

MINUTES OF COUNCIL

11 DECEMBER 2024

PRESENT:

The Mayor (Councillor Ward), Councillors Barnett, Brown, Daly, C Edwards, S Edwards, Freeman, Garcia, Gillias, Harrington, Hassell, Henderson, Howling, D Keeling, J Keeling, Lawrence, Lewis, Livesey, Maoudis, McKenzie, Mistry, Moran, New, O'Rourke, Parker, Picker, Robinson, Roodhouse, Russell, Sandison, Sayani, Slinger, Srivastava, Thomas, Timms and Trimble.

50. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Bennett, Karadiar, Poole, Simpson-Vince and Willis.

51. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2024 were approved and signed by the Mayor.

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 7(c) of Part 1 – Rugby's Health Services Provision – Update report to note – Councillor Roodhouse (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being a Director of Healthwatch Warwickshire).

Item 6(a)(4) of Part 1 – Support of the Voluntary and Community Sector 2025/26 – Councillor Freeman (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being Chair of the Newbold on Avon Community Partnership and an Executive Member of the Brownsover Community Association).

Item 6(a)(5) of Part 1 – Food Waste – Councillor Timms (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being Chair of Warwickshire Waste Partnership and Warwickshire County Council Portfolio Holder responsible for waste).

Item 6(a)(4) of Part 1 – Support of the Voluntary and Community Sector 2025/26 – Councillor Harrington (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being a trustee of Benn Partnership).

53. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor, as part of his announcements, took time to focus on some local charities.

- Shine a Light - a local Childhood Cancer Support Charity based in Rugby Central and setup by Sam Schoolar who had leukaemia herself as a child. The charity provides counselling and follow on support to families. Kimberley Woods and the Mayor had the honour of attending their Christmas party recently at Draycote Hotel. The Mayor thanked all the local businesses who kindly supported the event and to Jo Billings who had organised everything to make it such a special afternoon for everyone. It was a humbling experience and really makes you appreciate such simple things in life and put things into perspective.
- Freddie's Wish – the Mayor had been honoured to welcome Charlotte Humber, her dad and all other trustees from Freddie's Wish into the Parlour and Council Chamber last week to mark the 10th anniversary of the sad passing of Charlotte's 13-month-old son Freddie following a road traffic accident. Freddie's Wish helps those who have lost a child of any age, offering support and care when needed. They help families access bereavement support services, engage in several great partnerships with key organisations and run regular paediatric first aid courses which are free to attend. On 7 December 2014, Freddie had left home with a half-eaten donut left at home and now every year on the day people are encouraged to take a selfie eating a donut and post it on social media with the hashtag 'donut day' and tag Freddie's Wish, to help raise awareness of the amazing charity and to, of course, think of Freddie.
- Naomi Issitt, Jamie Rees' mum from OurJay Foundation, had the honour of being invited by Her Royal Highness, the Princess of Wales, to the carol service at Westminster Abbey last Friday. Naomi made connections with Lorraine Kelly, Kate Garraway, Susanna Reid, Laura Tobin and several others and was able to tell them all about Jamie and his story. Many offered their support to the charity.
- The Mayor also spoke about Naomi's husband, Jem, who had been surprised that morning live on Radio 1 with their unsung hero of the year award. Jem does so much for the OurJay Foundation and the community and goes out of his way to help others because he genuinely cares and wants to make a difference. It was my pleasure to say a few words about Jem and just how kind and selfless he is.

The Mayor recently launched a Christmas card competition with all primary schools to invite designs for his mayoral Christmas card this year. Naomi Issitt and the Mayor judged the many entries and the Mayor was pleased to announce that Zachariah from Hillmorton Primary School and Senithi from Paddox Primary School were our winners. Their finished card designs were shown at the meeting.

The Mayor thanked all Council employees for their hard work and efforts in 2024. The Council had faced challenges throughout the year and staff always showed dedication to do the right thing for Rugby, which he had witnessed when he had visited each service area recently. The Mayor hoped all staff would have some restful time over the festive season.

54. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 10

A. Councillor Daly submitted the following question to the Partnerships and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder, Councillor O'Rourke:

"Earlier in 2024, Rugby Borough Council secured almost £200,000 of funding from the previous government's Swimming Pool Support Fund. Can the Portfolio Holder for Partnerships and Wellbeing please confirm whether this funding has been invested yet on much-needed solar panels, LED lighting and plant insulation to help Rugby's leisure centre function more efficiently and reduce its carbon footprint?"

Councillor O'Rourke, Partnerships and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder, provided the following response:

"The Council has worked with GLL as the contractor responsible for the delivery of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Centre.

Contractors have been appointed and installation is to be carried out in February 2025 in line with the grant conditions.

In particular, the delivery of the project will see the leisure centre and associated car park fitted with LED lighting, helping increase the efficiency of the site and support the Council's commitment to the Net Zero agenda."

