

**MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
COUNCIL**

THURSDAY, 17 JULY 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 J Cottee (Chair), R Butler (Vice-Chair), M Barney, J Billin, T Birch, R Bird, A Brennan, A Brown, S Calvert, J Chaplain, K Chewings, N Clarke, T Combellack, S Dellar, A Edyvean, S Ellis, G Fletcher, M Gaunt, E Georgiou, P Gowland, C Grocock, R Inglis, R Mallender, S Mallender, D Mason, P Matthews, H Om, H Parekh, 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
R Clack	Deputy Monitoring Officer
A Hill	Chief Executive
P Linfield	Director of Finance and Corporate Services
E Richardson	Democratic Services Officer
H Tambini	Democratic Services Manager

APOLOGIES:

Councillor A Phillips

12 Declarations of Interest

The following declarations of interest were made in respect of Item 11: Local Government Reorganisation Update.

Councillor Gaunt declared a non-pecuniary interest as a secondary school teacher in the city.

Councillor Parekh as an employee of Nottinghamshire County Council.

Councillor Grocock, as an employee at Futures, a company jointly owned by Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottingham City Council.

Councillor S Mallender, as an employee of Nottingham City Council.

13 Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 May 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 22 May 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

14 Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor informed Council that his year had begun well, attending eight very enjoyable events. Highlights included the Soar Boating Club birthday celebrations, laying a wreath at Crich, attending Southwell Minster for the King's birthday celebrations, the Radcliffe on Trent Carnival, and Proms in the Park. He reminded Councillors about his Civic Service on Sunday, 20 July in Keyworth.

15 Leader's Announcements

The Leader referred to the very successful Proms in the Park, as well as the recent Film and Food Festival, which highlighted how well Rushcliffe organised such large scale events. Council was informed that earlier in the week some Travellers had moved onto Bridgford Park, and he went on to thank the Police and officers for promptly dealing with the situation. The Leader confirmed that Rushcliffe had again been awarded three Green Flags, which highlighted how well regarded those services were.

16 Chief Executive's Announcements

There were no Chief Executive's Announcements.

17 Citizens' Questions

The Mayor invited Mr Gaff to read his question as submitted.

"Can this Council, Councillors and its officers categorically assure the residents of Tollerton Park estate that it is safe to continue to live on Tollerton Park estate, and to continue to grow and consume the fruit and vegetables, which we produce on the land of the former RAF Tollerton site?"

Councillor Inglis thanked Mr Gaff for his question and advised that the Council's position on those points was set out in a letter and detailed briefing note that was hand delivered to all the Tollerton Park Home residents on 7 July 2025, as an expediated response to residents in relation to this question. The Council hoped that residents found the information helpful and of some assurance and that residents would follow the good practice advice contained in the correspondence.

18 Petitions

No petitions were presented at this meeting.

19 Approval of the Scrutiny Annual Reports 2024/25

The Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough-wide Leadership, Councillor Clarke MBE presented the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services providing a review of the work undertaken by the Council's four Scrutiny Groups during 2024/25.

The Leader informed Council that he had great pleasure in presenting the Annual Scrutiny Reports for approval and referred to the importance of scrutiny in helping to develop policy and provide the appropriate checks and balances. After Councillor Brennan had been given the opportunity to second the report, he asked that each of the scrutiny Chairs be invited to deliver a brief summary of the year.

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

Councillor Combellack, Chair of the Corporate Overview Group for 2024/25, reported that the Group had allocated many scrutiny requests, helping to guide and formulate them, even redirecting them where appropriate, which had led to both interesting and productive debate. Scrutiny of performance figures confirmed that Rushcliffe continued to deliver high level services, with good customer feedback. As the new Chair of Growth and Development Scrutiny Group, Councillor Combellack stated that she was looking forward to scrutinising work at the "coalface". She thanked officers and members for their time and dedication, in particular the Head of Corporate Services and the Director – Finance and Corporate Services and concluded by looking forward to being involved in further successful scrutiny work.

