

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL**

THURSDAY, 7 MARCH 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 D Mason (Chair), A Brown (Vice-Chair), M Barney, T Birch, R Bird, A Brennan, R Butler, S Calvert, J Chaplain, K Chewings, N Clarke, T Combellack, J Cottee, A Edyvean, S Ellis, G Fletcher, M Gaunt, E Georgiou, P Gowland, C Grocock, R Inglis, R Mallender, S Mallender, P Matthews, H Om, H Parekh, A Phillips, L Plant, D Polenta, N Regan, D Simms, D Soloman, C Thomas, R Upton, D Viridi, J Walker, R Walker, L Way, T Wells, 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
K Marriott	Chief Executive
E Richardson	Democratic Services Officer
H Tambini	Democratic Services Manager

APOLOGIES:

Councillors J Billin and S Dellar

50 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

51 Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2023

Councillor J Walker asked for an amendment to be made to the minutes. Under minute number 45, she asked for the word 'regressive' to be changed to 'progressive'.

Accepting this change, the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 7 December 2023, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

52 Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor informed Council that she had been very busy in the run up to Christmas attending many different places of worship for festive services. She mentioned her very enjoyable afternoon talking to past councillor Michael Cox who was being interviewed as part of the preparations for the Council's Golden

Jubilee celebrations. The Mayor regrettably informed Council that she had been unable to attend the service of celebration in honour of outgoing Lord Lieutenant Sir John Peace, but she had extended the gratitude of the Council for his services and wished him well in his retirement.

53 Leader's Announcements

The Leader announced that the East Midlands Combined County Mayoral Authority had been accepted by Parliament and was now a legal entity, with a Shadow Cabinet in operation until the first Mayoral Elections on 2 May 2024. He advised that he had also been meeting with Network Rail, which was in the process of finalising its plans for electrification of routes through Rushcliffe and would shortly be undertaking community engagement primarily around Sutton Bonington and Normanton on Soar.

54 Chief Executive's Announcements

There were no Chief Executive announcements.

55 Citizens' Questions

No citizens' questions were received for this meeting.

56 2024/25 Budget and Financial Strategy

The Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough-wide Leadership, Councillor Clarke presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services outlining the Council's Budget and Financial Strategy for 2024/25.

The Leader informed Council that he had great pleasure in presenting the Budget and Financial Strategy for 2024/25 and thanked the Director of Finance and Corporate Services and the Finance Team for their hard work throughout the last year. He stated that the financial position of the Council was strong and that the budget presented was legal, balanced and valid. The Leader recognised that times remained challenging and went on to say that several councils nationally had already issued s114 notices, with many more warning that significant change was needed to avoid such a position.

The Leader advised Council that the budget presented resourced the delivery of the new Corporate Strategy as well as the statutory and discretionary services residents in the Borough valued, supported businesses and climate reduction projects as well as financing improvements to a number of leisure centres and play areas. Despite this, Council Tax remained in the lowest quartile nationally presenting excellent value for money, and where increases in specific fees and charges had been made that was to directly cover increases in costs or to develop services. The Leader stated that it was a common misconception that Rushcliffe was a wealthy Borough with no social deprivation and informed Council of additional Government funding received recently to help tackle a growing homelessness problem in the Borough.

The Leader informed Council that he had been lobbying the Government for a

multi-year settlement, as had the Local Government Association (LGA) and the District Councils' Network, to provide greater certainty and stability. Efforts had also been extended to decide the future of the New Homes Bonus and complete the Fairer Funding Review; however, the Council had to work with what it currently had.

The Leader advised that external borrowing would only be contemplated when absolutely necessary, given the associated interest payments. He referenced Rushcliffe Oaks, Bingham Arena and the Enterprise Centre as worthwhile investments the Council had recently made to benefit residents and stated that this growth was funded through the Council's prudent management of its income and reserves. It was noted that the budget presented for approval contained a Capital Investment portfolio worth £24.8m over the next five years.

In summing up the Leader informed Council of an additional £128k received from central Government recently, of which £100k had been allocated for climate change activities and £28k for additional support for victims of the recent flooding. There was also a new requirement to produce a Productivity Plan that would be based on the Council's existing Transformation and Efficiency Programme. The Leader went on to conclude that the budget as presented was robust, deliverable and affordable, despite the challenging environment in which the Council was operating and recommended all Councillors to vote for its adoption.

