinghamshire were working collaboratively and would be ready once the Environmental Bill was completed.

Councillor Bansal thanked the Director – Finance and Corporate Services and his team for their hard work, given the considerable work required to produce a budget. Reference was made to the allocation of £1.1m for a new website and Councillor Bansal questioned that expenditure.

Councillor Moore stated that he was very proud of this Council's achievements, which included all Councillors, and he emphasised that the Council created and generated its own good fortune. Councillor Moore referred to previous comments that the freeze in Council Tax could be seen as a hidden rise; however, next year was unknown, as no budget had been set, and this year the Council was trying to help residents during the cost of living crisis. Councillor Moore stated that it would be inappropriate to expect residents in outlying villages to pay for the excellent events held in West Bridgford and that was quite correctly covered by the West Bridgford Special Expenses. Council was reminded that holding Budget Workshops was not required; however, this administration wanted budget setting to be an inclusive process and that was why it was disappointing to note that some Councillors would be abstaining, when a budget had to be set by law. Councillor Moore also referred to the importance of believing in value for money, which this Council did. Councillor Moore confirmed that funds were being spent on disabled adaptations, and in respect of climate change, the Council was fortunate to have received £1.2m from external funds, which was being used on the leisure centres, with funds used in East Leake to insulate houses, and it was hoped that the climate change budget would be kept going forward.

The Leader clarified that the new website would cost £80k, as part of the £1.1m allocated for IT informational systems and technology enhancements. The Leader asked if he should apologise for Rushcliffe being one of the best run councils in the country, for freezing Council Tax, whilst improving services and facilities and that people wanted to live in the Borough. The Leader was disappointed that no reference had been made by the opposition to the significant job creation that would be taking place in the Borough with the Freeport, Development Corporation and HS2, and that the increased Council Tax revenue from the additional housing would also ensure more jobs, houses, and prosperity for the Borough. The Leader stated that the most important things to help this country out of the current economic difficulties were growth and prosperity and that he had been told first-hand how much other authorities envied Rushcliffe and its strong financial situation. In conclusion, the Leader advised that this Council made very good decisions to invest in its residents and businesses and create jobs and this budget exemplified that.

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, a recorded vote was taken for this item as follows:

FOR: Councillors R Adair, M Barney, K Beardsall, A Brennan, R Butler, N Clarke, J Cottee, G Dickman, R Inglis, Mrs C Jeffreys, R Jones, G Moore, A Phillips, V Price, F Purdue-Horan, S Robinson, K Shaw, D Simms, Mrs M Stockwood, C Thomas, R Upton, R Walker, L Way, D Wheeler, J Wheeler and G Williams

ABSTENTION: Councillors B Bansal, N Begum, T Combellack, M Gaunt, P Gowland, B Gray, L Howitt, R Mallender, S Mallender, D Mason, J Murray and J Walker

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) the report of the Council's Responsible Financial Officer on the robustness of the Council's budget and the adequacy of reserves, as detailed at Annex A to the report be accepted;
- b) the budget setting report and associated financial strategies 2023/24 to 2027/28, as detailed at Annex B to the report be adopted;
- c) the Capital Programme as set out in Annex B, Appendix 3 to the report be adopted;
- d) the Capital and Investment Strategy as set out in Annex B, Appendix 4 to the report be adopted;
- e) the Council Tax Support Scheme as set out in Annex B, Appendix 6 to the report be adopted;
- f) the period for applying the Empty Homes Premium be reduced from 24 months to 12 months as stated at Section 3.4 of Annex B to the report to help incentivise housing use within the Borough be approved;
- g) Rushcliffe's 2023/24 Council Tax for a Band D property at £153.95 (increase from 2022/23 of £3.02 or 2%) be set;
- h) the Council Tax Support Fund (CTSF) to support economically vulnerable households with up to £25 reduction in their Council Tax bills be approved;
- i) linked to the CTSF, further funding from RBC of around £30k to ensure anyone in Bands A to D Council Tax are given a discount, effectively resulting in no person up to a Band D paying an increase in the Rushcliffe element of Council Tax be approved;
- j) the Special Expenses for West Bridgford, Ruddington and Keyworth, as detailed at Annex B, Appendix 1 to the report be set, resulting in the following Band D Council tax levels for the Special Expense Areas:
 - i) West Bridgford £55.95 (£53.91 in 2022/23);
 - ii) Keyworth £4.38 (£3.30 in 2022/23);
 - iii) Ruddington £3.68 (£3.82 in 2022/23);
- k) with regards to recommendations e) and f), the associated Bands in accordance with the formula in section 36(1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 be set; and
- l) the Pay Policy Statement detailed at Annex B, Appendix 7 to the report be adopted.

