

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
CABINET**

TUESDAY, 11 FEBRUARY 2025

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 Viridi
and J Wheeler

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillors T Birch and J Walker

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

D Banks	Director of Neighbourhoods
A Hill	Chief Executive
P Linfield	Director of Finance and Corporate Services
S Pregon	Monitoring Officer
H Tambini	Democratic Services Manager

41 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

42 Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 January 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 14 January 2025 were agreed as
a true record and signed by the Chair.

43 Citizens' Questions

There were no citizens' questions.

44 Opposition Group Leaders' Questions

Question from Councillor J Walker to Councillor Viridi.

"Will the new 'guiding principles' mentioned on page 52 of the budget be up for
discussion with all Councillors?"

Councillor Viridi thanked Councillor Walker for her question, confirmed that
Councillors would have the opportunity to discuss the principles at the Council
meeting in March, and stated that these were not new, as they were included in
the Medium Term Financial Strategy last year.

Councillor Walker asked a supplementary question to Councillor Viridi.

“Do you think the lack of mention of residents within our ‘guiding principles’ should possibly be altered?”

Councillor Virdi stated that the ‘guiding principles’ were adopted for residents to ensure that budget risks were mitigated and it was sustainable.

Question from Councillor Birch to Councillor Virdi.

“How does this Conservative-led Council justify a 2.46% rise in Council Tax on hard working residents when, as a whole, Rushcliffe's residents pay higher overall Council Tax than 95% of councils in the UK, the majority of which is forced on them by the Conservative-led County Council?”

Councillor Virdi thanked Councillor Birch for his question and confirmed that the budget only concerned the Rushcliffe element of Council Tax and had nothing to do with Nottinghamshire County Council. The key point was that Rushcliffe remained within the lowest 25% nationally for district and borough councils for the Council Tax it levied; and remained the lowest in Nottinghamshire in comparison to the other borough or district councils. The Council had only received an increase of 0.9% in Core Spending Power, compared to councils nationally, where the increase was 6.8%. The sums were clear that Rushcliffe was disadvantaged nationally compared to other councils, and the Core Spending Power calculation included the Council Tax increase, which meant in real terms that the Council had less funding than expenditure, given current levels of inflation. He stated that increasing Council Tax was therefore a necessity, with the increase being less than 8p per week and questioned what services Councillor Birch would look to reduce if the Council did not increase Council Tax?

Councillor Birch raised a supplementary question; however, it was rejected by the Chair, on the basis that it did not arise directly from the reply, nor relate to the original question.

45 **2025/26 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 2025/26, the five-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) from 2025/26 to 2029/30, 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 a recently circulated amendment regarding changes to the Special Expenses, detailed in the revised covering report, which he would be speaking to. Councillor Virdi stated that all councils continued to face financial pressures; however, unlike many, Rushcliffe was not making service reductions, it was improving them. The Council had a balanced budget, including up to date, signed off Financial Statements, and it remained both diligent and prudent, whilst maintaining a commercial culture and generating financial efficiencies.

Councillor Virdi advised that the Council had received the final Local Government Finance Settlement and reiterated that the Council's Core Spending Power had only increased by 0.9% compared to 6.8% nationally, with the Government redirecting resources to councils linked to areas of high deprivation. With inflation running at 2%, this was in real terms a cut in overall funding, which meant that the Council had to raise revenue to ensure that it continued to provide the best services and invest in its assets.

Cabinet was reminded that Rushcliffe continued to have the lowest Council Tax in Nottinghamshire and remained amongst the lowest 25% in the country, with the Band D average increase of £3.89, being less than 8p per week, which Councillor Virdi felt everyone should be proud of. In respect of Special Expenses, Councillor Virdi referred to the supplementary paper issued, which detailed minor changes to the figures, and advised that even with the changes, the precept for West Bridgford, compared to other areas remained excellent value. He confirmed that the revised figure for West Bridgford was £64.84, Keyworth £3.21 and Ruddington £3.14.

Councillor Virdi referred to the Council's Transformation and Efficiency Plan, which was detailed in Section 7 of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which would deliver £1.7m over five years and whilst acknowledging some charges were increasing, he felt that they remained competitive compared to other local authorities. Councillor Virdi proposed one change, that the report to Full Council should be amended to retain the proposed £6,000 efficiency for a move to digital bin calendars, as given the complexity of 'Simpler Recycling' and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), it was felt that it would be better to retain the hard copy calendars for now.