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

Councillor J Walker thanked officers for their support in producing this viable, alternative budget and referred to the legal requirement for local authorities to produce a balanced budget, set around the needs of its residents. However, political choices and ideological narratives showed the priorities and values of an organisation, and putting funds into Climate Change Reserves, although laudable was an example of that, as Councillor Walker considered that whilst this showed an awareness of the collective challenges, it failed to take direct action, and she questioned how best the money could be spent to benefit the world now and future residents.

Councillor Walker referred to the amendment, which was suggesting two simple and fully costed changes to the budget, firstly by investigating the possibility of building council housing and secondly to try and reduce the impact of cuts to the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). Council was reminded that this amendment was not proposing any borrowing, rather, it was asking Councillors to start thinking about having a small amount of council owned council housing. Councillor Walker advised that Rushcliffe was sixth in the country for having unspent S106 funds and stated that the charity Shelter and the LGA were asking councils to be ambitious in their approach to social housing. Council was advised that the recent Peer Review had advised that more could be done to protect residents from "coming down the tracks". Councillor Walker went on to advise the various measures that a Labour Government would put in place to ensure long term stability for local authorities and to allow them to invest in housing stock and by agreeing to the Feasibility Study, she stated that the Council would be able to act quickly in the future.

In respect of DFG, Councillor Walker advised that reducing the contribution to this grant would exacerbate waiting times, be very detrimental to vulnerable residents and a false economy. She advised that services had already been drastically cut during years of Government austerity and any further reductions could be disastrous. The amendment would simply divert funds over the short term to keep the grant viable, at least until there was more information on Better Care funding.

Councillor Walker concluded by stating that the Council needed to rethink how it viewed its budget and noted that the Peer Review Group had advised that a great deal of what the Council did was to its residents and not through engagement with them, and the Labour Group would like to see a budget which engaged with residents more. It was hoped that this amendment would be the start of a more collaborative and consensus building approach.

Councillor Chaplain seconded the recommendation and stated that every budget was based on choices, and in this case the main principle was to keep Council Tax in the lower quartile, whereas the Labour Group budget would focus on enhancing the lives of residents. She considered that the overriding principle should be to do as much for the community as possible, within available constraints and was concerned about the lack of consultation or engagement with communities, who would be affected by reducing discretionary expenditure. Councillor Chaplain stated that the Labour Group would prioritise climate change action and suggested that some of the projected earmarked reserves of over £800k could be used to combat climate change. Councillor Chaplain felt that many of the challenges faced by the Council were due to inaction by the current Government and she hoped for change after the next election. Councillor Chaplain stated that only council owned housing could give the feeling of permanence, which was so important to wellbeing, and the amendment was only asking for an affordable Feasibility Study to look at options, to allow the Council to make informed decisions going forward. Councillor Chaplain felt that the decision not to budget for a top up of the DFG was again based on priorities and would result in longer waiting lists, to the detriment of many and it should not happen in Rushcliffe.

Councillor Thomas thanked the Finance Team for their hard work but informed Council that she was unable to support the budget proposed by Cabinet. She referenced the £289k that the budget sacrificed by not raising Council Tax by the highest amount possible and the detrimental effect this had on valued services and added her support to the Labour Group amendment. Councillor Thomas stated that she believed car parking increases in West Bridgford could be better profiled to encourage more local shopping and social activities and called the large rises in car parking fees at Rushcliffe Country Park counterproductive, as it would inevitably lead to parking on the roads. She considered that the increased number of homes in the Borough would put additional pressure on existing services; however, additional Council Tax was being used to bolster reserves and stay debt-free rather than investing in areas of natural growth and demand. In conclusion, Councillor Thomas called upon the Council to take urgent action to resolve the situation on new estates across the Borough, where residents were effectively paying twice for the same services, once in the form of Council Tax and again through management charges.

Councillor R Mallender thanked officers for their hard work and Councillors for the alternative budget, agreed with the sentiment regarding multi-year settlements and stated that local government reform was long overdue, and hoped that the Combined Authority Mayoral election would bring more devolution. Councillor Mallender was pleased to see funding to tackle cyber-attacks, for works to the Devonshire Road railway bridge and for refurbishing play areas. Budgeting was required to combat climate change, improve infrastructure and the wildlife environment and he was pleased to see that the £128k grant would be partly added to the Climate Change Reserve and go towards flood resilience measures. Councillor Mallender confirmed that the Green Group supported the Labour Group amendment and that there should be better provision for residents and simply keeping Council Tax low was not the way forward.

