

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
CABINET**

TUESDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2024

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

PRESENT:

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors Bird, Birch, Gaunt and J Walker

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

L Ashmore	Director of Development and Economic Growth
G Dennis	Monitoring Officer
P Linfield	Director of Finance and Corporate Services
K Marriott	Chief Executive
H Tambini	Democratic Services Manager

46 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

47 Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 December 2023

The minutes of the meetings held on Tuesday, 12 December 2023 were
agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

48 Citizens' Questions

There were no citizens' questions.

49 Opposition Group Leaders' Questions

Question from Councillor J Walker to Councillor Brennan

"How has the Council engaged the wider community when making decisions
on how to spend the UKSPF?"

Councillor Brennan thanked Councillor Walker for her question and advised
that the UKSPF was a national Government programme, which set out the
criteria for projects to be considered eligible for funding, together with the types
of outcomes that the programme should deliver. This was the third and final
year of the programme and had two elements, the grant funding for community
groups and businesses and funds available for Rushcliffe Borough Council's

directly delivered projects and commissioning. Councillor Brennan stated that the grant funding element had been signed off by Cabinet in October 2023, and if approved this evening, the Council's schemes would be signed off. The funding available to the Council had been approved on the basis of an Investment Plan, based on the Council's Corporate Priorities, which had been subject to extensive consultation by residents and Councillors. Since the start of the UKSPF in 2022, the Council had engaged with various groups to help shape and design the scheme, and in addition to previous updates, a session had recently been held for Councillors outlining the commissioned projects detailed in the report. An extended workshop had been held to consult with the Strategic Growth Board and various partners and stakeholders, and that Board would oversee the programme delivery going forward. Councillor Brennan advised that many other groups had been consulted including the Town and Parish Council Forum, the Rushcliffe Community Cohesion Network, the Rushcliffe Business Partnership and various other voluntary and community groups and businesses.

Councillor Walker thanked Councillor Brennan for her response, referred to talk that there had been competition between community groups, and asked a supplementary question as to whether there was a more inclusive and less competitive way to spread out the community funds and engage with groups in a more proactive way.

Councillor Brennan stated that as this was the last year of the scheme, it was not known what would replace it and the Council could look at improving community engagement going forward if there was a similar scheme in the future. Councillor Brennan advised that officers had spent considerable time feeding back to community groups, both the successful and unsuccessful ones, including an evaluation with them, and at no point had there been any feedback to suggest any perceived unfairness due to direct competition between groups. The scheme was oversubscribed, with over 77 applicants; however, not all projects were suitable, and Councillor Brennan stated that it was important for the process to have some competitive element to ensure that the best schemes came forward.

50 **2024/25 Budget and Financial Strategy**

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance, Transformation and Governance, Councillor Virdi presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services outlining the Council's proposed budget for 2024/25, the five-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) from 2024/25 to 2028/29, which included the revenue budget, the proposed Capital Programme, the Transformation and Efficiency Plan, the Capital and Investment Strategy, and the Pay Policy Statement.

Councillor Virdi referred to the recent very challenging economic environment that the Council had faced and stated that the budget demonstrated the Council's ability to cope with those issues, whilst continuing to deliver excellent services. In that context, Councillor Virdi advised that the projected budget deficit over the next five years was considered to be manageable at £1.6m, and it was important that the Council continued to plan carefully to avoid the same problems faced by other Councils. Given the high inflation rate,

Councillor Virdi advised that consequently some fees and charges were being increased, including garden waste and car parking charges.

Cabinet noted that Rushcliffe continued to have the lowest Council Tax in Nottinghamshire and remained amongst the lowest 25% in the country. There was an option to raise Council Tax overall by 3%, which would equate to £5.17; however, the £5 increase was the preferred amount, which would help local residents, although it would mean approximately £289k less revenue for the Council over the next five years. Councillor Virdi referred to the financial pressures faced by Councils, and was proud that Rushcliffe had no external debt, and was the only Council in Nottinghamshire in that position. Cabinet was advised that the Council would not become complacent and would continue to ensure that its planning was prudent, sustainable and affordable.