B. Councillor Timms submitted the following question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Moran:

"With the 2024 Autumn Budget, change to Inheritance Tax relief announced by the Labour Government will introduce a 'Family Farm Tax'. The impact of this on farms and farmers here in Rugby will be highly detrimental, crippling the ability of farmers to pass on their farms to the next generation and raising serious concerns about future food security in the UK.

As a consequence, local farmers have expressed their concerns to Council, including a protest at Rugby Town Hall on Wednesday 20th November 2024. Following this demonstration can I ask whether the Council is engaging with local farmers, the local branch of the National Farmers Union and community representatives on what support this Council can offer them?

Please could I ask that the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to outline

the Council's dismay at this decision and calls on the Government to abandon the Family Farm Tax?"

Councillor Moran, Leader of the Council, provided the following response:

"While I understand the potential concerns raised by Councillor Timms, it would not be appropriate for me to write a letter expressing the Council's views on this matter given that the inheritance tax implications for the local farming sector is not an area covered by any existing Council function or working group. Therefore, no collective views on the matter have been established.

I would be pleased to meet with Councillor Timms to discuss her views in greater detail. We could then establish where the Council may be able to offer support for the Borough's agricultural sector beyond the various measures already outlined by the Secretary of State to drive growth in this key industry."

Councillor Timms then asked the Leader of the Council if farmers were a key part of the Council's Economic Strategy and ecological emergency. Councillor Moran stated that they were but invited Councillor Timms and the Conservative Group to submit proposals as part of the budget setting process to identify funding for farmers.

- C. Councillor Russell submitted the following question to the Partnerships and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder, Councillor O'Rourke:

"Almost a year ago, this Council approved over £80,000 of capital funding to make improvements at Brindley Road park, Lennon Close park and Hillmorton Recreation Ground. Can the portfolio holder for Partnerships and Wellbeing please update us on the progress of these works, how that funding is being spent and when Hillmorton residents will see improvements in their area?"

Councillor O'Rourke, Partnerships and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder, provided the following response:

"Following the update provided to Council in September, the Parks and Open Spaces team are working through the projects for park improvements and replacement programme including the allocated funding for Brindley Road, Lennon Place and Hillmorton Recreation Ground.

As stated in September, equipment replacement has taken place at Hillmorton Recreation Ground, specifically replacing the rope bridge and significant amount of Impact Absorbing Surfacing (IAS).

Brindley Road had identified surfacing improvement that can be carried out at a suitable time alongside a replacement piece of equipment identified to replace with a modern play equipment that delivers increased play value.

The next inspections are due to commence from 6 January and will support prioritisation of further works which will be carried out as per the requirements of the three sites. Updates will be provided for Ward Councillors to share with their residents respectively.”

Councillor Russell then asked the Partnerships and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder if she could confirm that the safety works undertaken at Hillmorton Recreation Ground were funded from the £80,000 budget and if this left enough remaining funds to carry out the remaining works. Councillor O'Rourke confirmed that the safety works were funded from the capital budget of £80,000 and remaining works would be within budget. She would confirm this in writing to Councillor Russell.

- D.** Councillor Picker submitted the following question to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Moran:

At Full Council on September 25th 2024, the Leader of the Council stated that:

“We have calculated approximately 1,100 pensioners in the borough miss out on the new qualification by around £100 a month. So working with partners across the board, we're engaging on that. We're rolling up our sleeves to understand how we can help those in that category.

And for that purpose we're including a commitment of £250,000 in this budget coming forward now to address that inequality in Rugby because it's not just old age pensioners. That's one element of society that are currently facing hardship. There's much more work to do so we've got to look at food and energy poverty across different measures.”

Could the Leader of the Council update members on how this work is progressing and specifically in respect of that part of the proposed budget allocation in respect of vulnerable residents, who have this year missed out on Winter Fuel payments thanks to the Government's changes, have been supported?”

Councillor Moran, Leader of the Council, provided the following response:

“I'd like to thank Councillor Picker for this question and the opportunity to ensure that this important matter remains high on the Council's agenda. As I stated during the debate on 25th September, Pension Credit and the Winter Fuel allowance is just one aspect of this issue and the broader challenges relating to matters such as food and energy poverty must not be overlooked. Since the notice of motion was debated by Council, three

workstreams have been progressed to support residents who may need additional support this winter.

- The first workstream has focussed on the Council's work with partners across the borough to promote take up of Pension Credit and other support and has resulted in partners sharing consistent messaging through their individual communications channels, including social media and through face-to-face and telephone engagement.

The Council has written to those individual households that our data suggests should be entitled to Pension Credit and Winter Fuel Allowance but may not be claiming it. During the debate on 25th September, I stated that this group was the priority and that is the reason why our initial work focussed so heavily on them.

During the debate, I also stated that officers had calculated that approximately 1,100 households may narrowly miss out on the new qualification. To support these households, the council has issued a further 952 letters, including to the 165 households who data suggests are between £5 - £30 over the Pension Credit thresholds, to advise them of the alternative support which is available to them.