Councillor Bird thanked officers and Councillors for their hard work and stated that he felt that the Labour amendment was important and should be supported.

Councillor Birch acknowledged that officers were working under the direction of the majority group and stated that his criticisms were not directed at them but at the political decisions of the Conservative Group. He challenged the priority given to remaining in the bottom quartile of Council Tax charges and offered a number of other metrics in which Rushcliffe did not perform so favourably and also questioned the importance of being in the lowest quartile if doing so meant cutting valued services. He highlighted that Rushcliffe was at a natural advantage to other councils locally by virtue of its larger proportion of high valued properties, which naturally attracted a bigger Council Tax charge. Councillor Birch also questioned the spending of almost £10k on the Council's attendance at the MJ Awards in 2023/24 and then proposing cuts in several areas that would undoubtedly disadvantage residents.

Councillor Parekh thanked the Director of Finance and Corporate Services and his team and Councillor Viridi for their hard work in producing a balanced and prudent budget, which prepared the Council for any future uncertainties. Councillor Parekh referred to national and international challenges, which continued to cause great uncertainty, and advised that the Council had remained resilient and taken effective measures to combat that. Councillor Parekh advised that the Council could support the budget without compromising essential services, whilst remaining vigilant to the impact of Devolution, Levelling Up and the Environment Act. Councillor Parekh also acknowledged the Council's commitment to combat climate change and increase sustainability. In the current climate, with many councils issuing s114 notices, Councillor Parekh was proud that Rushcliffe remained debt free, whilst providing excellent services, and she urged all Councillors to support this budget.

Councillor R Walker thanked the Labour Group for their amended proposal and stated that whilst he broadly accepted the premise that there was an under supply of social housing, he could not accept that the solution would necessarily be council owned council housing and stated that all possible courses of action should be considered. Councillor Walker felt that the

amendment had already concluded that council delivered housing would be the solution, which he considered to be misguided and referred to other courses of action available, including development of rural exception sites, encouraging developers to make their schemes more available, untapping capacity in the private sector, and potential development on Greenfield and Greenbelt sites. Council was reminded that an economic solution was being sought to a social problem and Councillor Walker stated that he could not support the amendment because he did not think that a Feasibility Study was required to show that the suggested model was not economically viable; however, he would be happy to work with Councillors to look at other viable alternatives.

Councillor Polenta recognised that the budget proposed was reflective of the Council's Corporate Strategy, was fiscally prudent and improved the lives of residents across many different areas. However, she stated that it did nothing to help families who were struggling to find or afford housing within the Borough, and she welcomed the proposed amendment, which would put housing at the epicentre of the budget, by delivering much needed housing rather than making a profit.

Councillor Plant thanked officers for their work on the budget and their support to Councillors Walker and Chaplain with the alternative proposal. She recognised that the Council was operating in a very difficult economic environment and that choices would be made in line with the political principles of the controlling party. However, she criticised the use of language used, highlighting that 'savings' in discretionary services were actually cuts in areas that affected residents' quality of life. Councillor Plant also pointed out that the Council could choose to increase Council Tax slightly to avoid those cuts to services but had prioritised staying in the lowest quartile of Council Tax charged instead.

Councillor Gowland stated that in respect of affordable housing, Registered Housing Providers failed to provide support, especially to the most vulnerable, and in her experience Housing Associations existed to raise money to pay large salaries, instead of providing support. Councillor Gowland referred to the unacceptable cuts in discretionary spending and concluded by stating that "councils can Rushcliffe won't".

Councillor Upton reminded Councillors that Rushcliffe had transferred its housing stock in 2003, an arrangement that he felt was working very well, and he advised that there was no in-house expertise to manage new housing stock of any size. He considered that it would be a backwards step and instead highlighted the success of the Council in providing a higher than average proportion of affordable homes. He also reminded Council that it was Empty Homes week and outlined the work the Council was doing to bring properties back into occupation. Councillor Upton concluded by clarifying that in relation to s106 and CIL contributions, the Council was essentially a banker, looking after contributions until they had built up to sufficient levels to enable infrastructure projects to be funded.