Councillor Virdi advised that as the Council's capital resources were diminishing they were being carefully managed to ensure future funding would be available, with the Capital Programme for the next five years estimated at £24.8m, which continued to demonstrate the Council's commitment to economic growth, meeting housing targets, supporting the vulnerable, improving services for residents, whilst focusing on the environment. In addition, the Council would remain a key partner in the both the Freeport and future Combined Authority, the benefits of which would go far beyond the five-year Strategy. Councillor Virdi referred to the continued challenges faced in balancing budgets and reminded Cabinet that this Council was in a far better position than many others, and that it would continue to develop its Transformation and Efficiency Plan.

Councillor Virdi referred to the Local Government Final Settlement, details of which had been received on 5 February 2024. Given the ongoing financial challenges being faced, the Government had provided an additional £600m in funding, of which Rushcliffe Borough Council had received £128k. It was proposed that £28k of the funding would be used for a Flood Grant and to reinvigorate the existing Flood Resilience Storm Grant Reserve, with the remaining £100k set aside for the Climate Change Reserve and earmarked for potential spend in relation to improving biodiversity net gain. Cabinet noted that in relation to this funding, the Secretary of State had asked all Councils to produce Productivity Plans by the end of 2024. Councillor Virdi advised that as a well-run Council, there would be nothing new in respect of operational matters, with the Transformation and Efficiency Plan continuing, to ensure that the tasks set by the Secretary of State would be met. Cabinet was advised that some changes would be required to the report submitted to Council to take account of this Final Settlement, together with changes to the MTFs to reflect the points raised.

Councillor Virdi concluded by thanking Councillors for their input during the Budget Workshops, which had been very constructive and had helped to plan the budget, and the Finance Team for their continued hard work during very challenging times.

In seconding the recommendation, the Leader echoed the thanks given to officers in ensuring that the Council continued to have very stable finances, with prudent use of tax payers money, and with the Council's financial position

envied by many. Whilst not being complacent, the Leader stated that this was due to the hard work of officers, which had been confirmed at the recent Peer Review, when everyone had been very impressed with the positive financial position at Rushcliffe. The Leader advised that the additional funding would be put to good use by helping residents who had been affected by flooding but were not covered by the Government's stringent regulations, and the additional investment to help mitigate and prevent future flooding was important, as was the funding to help with climate change and biodiversity.

In welcoming the report, Councillor J Wheeler stated that although no one liked to raise Council Tax, it was necessary and it was important to show residents what was being delivered for that, including all the investment taking place in the Borough. Councillor Wheeler referred to the £100k allocated to the Climate Change Reserve, which would help to enhance the Borough's Green Spaces, which would be beneficial to all residents.

It was RESOLVED that Cabinet RECOMMENDS to Council that it:

- a) adopts the budget setting report and associated financial strategies 2024/25 to 2028/29 (attached Annex) including the summarised Special Expenses budget at Appendix 1, Budget Summary at Appendix 2, changes to fees and charges regarding Garden Waste and Car Parking (Appendix 5) and Transformation and Efficiency Plan at Appendix 7;
- b) adopts the Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 3;
- c) adopts the Capital and Investment Strategy at Appendix 8;
- d) adopts the Second Home Premium at Section 3.4 and any notification of further exemptions to be adopted and incorporated into a revised policy;
- e) sets Rushcliffe's 2024/25 Council Tax for a Band D property at £157.88 (increase from 2023/24 of £3.93 or 2.55%);
- f) sets the Special Expenses for 2024/25 for West Bridgford, Ruddington and Keyworth, Appendix 1, resulting in the following Band D Council Tax levels for the Special Expense Areas:
 - i) West Bridgford £59.44 (£55.95 in 2023/24)
 - ii) Keyworth £4.69 (£4.38 in 2023/24)
 - iii) Ruddington £3.29 (£3.68 in 2023/24);
- g) adopts the Pay Policy Statement at Appendix 6; and
- h) delegates authority to the Director – Finance and Corporate Services to make any minor amendments to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) once the final local government finance settlement is received and advise the Finance Portfolio Holder accordingly, to be reported to Full Council.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Business and Growth, Councillor Brennan presented the report of the Director – Development and Economic Growth, outlining proposals for the final year of funding (2024/25) for the UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) programme, which followed on from previous reports to both Cabinet and the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group.