Councillor Edyvean, Chair of the Governance Scrutiny Group, thanked members of the Group for their involvement in sometimes lively debate on a range of topics. He stated that the Group had considered the Redmond Review, which had resulted in the appointment of an Independent Person, which had proved a very positive step and thanked officers and external presenters for their involvement and support.

Councillor Williams, Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Group, referred to the wide range and interesting subjects the Group had considered, which were detailed in the report and thanked officers, in particular the Head of Environment and Communities, the Democratic Services Team and members of the Group, especially the Vice-chair, Councillor Plant.

Councillors Matthews, Chair of the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group, referred to the varied and interesting topics that the Group had reviewed, which were detailed in the report, including the joint meeting with Communities Scrutiny Group, to consider accessible housing. He thanked all members of the Group, in particular the Vice-chair, Councillor Way and officers.

Councillor Plant, Vice-chair of Communities Scrutiny Group, thanked Councillor Williams and reflected on the interesting subjects covered during the year. She felt it was important that Councillors were appropriately informed about scrutiny topics and that recommendations agreed by scrutiny groups were actioned. Councillor Plant stated that the joint scrutiny group had been extremely informative, raising concerns, with many excellent recommendations, which, if implemented could make a real difference. She also felt that it would be good practice for Vice-chairs to see the draft Annual Scrutiny Report before it was published and she hoped that further scrutiny training would be provided, as agreed last year.

Councillor Polenta, the Vice-chair of Governance Scrutiny Group, thanked the

Chair, members of the Group and officers for their contributions and support. She referred to the importance of scrutiny in the democratic process, ensuring rigour and accountability, by challenging assumptions, regardless of political affiliations. It was important that the Council ensured that all information was accessible, with an accessible scrutiny process to residents. Councillor Polenta reiterated her concerns regarding the Constitutional changes agreed earlier this year, which she felt constricted debate.

In noting the comprehensive report, Councillor Way, the Vice-chair of Growth and Development Scrutiny Group thanked all those involved and felt that a great deal had been achieved. Councillor Way went onto agree with comments made by Councillor Plant and requested that going forward, any document that included a Councillor's name should be sent to that Councillor before being published. Councillor Way was pleased to note that the scrutiny process was to be reviewed, as suggested in the Peer Review, and hoped that this would address ongoing concerns.

Councillor R Mallender referred to the importance of having a robust scrutiny function, looked forward to seeing the outcome of the review, and was pleased that the Communities Scrutiny Group had undertaken important work in relation to Climate Change.

Councillor Birch thanked all Councillors and officers for their hard work in the scrutiny process.

The Leader confirmed that the request from Councillor Plant and Way would be actioned going forward.

It was **RESOLVED** that the work undertaken by the four Scrutiny Groups during 2024/25 be endorsed.

20 **Appointment of Independent Persons**

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance, Transformation and Governance, Councillor Virdi presented the report of the Monitoring Officer, outlining appointment of Independent Persons to the Standards Committee.

Councillor Virdi advised that it was a requirement of the Localism Act 2011 that the Council should have access to at least one Independent Person to consult on Member Code of Conduct matters, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer. Councillor Virdi advised that given the uncertainties around Local Government Reorganisation, it was not considered cost effective to commence a recruitment process to appoint new individuals, and it was recommended that the appointment of the two current Independent Persons be extended as detailed in the report.

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

Councillor J Walker thanked the two current Independent Persons for their professionalism over the past two years and fully endorsed the recommendation.

It was **RESOLVED** that the appointment of Mr Christopher Richards and Ms Helen Richardson as its Independent Persons for standards matters under Section 28(7) of the Localism Act 2011 be extended for a period of two years, with authority for the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee, to extend the appointment up to an additional two years.

21 **Local Government Reorganisation Update**

The Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough-wide Leadership, Councillor Clarke MBE presented the report of the Chief Executive, which provided an overview of the Government's requirement for plans for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) to be developed in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire and to update on the work undertaken to respond to the requirements.