Councillor Matthews reminded Council that this meeting was to discuss Rushcliffe's budget and was not about other authorities or organisations and referred to the importance of keeping Council Tax low and using it prudently to

help residents.

Councillor Gaunt stated that the Labour Group proposal was only asking for two small, fully funded amendments to help residents, including £20k for a Feasibility Study asking experts to look holistically at options and to ensure that works could be undertaken on housing to enable people to continue living in them.

Councillor Simms suggested that the proposals for a Feasibility Study should be brought forward separately to enable proper consideration and he felt that it was important for the Council to communicate positively about its achievements, to ensure that residents were informed about the work of the Council and how their Council Tax was spent.

Councillor Chewings thanked the Director of Finance and Corporate Services and his team for their hard work. He went on to say that he was saddened that there would be no opportunity to vote on the Labour amendment first and asked if next year the process could be changed. Councillor Chewings noted the Leader's comments that Rushcliffe had the lowest Council Tax in the county and one of the lowest in the country; however, he considered the real headlines of the budget to be the 40% increase to parking charges in West Bridgford and up to 200% for parking at Rushcliffe Country Park. Councillor Chewings went on to refer to the cuts to the DFG, which would significantly affect residents. In respect of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, Councillor Chewings stated that the Leader had failed to mention that there would be a £1.6m deficit at the end of the five years, which would result in further cuts or increased taxes. Councillor Chewings referred to the £10k, which he felt had been wasted attending the MJ Awards and noted that although the Leader had advised that this was a small fraction of the budget, there were now proposals to cut funding for those amounts, and he would not be supporting this budget.

In respect of the point raised by Councillor Chewings, the Monitoring Officer advised that rules of debate tonight were in the Constitution and had been adopted by Council in July 2023.

Councillor Barney thanked officers for their incredible work during the recent flooding and stated that this was the reason why the Council needed to maintain reserves, to ensure that support could be provided quickly and effectively. He highlighted the need to support a balanced budget so that the many challenges being faced could be addressed and expressed his sympathies to councillors in other authorities who were unable to support their residents in this way due to ongoing financial hardship.

Councillor J Wheeler reminded Council that Rushcliffe continued to invest in its facilities and stated that car parking charges at Rushcliffe Country Park remained very low compared to similar parks, with the income helping to maintain and improve parking. Councillor Wheeler advised that the Council wanted to remain debt free to ensure that all its money could be used to deliver services. Councillor Wheeler stated that Rushcliffe should be proud that it had more affordable housing than any other district, with the mix of housing on estates working well to improve social cohesion. In respect of the DFG, Councillor Wheeler advised that there would be £3.5m funding over the next

five years, and it was hoped that more funding would be made available going forward. He thanked the Labour Group for putting forward their amendment, which had allowed for a healthy debate.

Councillor Butler stated that Rushcliffe was a good council, which had been recognised recently by the LGA Peer Review team. He brought Council's attention specifically to the Capital Investment Projects detailed on pages 80 and 81 of the report and highlighted that good financial management enabled the Council to invest in its communities and the Borough.

Councillor J Walker thanked Councillors for their support for the alternative budget proposed by the Labour Group and clarified that it was not a request for funding to build new homes but to explore the possibility of doing so through a Feasibility Study. She wanted the Council to fully understand the many different models of home ownership and how a mix of those models was needed to meet the challenging needs of local communities.

Councillor Viridi thanked all Councillors for their engagement and measured contributions and advised that the Council was in an excellent financial position but that the future still contained a number of challenges that threatened instability. Councillor Viridi stated that the Council was nationally recognised as an authority that delivered high quality services, innovative capital projects whilst maintaining a balanced budget year after year. Council was reminded that it held that position by making prudent and financially sound decisions, working with partners to deliver services, finding savings where it could, and by making difficult decisions when required and the Council's achievements should not be underestimated. He stated that the Council's reserves were comfortable, but they were essential to respond to unforeseen circumstances, and in such a volatile environment those reserves should be protected. In summary, Councillor Viridi reminded Councillors of the various consultations that they had been invited to participate in and stated that he was proud to present this Budget and Financial Strategy for approval.

Councillor Clarke praised the Labour Group for putting forward an alternative budget and recognised that their proposals had positively contributed towards the debate. He responded to the concerns of several Councillors about the metrics used to compare Rushcliffe with other local authorities and the use of these figures in publicity materials. He highlighted the importance the Council placed on providing a balanced mix of housing on all new developments and quoted a number of figures in relation to affordable housing. He concluded by moving the recommendation and asking all Councillors to vote for the prudent, legal and sustainable Budget and Financial Strategy as proposed.