58 2023/24 Council Tax Resolution

The Mayor advised that in the interest of trying to complete the business of the

meeting, as Chairman she had been asked to consider reducing the time for speeches from 10 minutes to five minutes for the mover of the report, and three minutes for the responder and she was happy to approve the request.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Customer Access, Councillor Moore presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services outlining the Council's position on Council Tax for the year 2023/24.

Councillor Moore confirmed that there was a statutory duty to approve the Council Tax, with the various precepts and amounts detailed in the report and was happy to recommend it for approval.

Councillor Cottee seconded the recommendation and reserved the right to speak.

Councillor Gaunt advised that the Labour Group was concerned that the Council Tax was effectively being raised for everyone this year, it was simply that this was being covered for Bands A to D through funding, and although it was good to help those residents, there was a concern that this rise would be “baked in” for next year, when the funding disappeared and would then rise year on year.

Councillor Jones stated that in order to keep the Council's budget in order during very inflationary times, the Liberal Democrat Group understood and supported the reasoning for increasing Council Tax by 2% rather than by the full amount possible. Councillor Jones reiterated previous comments that the increase for Bands A to D had been offset by Government funding and Council money, and it would be interesting to see what happened next year following the local elections. Councillor Jones stated that he would like to see more grades in the ratings system, to ensure that costs were reduced for the poorest and increased for those in higher value properties.

Councillor R Mallender and Councillor Thomas advised that their Groups would be supporting the recommendation.

Councillor Moore thanked Councillors for their support, acknowledged the comments made by the Labour Group and advised that the budget had not been written for next year, what would happen in the future was unknown, and it was therefore impossible to make any predictions.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Council Tax Resolution for 2023/24 as detailed in Appendix A to the report (link attached) be approved [2023/24 Council Tax Resolution](#)

59 **Independent Review of Councillors' Allowances**

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance and Customer Access, Councillor Moore presented the report of the Chief Executive outlining the independent review of Councillors' Allowances undertaken by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

Councillor Moore explained that Councillors' allowances had to be reviewed

every four years and that, if approved tonight, the new allowances would be implemented following the 2023 Borough Council elections. Councillor Moore drew Council's attention to the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel, including the CVs of the independent members and the interesting background research the Panel had used in their deliberations. Council was advised that the Panel, which had met on two occasions and consulted with current Councillors, had found no grounds for change to the basic allowance as those reporting to the consultation felt that the role had remained predominately the same and that the Council was in the mid-range of other authorities locally. The Panel had also concluded that the scheme was fair in terms of the additional allowances paid to those in positions of responsibility. Councillor Moore concluded by drawing attention to the recommendation of the Panel to remove the special responsibility allowance for the Vice-chairs of scrutiny groups and explained that he valued the contribution Vice-chairs made and that, in acknowledgement of their readiness to 'step-up', he considered that the positions and corresponding allowances should be retained.

Councillor Brennan seconded the recommendation and reserved the right to speak.

Councillor Begum referenced the cost-of-living crisis and expressed the view that it did not sit comfortably with the Labour Group that the Council was proposing a 6% increase in allowances whilst other public sector workers were striking for a smaller increase.

Councillor Jones and Councillor Thomas informed Council that their Groups would be supporting the recommendation.

Councillor R Mallender was pleased that the Council had reviewed the allowances and felt it was important that they did not unfairly financially disadvantage those residents that would like to stand as future councillors and participate in local democracy. It was important that the allowances increased in line with inflation but agreed that large additional increases were not necessary or desirable at this point in time.

Councillor R Walker advised that he would be supporting the recommendation but was disappointed that Council had missed the opportunity to make a saving by removing the allowance for scrutiny Vice-chairs. Councillor Walker was also disappointed that only six Councillors, out of 44, had responded to the Panel's consultation invitation and hoped that next time more Councillors would respond.

Councillor Purdue-Horan stated that in his 20 years as a Borough Councillor he had held many positions including those as a Chair and Vice-chair of scrutiny and believed that he had made a valuable contribution as Vice-chair and certainly valued the support of his Vice-chair when he was Chair of Governance Scrutiny Group. He went on to suggest that there should be an elected representative on the Panel to represent the views of Councillors.

Councillor Brennan clarified the points made by Councillor Begum and stated that it was important that the allowances did not represent a barrier to people wanting to stand for office.