The Capital Programme remained substantial with £27.1m budgeted over five years, including a continued range of investments across the Borough and he confirmed that reserves remained sound and would help the Council navigate challenges going forward.

In summary, Councillor Virdi referred to those significant challenges and uncertainties, which were detailed in paragraph 6.1 of the report, and confirmed that the MTFS highlighted the relatively stable, healthy financial position that Rushcliffe was in compared to most local authorities. The Council continued to maintain and deliver excellent services and provide excellent value for money and Councillor Virdi concluded by thanking Councillors and the Director – Finance and Corporate Services and the Finance Team for their continued hard work during very challenging times.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Upton stated that this was an excellent report, detailing a balanced budget during difficult and uncertain times. He felt that the small increase in Council Tax represented great value for the services provided, together with an ambitious Capital Programme, and he reiterated Rushcliffe's Council Tax position, that it was debt free, with good reserves. Cabinet was reminded that an uncertain future lay ahead and he expressed disappointment that a well-managed, financially prudent council could be abolished. He thanked the Director – Finance and Corporate Services and his team and Councillor Virdi for their hard work in producing this excellent report.

Councillor J Wheeler welcomed the continued investment in projects and schemes throughout the Borough and felt that it was a shame that the Government continued to punish well run councils by reducing funding. However, because of the fantastic work the Council was doing, it could continue to provide excellent services, with only a small increase in Council Tax, and Councillor Wheeler echoed the thanks given to officers.

The Leader felt that it was always regrettable to increase charges; however, the important thing was to remain prudent and continue to give good value for money, and he was proud that the proposed Council Tax would continue to be the lowest in the county, which was important given the excellent services provided. The Leader reiterated comments made by Councillor Viridi regarding the importance of investing in the Council's infrastructure, and agreed that the future was uncertain, so it was vital that the Council continued to manage its finances prudently. The Leader echoed thanks given to the Director – Finance and Corporate Services and his team for their hard work and due diligence and to Councillor Viridi for his support and input.

It was RESOLVED that Cabinet RECOMMENDS to Council that it:

- a) adopts the budget setting report and associated financial strategies 2025/26 to 2029/30 (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 at Appendix 5 and Transformation and Efficiency Plan at Appendix 7, with the exception of the proposed £6,000 efficiency for a move to digital bin calendars, which shall be retained;
- b) adopts the Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 3;
- c) adopts the Capital and Investment Strategy at Appendix 8;
- d) sets Rushcliffe's 2025/26 Council Tax for a Band D property at £161.77 (increase from 2024/25 of £3.89 or 2.46%);
- e) sets the Special Expenses for 2025/26 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 £64.84 (£59.44 in 2024/25)
 - ii) Keyworth £3.21 (£4.69 in 2024/25)
 - iii) Ruddington £3.14 (£3.29 in 2024/25);
- f) adopts the Pay Policy Statement at Appendix 6; and
- g) 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.

46 **Revocation of the Borough's Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA1 and 1/2011)**

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment and Safety, Councillor Inglis presented the report of the Director – Neighbourhoods, to consider the revocation of the Borough's Air Quality Management Areas AQMA1 and 1/2011.

Councillor Inglis referred to the obligation on all local authorities to regularly review and assess if air quality objectives were likely to be achieved. The Council had assessed levels of the main air pollutants identified by the Government for a number of years, with four Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) identified and adopted by the Borough, including Trent Bridge and A52/Stragglethorpe Road at Radcliffe on Trent, as detailed in Tables 1 and 2 at paragraph 4.3 of the report, as they had traffic related Nitrogen Dioxide levels, which exceeded the Government's target. The two others areas at Barnstone, and at the Nottingham Knight roundabout had previously been revoked following improvements.