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

FOR: Councillors M Barney, A Brennan, A Brown, R Butler, N Clarke, T Combella, J Cottee, A Edyvean, S Ellis, R Inglis, D Mason, P Matthews, H Om, H Parekh, A Phillips, N Regan, D Simms, D Soloman, R Upton, D Viridi, R Walker, T Wells, D Wheeler, J Wheeler and G Williams

AGAINST: Councillors T Birch, R Bird, S Calvert, J Chaplain, K Chewings, G Fletcher, M Gaunt, E Georgiou, P Gowland, C Grocock, R Mallender, S Mallender, L Plant, D Polenta, C Thomas, J Walker and L Way

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 2024/25 to 2028/29, as detailed at Annex B to the report, including changes to fees and charges regarding Garden Waste and Car Parking as set out in Annex B, Appendix 5 to the report be adopted;
- c) the Transformation and Efficiency Plan as set out in Annex B, Appendix 7 to the report, which incorporates the Government's requirements for a Productivity Plan required to be published by July 2024 be adopted;
- d) the Capital Programme as set out in Annex B, Appendix 3 to the report be adopted;
- e) the Capital and Investment Strategy as set out in Annex B, Appendix 8 to the report be adopted;
- f) the Second Home Premium as set out in Annex B, Section 3.4 to the report, and any notification of further exemptions to be adopted and incorporated into a revised policy be approved;
- g) the creation of a new Flood Grant and Resilience Reserve as set out in Annex B, Section 6 of the report be approved;
- h) Rushcliffe's 2024/25 Council Tax for a Band D property at £157.88 (increase from 2023/24 of £3.93 or 2.55%) be set;
- i) the Special Expenses for 2024/25 for West Bridgford, Ruddington and Keyworth, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be set, 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);
- j) with regards to recommendations h) and i), the associated Bands in accordance with the formula in section 36(1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 be set; and
- k) the Pay Policy Statement as set out in Annex B, Appendix 6 to the report be adopted.

57 Council Tax Resolution 2024/25

It was proposed by Councillor Clarke and **RESOLVED** that the meeting be extended and would finish no later than 10.30pm.

The Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough-wide Leadership, Councillor Clarke presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services outlining the Council's position on Council Tax for the year 2024/25.

The Leader advised that this was a technical process to set the Council Tax and moved the recommendation as detailed in the report.

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

Councillor Gowland stated that Rushcliffe took more Council Tax, despite the rate being lower and core spending power was also higher in Rushcliffe. Central Grants continued to decline, and the Conservative Government had deliberately pushed taxes into Council Tax, which was regressive. Rushcliffe was asking to take more money from its residents to put in the bank, and whilst understanding the importance of having reserves, Councillor Gowland stated that the Council had a guaranteed income from Council Tax. Councillor Gowland agreed that it was important not to be in debt; however, the Council was not reducing its debt, it was increasing its reserves and it was unclear what would be done with the additional money being raised. This money should be used instead to reduce cuts to Disabled Facilities Grants, address climate change challenges or to build council houses. Councillor Gowland concluded by advising that the Labour Group would be supporting the recommendation, as the Group wanted to spend the money sensibly in the near future.

Councillor Virdi referred to Council Tax take and agreed that Rushcliffe did have a slightly higher proportion; however, out of the neighbouring seven districts, Rushcliffe was mid-range and if Business Rates were included, Rushcliffe was at the bottom. In respect of Levelling Up funding, Councillor Virdi advised that Rushcliffe also received very little compared to other neighbouring districts.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Council Tax Resolution for 2024/25 as detailed in [Appendix A to the report](#) be approved.

58 Amendments to the Constitution

The Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough-wide Leadership, Councillor Clarke presented the report of the Monitoring Officer outlining proposed amendments to the Council's Constitution.

The Leader explained that the amendments had been through the scrutiny process, considered by the Planning Committee Working Group before returning to the Governance Scrutiny Group, and referred Councillors to the Appendix to the report, which detailed them.