This point was further clarified by Councillor Gaunt, who explained that the Labour Group felt personally uncomfortable with the timing of the inflationary rise given that so many other public sector workers were fighting for the same increase.

Councillor Moore informed Council that accepting the inflationary rise was a matter of personal choice and that individuals could get in touch with the Finance team if they would prefer not to receive the increase and called for the recommendations to be put to the vote.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) that the basic allowance remains unchanged and continues to be increased annually in line with the percentage pay award made to officers;
- b) that the special responsibility allowances remain unchanged and continue to be increased annually in line with the percentage pay award made to officers;
- c) that the travel and subsistence allowances remain unchanged and continue to mirror those set by HMRC and used for officers; and
- d) that the civic dignitaries allowance remains unchanged and continues to be increased annually in line with the percentage pay award made to officers.

60 **Appointment of Deputy Electoral Registration Officers**

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough-wide Leadership, Councillor Robinson presented the report of the Chief Executive seeking approval for the appointment of three Deputy Electoral Registration Officers.

The Leader advised that this was an administrative issue to add resilience to the administration by appointing three additional Deputy Electoral Registration Officers to assist the Electoral Registration Officer with providing a wet signature.

Councillor Inglis seconded the recommendation.

Councillors J Walker, Jones, R and S Mallender and Thomas informed Council that they all supported the recommendation.

It was **RESOLVED** that the appointments of the Council's Monitoring Officer, Electoral Services Manager and Senior Electoral Services Officer to the role of Deputy Electoral Registration Officer, under section 52(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1983, having the same duties as the Electoral Registration Officer be approved.

61 Notices of Motion

The Mayor advised that again given the time and as there were four motions, she would be reducing the time for speeches from 10 minutes to five minutes for the mover of the motion, and three minutes for the responder.

- a) The following Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor Thomas and seconded by Councillor Way.

“Council recognises the problems faced in recent new estates where ownership and management of Public Open Space (POS) is under private companies, with residents subject to a charge on their homes and unregulated and uncapped charges for POS, plus additional fees not directly related to maintaining the public areas.

Council commits to undertaking a full and detailed options appraisal of ownership and ongoing management of public open space with a view to changing the policy for future new housing estates by April 2024, evaluating the following options:

- RBC takes ownership of the POS and responsibility for management with no additional charge to residents, with a commuted sum paid by the developer to support this for a number of years via a S106 agreement. (i.e. revert to the previous policy);
- RBC takes ownership of the land and itself charges residents for maintenance, undertaking the work in-house or procuring the services;
- Ownership of the land passes to a properly constituted and regulated not-for-profit co-operative residents’ association responsible for ongoing maintenance and any charges to residents.

Council further commits to investigate ways that Rushcliffe could change the existing arrangements for recent new estates affected by the current policy.”

In moving the motion, Councillor Thomas stated that many residents living on new estates in the Borough had to pay a development company directly for the management of public open spaces in their community, in addition to their Council Tax. Those additional sums were often way beyond the anticipated charge for cutting the grass and could also include future liability for capital works such as play areas and drainage ponds. Councillor Thomas reported that a third of homes in her ward of Leake were now subject to those additional charges. Councillor Thomas advised that unfortunately, residents on new estates often mistakenly believed that those payments meant that local open spaces and play areas were exclusively for the use of residents that paid those additional charges, and this could lead to conflict between local residents and perceived visitors. Local residents paid for maintenance, litter collection and dog fouling, so it seemed logical to them that the facilities were for their use solely. Councillor Thomas stated that Section 106 Agreements differed significantly across different developments with a number of models in operation across the Borough and argued that despite the decision to move to this system being taken in good faith, it was not working and would lead to

further problems in the future. Councillor Thomas outlined three alternative options described in the motion and asked the Council to commit to undertaking this work before April 2024, to ensure there was a better solution in place for new estates attracting residents after that time. Councillor Thomas also asked for consideration to be given to improving the situation for residents already subject to those additional charges and she requested that a recorded vote be taken on the motion and any amendment proposed.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Way provided Council with examples of additional charges residents had reported to her. Council was advised that on one estate there were twenty-six additional items charged for including a seller's information pack at £249; permission to apply for alterations £110; retrospective consent for alterations £475; a change of mortgage lender £115; and the provision of answers to questions £30. Some charges had seen a 40% increase in the last two years, and all excluded VAT. Councillor Way stated that none of those charges would apply to owners of older homes, and none had anything to do with managing public open spaces. It was noted that many new homeowners did not realise there was a charge on their home or that the management company name was listed on their deeds, which could lead to difficulties when selling their property; in some areas, buyers had reported being offered incentives to use the solicitors recommended by developers for ease and expediency, which further compounded the issue. The prospect of receiving huge bills from developers hung over the heads of residents and some had reported feeling threatened with subsequent effects on mental and physical wellbeing and Councillor Way called upon the Council to investigate unreasonable charges to support and protect residents.