In formally moving the recommendations detailed in the report, the Leader stated that LGR was the most important issue for Rushcliffe in years and summarised the actions taken since the publication of the Government's White Paper in December 2024. He confirmed that in March, councils in Nottinghamshire had submitted three core options, all of which proposed two unitary councils, with Rushcliffe advancing a fourth option of three unitary councils. He confirmed that Rushcliffe's position remained that no part of it should be part of a newly expanded City area, as Rushcliffe was well run, financially stable, delivering first class services, in contrast to the City Council. The Leader advised that the original proposal had now been reduced to two options, 1b and 1e as detailed in Appendix D to the report, and Council noted that as Rushcliffe's option had received little support from other authorities, the report was recommending supporting option 1b. The Leader reminded Council that this was not a final decision, it was an update, with work on the Council's third option being paused; however, if circumstances changed it would be revisited. The Leader referred to evidence gained from the ongoing petition, with over 15,000 cross-party signatures, all against Rushcliffe joining any expanded City area. The Leader concluded by reiterating that this report was supporting an interim approach, working towards a final submission in November, and he thanked officers involved in this time consuming work.

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

Councillor J Walker advised that the Labour Group had submitted an amendment, as it believed the proposal to be unbalanced and potentially damaging; however, as it could not be accepted, the Labour Group would not be supporting the recommendations. She felt that Rushcliffe would not have an open mind during the consultation process, with the proposed recommendations failing to serve the needs of local communities. Councillor Walker stated that all useful debate had been replaced by political rhetoric and that the proposals had been put forward without properly investigating all other options, as there were alternative ways to improve efficiencies and service delivery. Councillor Walker questioned why there had been no serious evaluation of the boundary review and what evidence there was in favour of option 1b rather than 1e. The Labour Group was demanding a better process, where all options were carefully considered, as residents deserved that.

Councillor Thomas referred to the most cost effective option of a single unitary authority, questioned why it had been discounted for political reasons and felt that it should be reconsidered, because if implemented with a commitment to running local area committees, it could deliver for everyone. Councillor Thomas was concerned that recommendations e) and f) would limit Rushcliffe's ability to have any influence over any possible alternative options put forward, with the river as a hard boundary, and if boundaries were to change, options which used the river for an expanded City could be considered. Councillor Thomas referred to a changing storyline to emphasise that new councils would be formed, rather than saying that some districts would be added into the City, with the County Council taking the rest. She stated that it was vital going forward that the new councils were formed from the ground up, and it should be added to the recommendations.

Councillor Thomas proposed the following amendment, to add a further clause at the end, which was seconded by Councillor Way, who reserved the right to speak.

- h) it be recognised that after the reorganisation all councils in the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire area will be completely new organisations.

The Leader confirmed that he accepted the amendment, which then became part of the substantive motion.

Councillor Birch stated that he would like to propose the following amendment to g), which would be seconded by Councillor Chewings, who reserved the right to speak.

- g) to ensure the final proposal is informed by the views of local communities, Rushcliffe Borough Council will actively engage Town and Parish Councils, local community organisations, and businesses as part of a broader Engagement Strategy. In addition, to provide Central Government with an accurate reflection of residents' views, the Council will undertake a Borough-wide Engagement Survey, to ensure the voices of Rushcliffe constituents are clearly heard.

Councillor Birch was concerned that the issue had been heavily politicised and felt that opposition Councillors had not been kept appropriately informed about LGR, with very little communication throughout the process, which failed to promote transparency and openness. Councillor Birch stated that the petition was not verifiable and was unreliable, and the amendment was calling for more engagement, with a public survey.

The Leader advised that most of the work referred to had already been done and was contained in the documents, and confirmed that he accepted the amendment, which then became part of the substantive motion.

Councillor Polenta stated that LGR should be an opportunity to rethink how Council's governed and funded services, with collective decision making for all. She agreed that the petition was flawed and that an element of fear was

stopping proper debate on this issue. LGR should create financially sustainable authorities by rebuilding a broken system, with a unitary structure simplifying decision making and improving services for all. A new vision was required and should be reflected in LGR, which put people before profit, with democratic devolutionary powers.