- The second workstream has sought to engage with our partners to ensure a joined-up approach to supporting vulnerable residents and targeting our collective interventions. This has primarily focussed on the Council's work with advice providers and social care teams to ensure that there is sufficient capacity within advice services to provide support those households who need it. On this, the message remains clear - where there are capacity challenges, funds are available and the Council will intervene to support those partner organisations, as outlined in my response on 25 September.
- The third workstream has sought to utilise customer insight data and analytics to provide additional support to vulnerable residents. This has involved working with an external partner to combine technology, data and analysis to understand the impacts of policy, engage those who are affected and track the impact of interventions. This supports the issue which I raised during the debate on 25th September – that the broader issues of hardship faced by some of our residents must be considered alongside the specific challenges of Winter Fuel Payments.

This has demonstrated that some 9,000 households are not claiming all of the support which they are eligible for, equating to a potential £23million of underclaims, across the suite of benefits. Whilst there are some technical queries which need to be resolved before procurement can progress, I am sure you will agree that this is certainly an investment which could make a long-lasting impact on a variety of inequalities seen locally.

Lastly, with regard to the £250,000 figure quoted, I can confirm this is being worked through the current budgetary process for which further detail will be provided at the usual time in the New Year.

I hope that this response provides Councillor Picker and all Members with the assurance that this Council will continue to support all vulnerable residents in the manner which I set out during the previous debate on this important matter. Indeed, I continue to be proud that this Council is taking a proactive approach to the wider issue of addressing inequality in our community.

Councillors will also note that the supply and confidence agreement reached by the Labour and Liberal Democrat Groups highlighted a shared commitment to support the building of a Better, Fairer, Greener, Borough that promotes a “Wellbeing Economy” and reduces inequalities whilst protecting the vulnerable. This commitment has been further strengthened in the Council’s recently adopted Corporate Strategy which provides greater detail on our plans to deliver a Fairer Rugby.”

Councillor Picker then asked the Leader of the Council if he could provide reassurance that follow up letters would be sent to the 952 residents who had already been contacted regarding Pension Credit. Councillor Moran confirmed that this would happen.

55. REPORT OF CABINET – 2 DECEMBER 2024

RESOLVED THAT – the report of Cabinet be confirmed and adopted.

56. REPORT OF LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE – 5 NOVEMBER 2024

RESOLVED THAT – the report of Licensing and Safety Committee be confirmed and adopted.

57. REPORT OF AUDIT AND ETHICS COMMITTEE – 25 NOVEMBER 2024

Councillor Mistry proposed and Councillor O’Rourke seconded the following amendment to the motion (amendment in italics):

“The Committee recommends the following to Council:

- (1) The adoption of the revised Code of Conduct (following the LGA Model Code) as set out in Appendix 2 of this report;
- (2) the adoption of the revised complaints handling process, and consequential constitutional amendments as set out in Appendix 3;
- (3) the Constitution of the Council be amended to incorporate the changes set out in Appendix 2 and 3 and the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make such typographical amendments as required to facilitate this; and

- (4) *the Member Champion for Standards role profile be adopted and that the Council grant delegated authority to the Chief Officer for Legal and Governance to appoint a Member(s) to this role. It be recommended that the Member Champions are not members of the Executive or the Audit and Ethics Committee.*

The Mayor put the amendment to the vote and declared it carried. The Mayor then put the substantive motion to the vote and declared it carried.

RESOLVED THAT – the recommendation of Audit and Ethics Committee, as amended, be confirmed and adopted.

58. REPORTS OF OFFICERS

(a) Expediting the stock condition survey

Council considered the report of the Chief Officer – Communities and Homes (Part 1 – agenda item 7(a)) concerning proposals to expedite the Council's housing stock condition survey.

RESOLVED THAT –

- (1) the remainder of the stock condition survey works be carried out to achieve a comprehensive understanding of stock condition by 31 March 2025;
- (2) a supplementary budget of £135,000 from Housing Revenue Account reserves be established for this;
- (3) provision be made at Housing Revenue Account budget setting for 2026/27 onwards for a rolling programme of 20% stock condition surveys annually to ensure that data is updated at regular intervals; and
- (4) the approach to collecting PC data be reviewed when the new methodology has been confirmed.

(b) Scrutiny review

Council considered the report of the Chief Officer – Legal and Governance (Part 1 – agenda item 7(b)) concerning proposed recommendations and action plan following the review of the Council's scrutiny function by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.

RESOLVED THAT –

- (1) the Action Plan relating to the implementation of the CFGS Review, as attached at Appendix 1, be approved; and
- (2) delegated authority be given to the Chief Officer - Legal and Governance to make such amendments as necessary in consultation with the Chair of Scrutiny Committee.

(c) Rugby's Health Services Provision – update report to note

Council considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive (Part 1 – agenda item 7(c)) concerning an update on Rugby's health service provision.

RESOLVED THAT – the update report on engagement and discussion with regards to the ongoing health service provision for Rugby residents be noted.

59. NOTICES OF MOTION PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 11

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, there were no motion on notice to be considered.

MAYOR