Councillor Upton stated that whilst agreeing whole heartedly with the sentiment of the motion, the Conservative Group would be unable to support the three policy changes suggested without due consideration and investigation and he therefore, proposed an amendment to the motion as follows:

“Rushcliffe Borough Council recognises the problems faced in most of the recent new medium and large housing estates where ownership and management of Public Open Space (POS) is under private companies, with residents subject to a charge on their homes and unregulated and uncapped charges for POS, plus additional fees not directly related to maintaining the public areas.

Council commits to undertake a full and detailed options appraisal of ownership and ongoing management of this public open space, and then follow due process to change or confirm the policy for future new housing estates by April 2024, and also to seek opportunities to improve the situation in existing new housing estates.”

The amendment to the motion was seconded by Councillor J Wheeler who reserved the right to speak.

Councillor Upton, in moving the amended motion, stated that the additional wording would provide clarity, with the removal of the three specified policy changes contained in the original motion. Councillor Upton reassured Councillor Thomas and Councillor Way that his Group understood the issue

and was committed to taking it through scrutiny in line with their original timescale.

Councillor Thomas, as the original proposer of the motion, accepted the amendment, and this became the substantive motion.

Councillor Clarke commented that he largely agreed with the original proposer and seconder of the motion but wished to clarify a point raised in the Citizens' Question earlier in the evening by Mr Robinson-Green. He believed he had described 'unintended consequences' not 'unforeseen circumstances' when discussing this issue in the past and recollected that he had been Leader of the Council when this Policy had been approved, when the Council had been facing escalating and unsustainable costs in relation to open spaces. The Council was trying to mitigate costs to the Council and the taxpayer and had not foreseen some of the consequences that had occurred as a result of that decision. Councillor Clarke stated that this motion provided a good opportunity to scrutinise the current Policy and its application in the broadest possible sense to potentially find a solution that had less of a negative impact on residents.

Councillor S Mallender supported the motion and was keen to hear again from Councillor Thomas at the end of the debate.

Councillor Gowland informed Council that residents of Abbey Park had been experiencing this problem since the 1970s as developers moved on and lost interest in established estates.

Councillor Gaunt commented that he was usually concerned when the detail was removed from motions but, in this case, he could see the advantage as it would allow for a much wider debate.

Councillor Barney thanked Councillor Thomas and Councillor Way, and the residents from East Leake in the public gallery, for bringing this issue to the attention of Council and hoped appropriate scrutiny would take the national position into consideration.

The Leader informed Council that the problem had been recognised nationally and that the Council had contributed to the consultation on the Levelling Up and Planning Bill to that effect. He felt that a national solution might be more powerful than one the Council could develop locally but that it was right at this stage to consider all options.

Councillor Thomas thanked Councillors for their consideration of the motion and warned that although the impact of those policies was being seen first in East Leake it would affect the whole Borough in time as the new estates became populated. Council was urged not to wait until the Levelling Up and Planning Bill had been published as each day of delay was causing more residents to be caught in this untenable position.

In accordance with Standing Orders – Council 16.4, a recorded vote was taken on the substantive motion.

FOR: Councillors R Adair, B Bansal, M Barney, K Beardsall, N Begum, A Brennan, R Butler, N Clarke, J Cottee, G Dickman, M Gaunt, P Gowland, B Gray, L Howitt, R Inglis, Mrs C Jeffreys, R Jones, R Mallender, S Mallender, G Moore, J Murray, A Phillips, V Price, F Purdue-Horan, S Robinson, K Shaw, D Simms, Mrs M Stockwood, C Thomas, R Upton, J Walker, R Walker, L Way, D Wheeler, J Wheeler and G Williams

ABSTENTION: Councillors T Combellack and D Mason

The substantive motion was carried

- b) The following Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor Way and seconded by Councillor Thomas

“Council believes that artificial grass is detrimental to the environment and will do everything possible to eliminate its use in residential settings, parks, and other open spaces, through policy changes and media campaigns.”