Councillor Calvert was concerned that Rushcliffe was acting in self interest in relation to the rural parts of the Borough, by refusing to consider the best interests of West Bridgford, which was closely connected to the City. He reiterated previous concerns regarding the petition and the insulting remarks it contained about the City and for that reason he would not be supporting recommendation f). He also advised that he could not accept recommendations c) and d), as he felt that the analysis and scoring was very questionable. In respect of increases to Council Tax, Councillor Calvert stated that the report came to a different view compared to figures in the petition, with it stating that there would be very little difference annually.

Councillor Soloman stated that she would be supporting option 1b as it was the only one to ensure that Rushcliffe would not be absorbed by the City, as it should not be expected to underwrite the City's past mistakes, nor any authority that had failed its residents and mismanaged its finances. However, due to LGR this was the situation being faced and option 1b offered the best outcome for Rushcliffe, which should be the primary objective of every Councillor here. Option 1b would create two viable authorities, avoiding the risks and costs associated with more complex options, and had been appraised by independent, expert analysis. Councillor Soloman stated that any Councillor not supporting option 1b was failing to put Rushcliffe residents first, as it was largely rural and entirely incompatible with a city based unitary merger.

Councillor R Mallender agreed that local government was about local representation, which everyone tried to achieve. He noted the arguments raised that LGR would simplify things and improve efficiency; however, he felt that it would be better to give local authorities more effective control over their budgets and called for a sensible redistribution of wealth around the UK. In reality LGR would still consist of at least two tiers, but by removing the lowest tier, it would impact the lowest level of democracy, and Councillor Mallender also called for voting reform, as the first past the post system was no longer fit for purpose.

Councillor Gowland stated that she was in favour of having a single unitary authority; however, it would only work if all areas had strong town and parish councils. She was concerned that money had been spent investigating an unviable option, and whilst acknowledging that the City had financial problems, she felt that there were valid reasons for this, including the low Council Tax raised per household. Councillor Gowland also questioned how Council Tax was distributed around the County and stated that many Rushcliffe residents used services provided by the City. Under option 1b, West Bridgford, would be the only urban area, and she reminded Council that 40% of Rushcliffe's population lived there and that it was part of the City. She felt that given the current boundaries, it made sense for Rushcliffe, the City and County Councils to talk to each other, to address joint concerns and she also called for a

complete review of local government finances.

Councillor Grocock was concerned that the recommendations failed to take into account the reality of the situation across the nine local authorities, with all of them forming positions, and whilst there was some support from other authorities for option 1b, he did not believe that any other authority would support recommendation f). Having previously spoken in favour of boundary review, Central Government had indicated that it was more open to this; however, despite other authorities considering it, Rushcliffe was refusing to do so and he questioned how Rushcliffe could share affinity with areas in the northern most part of the County. Councillor Grocock felt that if the other councils favoured option 1e, the best approach would be for Rushcliffe to support a boundary review, which other councils would also support.

Councillor Gaunt was concerned that the recommendations were based on inaccurate data and questioned the inclusion of data from the petition as that was unreliable, signatures could not be verified and he felt that many questions had to be answered before that data could be accepted as valid. Councillor Gaunt advised that he could not accept recommendation c) as he did not believe that the three unitary option would ever pass Central Government's criteria regarding sustainability and work on this had already cost a great deal and would cost more if looked at further. Councillor Gaunt stated that by supporting recommendation f) Rushcliffe would be unable to negotiate going forward, even if circumstances changed.

Councillor Chewings felt that LGR was not fit for purpose, and whilst he did not agree that 1b was the best option, he stated that he would be voting for the recommendations. He was pleased that the Group's amendment had been accepted, as the original recommendations did not allow for fair, impartial engagement, and was concerned that the high scores in the report, paid for by the Council were based on the unverified petition. Councillor Chewings stated that if the recommendations were passed, he would hold the Council to account to ensure that a Borough-wide engagement survey would be undertaken.

Councillor J Wheeler felt that the money spent on the report for the Council's extra option had been well used, as the option had been independently appraised and shown to be viable, if circumstances changed. He reiterated that LGR had been imposed by Central Government and had to be funded by the tax payer and advised that other councils were spending far more money than Rushcliffe. He agreed that work on consultation was already taking place and felt that the City Council had caused its own problems by making poor political choices about its housing. In respect of the petition, he felt that it did echo the concerns raised by residents that he had spoken to, and he stated that a boundary review was not feasible as it would take too long.