Councillor Inglis advised that automatic continuous analysers were installed at both sites, and the results had been under the target levels for five years and DERFA recommended the removal of AQMAs after three years. It was noted that the Council would continue to monitor air quality with average monthly readings from its 29 other passive sites. Councillor Inglis thanked the Head of Public Protection and the Environmental Health team in conjunction with the County Council and National Highways for their hard work to minimise traffic generated pollution.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Brennan endorsed the continued monitoring of the 29 passive sites and stated that it was great news that the two areas were now under target levels, improving quality of life, which the Council took extremely seriously, and it was hoped that a decrease in particulates would continue.

Councillor J Wheeler welcomed the report, which would reassure residents and welcomed the ongoing monitoring in place.

It was RESOLVED that the revocation of the Borough's Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA 1 and 1/2011) be approved.

47 **Rushcliffe Play Strategy 2025-2030**

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Wellbeing, ICT and Member Development, Councillor J Wheeler presented the report of the Director – Neighbourhoods, outlining the Rushcliffe Play Strategy for 2025-2030.

Councillor Wheeler stated that over £800,000 had been invested by the Council in the past five years, and referred to differing expectations and requirements, since the previous Strategy was adopted in 2007, including having a wider range of accessible play equipment. Councillor Wheeler confirmed that play area users had been consulted, to ensure that facilities would meet their needs, as it was so important that children were active, and

the Council was committed to providing the best facilities possible. He thanked all those who had responded to the consultation and to the Director – Neighbourhoods and the Communities Manager.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Brennan referred to the important emphasis on quality of life, together with the experience of living in Rushcliffe, and this Strategy would support and enhance that offer throughout the Borough. She particularly welcomed the emphasis on accessible play areas, and provision for young girls and tweenagers, and that during routine upgrades every effort was being made to ensure that new equipment was inclusive for all. Councillor Brennan noted that in particular young girls sometimes found park less accessible, and considerable time had been taken to identify what young people wanted and to try and accommodate that.

Councillor Upton felt from his own personal experience that facilities in Rushcliffe were excellent, as was the maintenance and management.

Councillor Wheeler responded by confirming that provision for young girls and tweenagers was very important, with all refurbishment projects appealing to everyone, and by speaking to users it had helped to shape this Strategy.

It was RESOLVED that the updated Play Strategy 2025-2030 be adopted as a Strategy of the Council and supporting document to the Council's overall Leisure Strategy 2021 – 2027.

48 **Asset Investment Group Terms of Reference**

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance, Transformation and Governance, Councillor Virdi presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services detailing the Asset Investment Group Terms of Reference.

Councillor Virdi advised that the report followed recent discussions by Councillors regarding asset acquisition, and it highlighted why the Group was required, together with the current Terms of Reference (ToR) and proposed revisions. Councillor Virdi stated that the Group's original focus had been on asset investment for commercial return; however, that type of investment was now less likely, given recent changes to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) rules. It was noted that the Council might need to acquire assets, and such acquisitions were often opportunistic and required quick decision making, with the input of officers and Cabinet. Business cases had to be assessed and scrutinised prior to Council meetings, and given the confidential nature, restrictions were required on those involved, and he referred to paragraph 4.5 of the report, which detailed the revised ToR. Councillor Virdi stated that the report provided additional assurance, and highlighted were broader transparency and accountability lay, to ensure that all Councillors had confidence in this process.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Upton stated that this Group was still needed, even though its remit had been slightly changed to comply with new financial guidance.

It was RESOLVED that the Terms of Reference for the Asset Investment

Group as referred to in Paragraph 4.5 of the report be approved.

49 **Officer and Member Indemnity**

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance, Transformation and Governance, Councillor Virdi presented the report of the Monitoring Officer and Head of Chief Executive's Department outlining arrangements for officer and Member indemnity.

Councillor Virdi stated that the report clarified the position regarding officers and Members and their personal liability whilst working on behalf of the Council and advised that Members and officers acting on behalf of the Council, had statutory indemnity against personal liability. Whilst the proposed indemnity offered protection, it did not apply to deliberate wrong doing, and not having this indemnity could result in people not serving on such bodies.

In seconding the recommendation, the Leader stated that it was important that an indemnity was in place to ensure that no one was not deterred from seeking public office or participating in outside bodies because of any fear of incurring liability whilst acting on behalf of the Council.

It was RESOLVED that the grant of an indemnity for officers and Members as referred to at Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

The meeting closed at 7.45 pm.

CHAIR