In moving the motion, Councillor Way informed Council that there had been a considerable increase in the use of artificial turf, especially during lockdown, with some companies reporting a 65% increase in sales. Councillor Way listed the disadvantages of artificial grass; including the reliance on fossil fuels in terms of manufacturing, problems with recycling once it started to degrade, the increased temperature underfoot and the dangers of this to children and pets, as well as the inability of artificial turf to absorb CO₂ and release oxygen. Council was advised that artificial turfs also removed natural habitats for many creatures, further reduced biodiversity and released harmful microplastics into the environment. Manufacturers advertised its green credentials as it did not need watering; however they did recommend a monthly hose down with water and a chemical cleaner. Councillor Way informed Council that there were circumstances in which artificial turf was the preferred option in spite of those environmental concerns, including its use on sports pitches, where it presented a much more suitable and robust playing surface. Councillor Way concluded by reminding Council of the benefits of green spaces and wildlife on mental health.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Thomas highlighted the provisions in the forthcoming Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which sought to restrict the use of artificial grass on new housing developments and stated that this needed to go further to prevent use in all residential settings. Councillor Thomas outlined the reasons why homeowners choose fake grass over real grass, including the time taken to maintain a real lawn and its depressing colour in a drought. The use of raised beds or low growing ground cover plants could provide an alternative to grass that was more natural and less harmful to the planet. Councillor Thomas concluded by asking Council to support the motion to increase education and change policy, bringing about behavioural change within the Borough.

Councillor Brennan informed Council that the Conservative Group wholeheartedly supported the sentiment behind Councillor Way's motion, noting that even badly cared for lawns were better for the environment and

biodiversity than artificial grass. However, she felt that it would be difficult for the Council to prevent residents from using artificial grass and reminded Council that there were no laws preventing its sale or use, it was readily available, reasonably priced and to many presented a low maintenance alternative to natural grass. Council was advised that in some instances, the land available for grass was too small to make owning a lawnmower viable and for those with certain disabilities artificial grass enabled them to enjoy their gardens without the burden of maintenance. Councillor Brennan stated that the Council would not want to create a blanket ban and would not be able to enforce it and in some circumstances, artificial grass was a reasonable choice. She reminded her colleagues that the Council preferred natural grass with the exception of playing pitches where the use of artificial grass was supported by various governing bodies as it increased the number of playable hours, was cheaper to maintain and was harder wearing. Councillor Brennan also mentioned the Council's free tree planting scheme and advice to residents in relation to protecting and increasing biodiversity in their gardens and with this in mind, Councillor Brennan proposed an amendment to the motion as follows:

“Council recognises that artificial grass can be detrimental to the environment. We do recognise that its use in certain circumstances can be justified, such as for playing pitches and for small scale decorative purposes. Council will undertake, through media campaigns, to raise awareness of the negative impact on the natural environment and biodiversity of the extensive use of artificial grass.”

Councillor Brennan hoped that Councillor Way could see that the amendment supported the sentiment of the motion but focused action in areas that were within the Council's control, such as media campaigns to provide information about alternatives and educating the public.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Butler who stated that he absolutely agreed with the ethos of the motion but hoped that the amendment made things clearer and more achievable.

Councillor Way was given the opportunity to accept the amendment to the motion but did not support the changes proposed and stated that she would like the Council to introduce local policy changes to stop the use of this dreadful material.

Councillor Jones raised concerns about free-roaming microplastics in the water supply and the impact this would have for generations to come, stating this was the most important issue whichever motion was approved.

Councillor S Mallender gave her support to the original motion and informed Council that playing fields were the second largest source of microplastics after road surfaces. She also highlighted the large carbon footprint associated with manufacturing artificial grass, the negative impact on biodiversity, the 12,000 different chemicals in artificial grass linked to significant medical problems and the fact that it currently could not be recycled. Councillor Mallender did not feel that the Council should be supporting any kind of artificial grass use even on playing pitches.

Councillor Simms called on Council to keep things in perspective and stated that the benefits of artificial grass far outweighed the disadvantages. In addition, he pointed out that the Council could not create a policy to stop people from doing something that was within the law, therefore the amendment was appropriate and necessary.

Councillor Brennan recognised that there appeared to be broad agreement that widespread use of artificial grass was detrimental to the environment and should be discouraged but that several positives had also been identified by Councillors. Therefore, the amendment was necessary to clarify the Council's position and focus attention on what could be done to educate residents, increase their understanding of the alternatives, and highlighting the environmental damage caused by artificial grass.