Councillor Simms stated that he represented one of the most rural areas of the Borough, and no one that he had spoken to wanted to join the City and referred to the City's history of poor financial management

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Brennan referred to the energy, time, expertise and money being spent on this process, which she failed to see

would benefit anyone in Rushcliffe. The process had been imposed, with councils working together to try and come to an agreement, and even if everyone could agree that single tiers might be the most efficient option, the process had been rushed through and set up in a way which ensured politicisation. Councillor Brennan confirmed that 1b was already one of the recommendations agreed by all authorities and submitted to Government and was based on research by the commissioned experts. Councillor Brennan stated that the City had not put forward any option for new boundaries; however, Rushcliffe had worked hard to put an alternative option forward, which was being paused, whilst Rushcliffe looked at another option agreed by other authorities. This report was trying to narrow down options, finding the best one for Rushcliffe, whilst still engaging with all other authorities, and given the uncertainty ahead she felt that it was best to keep doors open. Councillor Brennan confirmed that there would be appropriate engagement going forward and she reiterated that 1b was the best option for Rushcliffe.

The Leader agreed with Councillor Brennan's comments and with other Councillors that LGR had been imposed with impossible timescales. He advised that not all councils had expressed views yet on the options and stated that given the tight timescales, a boundary review would not be feasible. In answer to the criticism that money had been spent on looking at an alternative option, the Leader felt that exploring other options was a positive thing to do. Council was reminded that discussion on a single unitary authority had taken place over 50 years ago, there was no easy solution and in order to progress the work the recommendations should be supported. The Leader stated that it would be difficult to engage with the public effectively, given the short timescales and that timing would be key, given that this was not the final decision. The Leader advised that all information had been shared with Councillors as soon as it had been made available and he requested that a recorded vote be taken, which was agreed by four Councillors.

In accordance with Standing Order Paragraph 4.23, a recorded vote was taken for this item as follows:

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

AGAINST: Councillors J Billin, S Calvert, J Chaplain, G Fletcher, M Gaunt P Gowland, C Grocock, L Plant, D Polenta and J Walker

ABSTENSIONS: Councillors R Mallender, S Mallender, Thomas and Way

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) the update be noted;
- b) continuing to work collaboratively with the other local authorities across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire with a view to developing a final unitary proposal for submission to Government by 28 November 2025

be endorsed;

- c) any further work focusing on the Council's own three unitary option where Rushcliffe is joined with Newark and Sherwood and Gedling Borough Councils be temporarily paused until clarity is obtained on options being taken forward as part of the all Nottinghamshire and Nottingham councils joint work;
- d) it be endorsed that if further support materialises for a three unitary option from other councils, this option will be pursued further to a potential 'final bid' stage and further partnership working explored with other councils;
- e) the development of option 1(b) One unitary council covering Broxtowe, Gedling and Nottingham City and one unitary council covering the remaining County including Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Mansfield, Newark and Sherwood and Rushcliffe be supported;
- f) the Council continues to ensure any proposal does not include any part of the current Rushcliffe Borough being absorbed into any new or expand city area;
- g) to ensure the final proposal is informed by the views of local communities, Rushcliffe Borough Council will actively engage Town and Parish Councils, local community organisations, and businesses as part of a broader Engagement Strategy. In addition, to provide Central Government with an accurate reflection of residents' views, the Council will undertake a Borough-wide Engagement Survey, to ensure the voices of Rushcliffe constituents are clearly heard; and
- h) it be recognised that after the reorganisation all councils in the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire area will be completely new organisations.

22 Notices of Motion

The following notice of motion was proposed by Councillor J Wheeler and seconded by Councillor Brown.

"This Council resolves to:

- Re-affirm this Council's support to for the Armed Forces Covenant by signing up again for the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Welcome Rushcliffe Borough Council being re-awarded of the Gold Award for the Armed Forces Covenant Employer Scheme.
- Place on record our thanks for all those who serve in the Armed Forces, their family and friends and all of our veterans.
- Encourage all employers in Rushcliffe to sign up to the Employer Recognition Scheme Award.