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

Councillor Calvert confirmed that he had been one of two Governance Scrutiny Group Members, together with Councillor Thomas, who had sat on the Working Group, which had considered amendments to Planning Committee arrangements. Councillor Calvert referred to the positive amendments made by the Working Group, which had been reported back to and approved by the Governance Scrutiny Group in November 2023. Council was reminded that those amendments had been included in the report published for Full Council on 7 December 2023, which had subsequently been withdrawn without explanation. Councillor Calvert stated that no further information about proposed changes to the Constitution had been provided prior to publication of the report last week, and he hoped that if there had been any, they would have been reported to the Governance Scrutiny Group. Having reviewed this report, Councillor Calvert confirmed that he could not find any significant changes and sought confirmation that none had been made.

Councillor Thomas echoed the concerns expressed by Councillor Calvert, advised that she had also not found any significant changes and welcomed the constructive process that had been undertaken for this review.

Councillor Edyvean confirmed that whilst there had been further discussion in response to questions raised in relation to ambiguity of language, there had not been any changes made to the original proposals.

It was **RESOLVED** that Council adopts the proposed revisions to the Constitution.

59 Notices of Motion

The following notice of motion was proposed by Councillor Calvert and seconded by Councillor Inglis.

“Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains far too high in our society. In Rushcliffe we are determined to change this.

This Council is a signatory to the Nottinghamshire Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy which has been developed in a multi-agency approach.

This Council will:

- report progress on the implementation of the Action Plan of the Strategy back to the Corporate Overview Group within the 2024/25 municipal year; and
- seek re-accreditation (as an employer) as a White Ribbon UK organisation within the same timeframe.”

Councillor Calvert reminded Council that this motion had originally been brought to the meeting on 7 December 2023, and following a lengthy debate, at the suggestion of Councillor Richard Mallender, it had been agreed to take both the motion and amendment away and work cross-party to find a proposal

that everyone could support. The minutes of that meeting had detailed that all Councillors were in agreement with the sentiment of the motion but were anxious to get the wording right to ensure that the most effective action could be taken.

Councillor Calvert advised that since then very positive discussions had taken place with Labour Group members, Councillor Inglis and officers, and he was now very pleased to move this new motion, which acknowledged that violence against women and girls remained far too prevalent. The recently published Nottinghamshire Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy and Action Plan, developed by a range of partner organisations set out an ambitious but achievable programme, and it was important that Councillors would have the opportunity to monitor progress of the Action Plan through the Corporate Overview Group. Councillor Calvert stated that it was important that all partner organisations regularly reviewed their internal practices, and with that in mind, the Council would seek reaccreditation as a White Ribbon UK organisation.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Inglis felt that everyone was in agreement, thanked Councillor Calvert and the Labour Group for this positive cross-party working and Councillor Richard Mallender for his pragmatic suggestion. Councillor Inglis referred to the measures Rushcliffe already had in place and its very active role in multi-agency partnerships, and he considered it timely that the VAWG Strategy and Action Plan was being republished. Council was reminded of the campaigns Rushcliffe was involved with, including “Ask for Angela”, the White Ribbon accreditation, the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) and future training for Councillors. Councillor Inglis stated that it should also be recognised that violence was not only directed against women and girls, and not always carried out by men and physical violence was not the only form of abuse.

Councillor Gowland stated that it was vitally important that work was undertaken with young people to make it clear that banter, teasing and harassment should not be normalised and was unacceptable.

Councillor Polenta referred to the problems in society that allowed this to happen and stated that on average one woman was killed by a man every three days in this country. 90% of sexual assault victims were women, with one in seven injured by a partner and in 2021, a UKGOV poll found that 97% of 18-24 year olds said that they had suffered sexual harassment in public. Councillor Polenta advised that women from disadvantaged groups were more likely to suffer abuse and there was therefore a greater need for specialist services and support.

Councillor Sue Mallender stated that it was refreshing that everyone was working together, as it was clear that all Councillors wanted the best for Rushcliffe, and Council was reminded that previous collaborative working had achieved great things before.

Councillor Way agreed with Councillor Inglis that men could also be victims and was concerned that the emphasis in schools might mean boys would not come forward, and hoped that once the motion was passed, future support for those

not included in this category would be provided. She went onto recommend J9 training for those interested in learning more.

Councillor Calvert felt like this was the beginning of a very long journey, and he hoped that this time next year, after receiving updates, Councillors would be able to see improvements both in Rushcliffe and across the County.