Councillor Way informed Council that she had listened carefully to the debate but felt that the changes to the motion undermined its impact and was disappointed that the Council was not prepared to be more forward-thinking in this area.

A vote on the amendment to the motion was carried, and this became the substantive motion.

No further Councillors wished to speak so the substantive motion was put to the vote and carried.

- c) The following Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor Jones and seconded by Councillor S Mallender

Council:

- notes with concern that the new requirements for Voter ID create a barrier to residents exercising their democratic right to vote and may lead to some residents being disenfranchised. The requirements entail additional administrative burdens on Electoral Services and a risk of abuse to Poll Staff from anyone denied a vote due to lack of ID;
- asks Officers to send appropriate information to all voters who have become 18 since the last Borough election unless registered for a postal vote;
- asks the Leader to call on government to halt the further roll out of voter ID, and if not, an expansion of the 'accepted' forms of photo ID to include those valid for young people.

In moving the motion, Councillor Jones informed Council that there were four reasons to consider: firstly the ID requirement was red tape and an unnecessary cost on the public purse; secondly the acceptable forms of ID were predominately held by older people, with the ID requirements discriminating against young people; thirdly, the UK Government's own research had found that those less likely to hold any form of photo ID were those with severely limited disabilities, the unemployed, those without qualifications and those who had never voted before; and fourthly, the Election Commission concluded that there had been no evidence of large scale fraud in

the 2019 elections and the Commission had advised that out of 142 allegations of voting irregularities, only one had been upheld. Councillor Jones considered such measures to be an attempt to limit the historical freedoms of the people.

In seconding the motion, Councillor S Mallender stated that there was evidence from countries with Voter ID rules, which did not have a mandatory ID card that this kind of ID led voting effects marginalised groups far more than other groups. Councillor Mallender stated that poorer people were less likely to have a passport, those who could not drive, would not have a driving license, so the groups mentioned by Councillor Jones were less likely to be able to vote in this situation. Council was advised that 2% of the population had no ID, with 4% having no recognisable ID and Councillor Mallender asked if an additional £180m should be spent across the country, each decade to solve a problem that did not exist. UK elections were safe and secure and very well run, with only 33 allegations of impersonation in a poll of over 58 million voters in 2019. Councillor Mallender asked if it was fair to ask polling station staff to slow up the process with more checks, and then having to deal with any queries and problems.

The Leader reminded Council that this was national legislation and whatever decision was made tonight, it would not change that legislation. The Leader stated that the Conservative Group supported Voter ID and referred to its successful use in Northern Ireland since 2003, as well as in many European countries and around the world. It was clear that the Government had undertaken research in implementing this and was being proactive, to ensure that democracy was upheld and preserved at any cost, and the Leader agreed that you could not put a price on democracy. Issues raised regarding education were acknowledged, and the Leader was delighted to note that the election was being promoted on the front of Rushcliffe Reports, through social media, and national TV campaigns. The Leader referred to the 2% of people without any ID in the Borough and confirmed that every measure including certification was being made available to ensure that Voter ID was valid, and this was all based on the experiences of other democracies, where this had been proven to work successfully.

Councillor J Walker had no comments.

Councillor Thomas stated that she would be supporting the motion and was unaware of any overwhelming evidence to justify the change, and that the motion recognised the differential impact that this would have on younger voters, and it could be argued that the new requirements would also have more impact on other socio-economic groups. Councillor Thomas wondered about the political motivation behind this, in that people who voted a certain way were more likely to initially have the ID, or if not, they would be more likely to obtain one. Council was reminded that the ID requirement could be overcome by requesting a postal vote, which it could be argued was a system more open to abuse, including coercion. Councillor Thomas urged officers to continue to work to ensure that as many residents as possible were ready for the election.

Councillor Jones stated that many of the countries referred to by the Leader had mandatory ID cards, which did not apply here and that the Government's own research had established a number of groups who were less likely to vote

because of Voter ID and the Electoral Commission had found very little evidence of voter fraud. Councillor Jones stated that a great deal of money would be spent, and it would limit democracy.

On being put to the vote, the motion was lost.

62 **Adjournment**

The Mayor announced that as it was now nearly 10.00pm the meeting would conclude, and the remaining items would be carried forward to the next ordinary meeting of Council in July 2023. She thanked Councillors for their attention through such a long evening.

It was **RESOLVED** that in accordance with the Council's Constitution, the Mayor closed the meeting at 9.50pm and all remaining items were adjourned to the next ordinary Council meeting in July 2023.

The meeting closed at 9.50 pm.

CHAIRMAN