In moving the motion, Councillor Wheeler advised that a great deal had happened since the Armed Forces Covenant was first signed in 2015, including

the opening of the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC) at Stanford Hall, with its first class facilities making a huge difference to the treatment and recovery of so many. The Council's showcase events celebrated the armed forces, including Prom in the Park, which had won an award at the Boots and Berets awards in 2024. The Council was re-awarded the Employers Scheme Gold Award in 2024, the highest honour for organisations that signed the Armed Forces Covenant and a testament to the work of the Council, and Councillor Wheeler thanked the Team Manager Community Development in particular for her work on this. Councillor Wheeler stated that by re-signing the Covenant, the Council was reaffirming its commitment to the armed forces and veterans, to ensure that they knew how grateful Rushcliffe was for their service. He concluded by encouraging any member of the armed forces or veterans who needed support to contact the Council.

Councillor Brown seconded the motion and reserved the right to speak.

Councillor Fletcher stated that as an ex service member, he had a strong belief in supporting the armed forces and veterans and felt that the difficulties faced when returning to civilian life were not always obvious. Schemes such as the Armed Forces Covenant provided vital support and the Labour Group was passionate about supporting the armed forces and would be supporting the motion.

The Leader felt and hoped that everyone would support the motion and agreed that it was important that the Council reaffirmed its support for the armed forces, advising that Rushcliffe was previously home to several RAF stations and an Ordnance Depot. The Leader referred to the significance of the DMRC to the Borough, with the important work it did.

Councillor Gaunt referred to the current political situation in the country and the significant attacks on diversity and inclusion measures and felt that this was an excellent example of diversity inclusion in operation. He asked if the Council could engage more with local businesses to improve awareness of the scheme.

Councillor Birch thanked Councillor Fletcher for his service, advised that he had family members who were veterans and was aware of the challenges veterans faced daily. He felt that as a country, veterans should be given far more respect, thanked officers and confirmed that his Group would be supporting the motion.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Brown was delighted to reaffirm the Council's support for the armed forces and stated that Rushcliffe should be proud that it was chosen for the location of the DMRC, a first class rehabilitation centre, which he had had the pleasure of visiting, as well as Norton House in Stanford on Soar. Councillor Brown stated that during his Mayoral Year he had met three veterans seeking help, and with the help of officers, fellow Councillors and his Charity SSAFA, one had been found supervised accommodation, which highlighted why it was important to support the armed forces.

Councillor Wheeler thanked everyone for their comments and Councillor

Fletcher for his service. He confirmed that the Council already worked with businesses and would be happy to work with any other organisations that wished to sign up.

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

23 Questions from Councillors

a) Question from Councillor Gowland to Councillor Inglis.

“Can the Council explain how residents are made aware of reports of land contamination and related warnings from RBC Environmental Health? For instance, are the reports available in a way that will be found on land searches or public searches? Does the Planning Committee advise developers or utilities of any reports on land they are likely to work on?”

Councillor Inglis advised that similar to all district and borough councils, this Council had a public register of land that has been determined as contaminated under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which provided a risk based approach to the identification of land where contamination posed an unacceptable risk to health, and could be easily accessed via the Council's website. The Council also held a range of information on its GIS system covering historical land usage, which was used to respond to public enquiries, particularly in relation to land searches when purchasing a property. In addition to the standard land search information, some purchasers decided to undertake a Con29 enquiry, which contained a standard list of questions and some optional queries that related to land contamination, which the Council would provide a response to, based upon the information that it held. It was not the role of the Planning Committee to advise developers or utility companies of any contamination, and when determining a planning application, Environmental Health was a statutory consultee and would raise any appropriate known matters in relation to a site.

The Mayor asked Councillor Gowland if she had a supplementary question.

In talking about levels of acceptable risk, if a report referred to the change of use of land, in particular excavations, which required further investigation works, would that then be picked up by any of these reports?”