Councillor Brennan confirmed that this was the final year of a three year programme, with an allocation of £1,635,250. The report related specifically to schemes directly commissioned by the Council, as the grant pot element for community groups and businesses had already closed, with applications being assessed, as detailed in Paragraphs 4.1 to 4.3 of the report. Councillor Brennan advised that the remaining pot available for direct delivery and commissioning by the Council stood at £1.2m and the importance of ensuring that any proposed schemes would be deliverable was noted, as all spending had to be completed by the end of March 2025. To manage that, Councillor Brennan advised that four themes had been identified, as detailed in Paragraph 4.7 of the report, together with details of the proposed projects, which it was hoped would deliver a wide range of outcomes related to the Council's Corporate Priorities and the Investment Plan, which had been submitted to Government in support of the funding process. The list might be subject to change, if circumstances required, and Councillor Brennan advised that it was therefore being recommended that the Leader, Chief Executive and S151 Officer be granted delegated authority to make those changes.

Cabinet was advised that there were also two jointly commissioned projects with Gedling and Broxtowe Councils, the Rushcliffe Accelerator Business Support Programme and the Active Work Programme. As well as those schemes, Councillor Brennan stated that the employment and skills funding element of the UKSPF was starting in Year 3, to replace the previous European Social Funded projects, and this element would now deliver a number of local schemes as detailed in Paragraph 4.11 of the report. Councillor Brennan concluded by advising that the programme would be overseen by the Rushcliffe Growth Board, and Councillors would continue to be updated.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Inglis acknowledged the benefits that UKSPF funding had brought and hopefully would continue to bring and referred to the hard work involved for officers in processing the applications already received. Councillor Inglis hoped that everyone in the Borough would benefit in the future as those projects came forward.

Councillor J Wheeler referred to the achievements over the previous two years and the difference it had made to local communities throughout the Borough, by providing additional projects, in addition to statutory services. The proposed wide range of funding for the final year would make a real difference to the Borough and it was hoped that in the future, there would be other opportunities to carry on.

Councillor Upton echoed Councillor Wheeler's comments that it was pleasing to see funding spread across the Borough and considered this UKSPF funding

to be more focused on smaller communities than the previous European Union Regional Fund. The Leader agreed with those comments.

It was RESOLVED that:

- a) the UKSPF activity delivered in 2023/24 be recognised;
- b) the proposals for UKSPF in 2024/25 be endorsed; and
- c) sign-off of refinements to proposals for 2024/25 be delegated to the Leader, Chief Executive and S151 Officer, with both the revenue and capital implications reported in future financial reports to Cabinet and the Medium Term Financial Strategy to Full Council.

52 Potential Relocation of the West Bridgford Customer Service Centre

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Wellbeing, ICT and Member Development, Councillor J Wheeler presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services outlining proposals regarding a potential relocation of the West Bridgford Customer Service Centre.

Councillor Wheeler advised that several years ago, following the closure of the Police Station, a new site on Gordon Road had been identified as suitable for the Customer Service Centre, to help improve footfall in a struggling area, whilst maintaining a presence in the town centre, as many people still preferred to access services face to face. Since Covid, engagement had changed dramatically; however, it was acknowledged that many people still preferred to access services in person. Councillor Wheeler confirmed that talks had taken place with the County Council, to explore the relocation of the Customer Service Centre to West Bridgford Library, allowing residents to access all services in this one, accessible, prime location, close to good bus routes and next to a car park. Cabinet was advised that there would be a financial saving, and the move would also allow a business unit to be brought back into use on Gordon Road, which was now thriving. Councillor Wheeler concluded by stating that this was the best option going forward and confirmed that none of the other sites around the Borough would be affected, with the same opening hours and excellent levels of service would be maintained.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Upton supported this approach, having very little risk, a financial saving, bringing great synergy of services and potentially returning a commercial unit back into the town centre.

The Leader agreed that this new location would be an excellent 'one stop' shop, and subject to finding a tenant for the unit, it would present significant savings.

Councillor Brennan stated that by using its investment and creative thinking well, the Council could contribute to keeping Rushcliffe's high streets and town centres vibrant, given that so many had struggled since Covid.

It was RESOLVED that:

- a) exploring the relocation of the Customer Service Centre to West Bridgford Library as soon as possible in conjunction with Inspire, who operate the site on Nottinghamshire County Council's behalf be approved; and
- b) the Council's Property team be requested to work with partners to market the existing Fountain Court premises to find a suitable tenant in line with its lease obligations at the site.

The meeting closed at 7.35 pm.

CHAIR