The Mayor announced that as she had been advised that the Conservative Group would be proposing an amendment to Motion B, she did not think that there would be sufficient time to debate both the motion and the amendment before 10.30pm, so the meeting would move to the questions and bring Councillor Chewings' motion to the next ordinary meeting.

60 Questions from Councillors

a) Question from Councillor Plant to Councillor Upton

“There are significant pressures on the Disabled facilities Grant service and budget- demand exceeds the Council's grant allocation. Building more adapted and affordable housing would help alleviate pressures on this grant. The Council's Local Plan Part 2 policy (Housing standards), states that in developments of more than 100 dwellings at least 1% should comply with building regulation requirements M4(3)a-which is a purpose-built adapted property. How many of such properties have been built on currently completed sites?”

Councillor Upton responded by advising that there were two related building regulations, being M4(3)(b) and M4(3)(a) and confirmed that Councillor Plant's question referred to M4(3)(a) in relation to what properties could be adapted but he would like to take the opportunity to include M4(3)(b) in his answer, which related to properties built as adapted at turnkey. Councillor Upton explained that of the schemes completed by the Council since Policy 12 of Local Plan Part 2 came into force, five developments included provision for both wheelchair adaptable or wheelchair accessible dwellings. Of these, he said that three schemes had a combined total of 12 wheelchair accessible dwellings M4(3)(b), of which nine had already been built and that two schemes had provision for a combined total of five wheelchair adaptable dwellings, none of which had yet been built. He said that this amounted to a total of 17 properties.

In relation to the Gamston development, Councillor Upton said that the scheme should deliver a further 40 homes totalling 4000 dwellings and stated that this totalled 57 adapted properties either in existence or to be build.

The Mayor asked if Councillor Plant had a supplementary question.

Councillor Plant asked if she could receive Councillor's Upton's response in writing and whether the provision detailed by him in his response met the 1% requirement.

Councillor Upton confirmed that he would provide a written response and that the provision did meet the 1% requirement.

b) Question from Councillor Way to the Leader, Councillor Clarke

“Following the Competition and Marketing Authority's report on the Housebuilding Market, what decisive action will Cabinet now take to stop unfair practices relating to management charges on Rushcliffe's new housing estates?”

The Leader responded by agreeing with the importance of this issue, which had resulted from a correct policy having unforeseen consequences. He referred to scrutiny work which was taking place, and which would result in a report to Cabinet setting out what the Council could do to respond, which would hopefully involve trying to raise standards with management companies and developers across the Borough. The Leader stated that he had also written to the Secretary of State, Michael Gove, to raise this matter, and that it had already been raised within the LGA and he would be raising it with the District Council's Network, and given that this was a national issue, he would also be lobbying Government. He also thought that the situation had reached the stage where some management companies were drawing back from some of the onerous activities that they carried out.

The Mayor asked if Councillor Way had a supplementary question.

Councillor Way stated that she was pleased to hear that action was being taken as she had been trying to bring this issue to the fore for nearly five years. She felt that many of the suggestions being brought forward applied to the newer estates and asked if the Leader saw any way of providing assistance to people living on existing estates who were suffering from the worst of those charges.

The Leader responded by confirming that this needed to be looked at and that if there was something that could be done to help, he would be keen for the Council to pursue it, and whilst he did not expect it to be an easy solution, he agreed with the sentiments involved.

c) Question from Councillor Thomas to the Leader, Councillor Clarke

“What process will be used to formulate the Council's response to the consultation about the future of the County Hall site so that it reflects the views of all councillors plus the residents of West Bridgford and ensures that this critically located site serves the community in which it is located?”

The Leader responded by advising that he thought it best if the views of Councillors and residents were expressed by themselves as individuals. He noted that the question referred to residents of West Bridgford but thought that residents and Councillors from other parts of the Borough might also wish to express their views. He did not think that it was particularly useful for one local authority to tell another local authority what to do with their assets.

The Mayor asked if Councillor Thomas had a supplementary question.

Councillor Thomas said that she was aware that the County Council were consulting with both individuals and neighbouring authorities and asked if this meant that the Council would not be putting in a response.

The Leader responded by stating that it did not necessarily mean that the Council would not respond but that there was a need to assess whether any response would represent the entire Borough or if it would be possible to respond in a corporate manner without negating individual responses.

The meeting closed at 10.07 pm.

CHAIR