Councillor Inglis confirmed that Environmental Health, as the statutory nominee would pick that up on the planning application, and the stringent conditions in place would not be discharged until they were passed.

b) Question from Councillor Plant to Councillor Brennan.

“Please can the Cabinet Member responsible for economic development clarify if they are aware of any factors that may change the planned uses of the site at Ratcliffe on Soar Power Station site?”

Councillor Brennan stated that she was not aware of any factors and confirmed that the Council worked closely with all partners, meeting

recently to discuss plans and progress on the site. It was her understanding that all partners remained committed to bringing the site forward for green energy, innovative businesses and to address the motorway junction capacity.

The Mayor asked Councillor Plant if she had a supplementary question.

The power station was the largest commercial development site in Rushcliffe, and of great importance, particularly as part of the only inland Freeport. It was nearly two years since the Local Development Order was put in place and the issue had been discussed by the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group last night, and she asked when and how Councillors would be updated?

Councillor Brennan confirmed that the scrutiny group would continue to review this and she expected Cabinet to be considering an update and would confirm that date in writing.

c) Question from Councillor G Wheeler to the Leader, Councillor Clarke MBE

“Can the Leader tell me what engagement the Government undertook with this Council before starting its new dispersal model to house asylum seekers?”

The Leader advised that the Government’s Full Asylum Dispersal Model was first imposed in April 2023, with a number of revisions taking place since then, which had seen Contingency Hotel Accommodation close and the Government’s contractor SERCO increase its search for accommodation in the private rented sector. This was particularly concerning given the existing pressure in this sector in Rushcliffe, with it being such a popular place to live. The latest revision to the Policy had seen SERCO switch to a property specific approval process; however, it only allowed five days for the Council to respond with three options; to accept, limit with conditions or decline. When deciding which option to take, the Council had to have regard to the Home Office Dispersal Accommodation Adjudication Process. Whilst the document referred to risks to both asylum seekers and a community risk, the latter was very difficult for the Council to provide evidence for, since it was impossible to know who would be placed in the accommodation. This put the Council in a very difficult position to try and limit or decline such requests, which were being received in high numbers.

The Mayor asked Councillor Wheeler if he had a supplementary question.

Whilst it was right that the Council supported genuine asylum seekers, would the Leader agree that SERCO and the Government should ensure that proper housing was sourced in consultation with the community and that local councils were fully consulted and funded?

The Leader felt that it would be preferable to amend the Home Office document to give better consideration to the demographics of a local area, to enable a ‘good fit’ and agreed that there should be better consultation

and information to ensure that local councillors were aware of the circumstances of the Policy.

d) Question from Councillor Chewings to Councillor Upton

“In recent months, I have become increasingly concerned by a pattern of delayed responses, missed determination deadlines, and a lack of timely communication from the planning department, both to applicants and to Councillors seeking updates on behalf of residents. Can the Portfolio Holder confirm what steps are being taken to improve service standards within the Planning department, ensure that statutory and internal response times are met, and restore public and member confidence in the service?”

Councillor Upton advised that Planning Service was experiencing difficulties due to an unusually high number of applications and staff resources, which was recently communicated by email to Councillors, applicants and agents. It was due to proposed changes to the planning system, including a fees increase in April, which had resulted in a significant increase in pre-application and applications since December. Recently four team members had left, with another on extended leave, and there had also been several major, complex applications, which required significant staff resources. The Planning Manager had responded to the situation by filling vacant posts, and whilst Councillor Upton appreciated that delays were frustrating, he felt that the team had responded to the challenges and was working hard under pressure to maintain the service. If the number of applications returned to normal, as appeared to be happening, and the team became fully staffed, Councillor Upton was confident that performance would continue to improve.

The Mayor asked Councillor Chewings if he had a supplementary question.

Given the persistent and continual issues, would Councillor Upton commit to initiating a full review of Planning Services’ processes and performance, with the aim of ensuring that lessons were learned, service standards improved and that residents and elected members finally received a timely and meaningful response?

Councillor Upton felt that this would not be necessary as he believed that Planning Services had turned the corner, expressing confidence in the team that with the arrival of new staff, the issues would be resolved.

The meeting closed at 9.57 pm.

CHAIR