

# MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF COUNCIL

21 JULY 2020

## PRESENT:

The Mayor (Councillor Lewis), Councillors Mrs Allanach, Mrs A'Barrow, Bearne, Brader, Mrs Bragg, Brown, Butlin, Cade, Cranham, Douglas, Miss Dumbleton, Eccleson, Ellis, Mrs Garcia, Gillias, Leigh Hunt, Keeling, Miss Lawrence, Lowe, McQueen, Mahoney, Mistry, Mrs New, Mrs O'Rourke, Mrs Parker, Picker, Poole, Ms Robbins, Mrs Roberts, Roberts, Roodhouse, Mrs Roodhouse, Sandison, Shera, Mrs Simpson-Vince, Srivastava, Stokes and Mrs Timms.

## 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Mrs Brown, Mrs Crane and Pacey-Day.

## 2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 25 February 2020 were approved.

## 3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 6(a) of Part 1 – Transfer of land ownership, Land at Long Furlong, Rugby – Councillors Mrs Allanach, Miss Dumbleton and Lewis (non-pecuniary interests as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being Ward Councillors).

Item 6(a) of Part 1 – Transfer of land ownership, Land at Long Furlong, Rugby – Councillor Mrs Simpson-Vince (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being a trustee of Rugby Free Secondary School).

Item 8(e) of Part 1 – Commissioning a Joint Review into Local Government Structures in Warwickshire – Councillors Butlin, Roberts, Mrs O'Rourke, Roodhouse, Mrs Simpson-Vince and Mrs Timms (non-pecuniary interests as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being Warwickshire County Councillors).

## 4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor informed the wider audience that, due to the coronavirus pandemic, the usual electoral processes had not taken place and, with the agreement of the Deputy Mayor and the Deputy Mayor-elect, together with members of the Council, he had agreed to continue in the role until May 2021.

The Mayor reflected on the last four months which had been unusual and stressful in various ways for everyone. Officers of the council and the whole workforce had risen to the many challenges that they had had to face. The Mayor commended them for ably and successfully dealing with those challenges. He added his thanks

to those already expressed by the Leader of the Council, opposition Group Leaders and the Executive Directors. The community had also adapted to a new way of life that was gradually changing with many community organisations and charities having been impacted. The Council and others had stepped in to ensure that vital services were maintained.

The Mayor drew attention to the recent increase in confirmed cases of coronavirus within the Borough. While the number of cases remained low, the recent increase was a reminder that the coronavirus had not gone away and the community as a whole must remain vigilant.

Residents were encouraged to continue to take simple steps to reduce the likelihood of transmission of the disease by washing their hands frequently and for at least twenty seconds, using hand sanitiser when out and about, keeping 2 metres apart whenever possible, and wearing face coverings in enclosed spaces. By taking these basic precautions together we will be doing what is right for Rugby.

## **5. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 10**

### **(a) Councillor Brader asked the Leader of the Council (in the absence of the Communities and Homes Portfolio Holder, Councillor Mrs Crane):**

“Would the portfolio holder for Communities and Homes update the council on the effect the coronavirus crisis has had on the number of council tenants in rent arrears and give assurance that tenants who have fallen behind on rent due to the crisis will not face losing their homes when the government’s ban on evictions comes to an end on August 23<sup>rd</sup>?”

### **Councillor Lowe (in the absence of Mrs Crane, Communities and Homes Portfolio Holder), provided the following response:**

“The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Homes is able to give assurance to those tenants in arrears who have fallen behind with their rent due to the crisis that they will not face losing their homes when the government’s ban on evictions come to an end and assures members that officers will work with those tenants in arrears by providing the tenants with the necessary support, advice and guidance until the rent arrears are cleared.

Only as a last resort do we ever seek to evict tenants from their homes. It is in the Council’s interest not to evict tenants unless absolutely necessary and where we have exhausted all other options, not only because those individuals/families are likely to present themselves as Homeless to our Community Support and Advice Team, who are already dealing with an unprecedented number of homeless cases due to the pandemic and who are working tirelessly to assist our most vulnerable, but also because of the added expense incurred when preparing properties for reletting which creates a further loss of income.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the Housing Services Team contacted all council tenants as part of a safe and well exercise. To date, 2% (79) tenants have told us that the pandemic has affected them financially and we are working with those tenants to ensure that they are able to access the means available to them so that they can pay their rent and entering into affordable payment arrangements with them where there are arrears. We would encourage any tenant facing financial hardship because of Covid-19 to contact the Housing Services Team as early as possible to access available support and advice.

The Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick MP made clear in the government's announcement in March "at the end of the suspension period, landlords and tenants will be expected to work together to establish an affordable repayment plan, taking into account tenants' individual circumstances". It also announced that it would be working with the courts to widen the 'pre-action protocol' on possession proceedings, landlords already have to satisfy the court that they conducted themselves and followed the steps set out within the protocol before commencing with proceedings. The Housing Sector welcomed the government's announcement and officers are very mindful of these difficult times, their main goal is to work collaboratively with tenants and to ensure that tenants are getting the support that they need to pay their rent.

It is also important for me to emphasise, it is inevitable that there will always be those tenants who despite our best efforts to work with and engage with them, will refuse to adhere to their terms and conditions of their tenancy, this could be a refusal to pay their rent or because of persistent and unacceptable anti-social behaviour which in turn has a negative impact not only on neighbours but the wider community and where there is no alternative or solution but to carry out an eviction.

Tenancy Sustainment Officers have during the crisis continued to contact tenants facing court action regardless of the reason why, to encourage those tenants to work with them to help them sustain and keep their tenancies. No officer wants to see anyone lose their home because of experiencing financial hardship since the outbreak of COVID-19. Eviction is and will always be the last resort for officers after all other options and alternatives have been explored."

Councillor Brader asked if the number of people in rent arrears by virtue of the impact of the pandemic be provided to him. The Leader of the Council undertook to ensure that this data was sent to Councillor Brader.

**(b) Councillor Ellis asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Lowe:**

"Recently, Ashlawn School opened a Food Bank to support pupils living in poverty. Is the Leader of the Council aware of an increase in child poverty locally, and what does he think the Borough Council should be doing to combat this where it exists in the Borough?"

**Councillor Lowe, Leader of the Council, provided the following response:**

"The efforts of Ashlawn School to assist more financially vulnerable households for the furlough period, with a temporary Foodbank are welcomed. We understand that they expect to close in September 2020, at the start of the new school year.

In 2018/19, 13% of children under 16 in Rugby were from relative low-income families. This was set against an average of 18% for Great Britain (source: DWP and HMRC data, updated 20 June 2020).

Officers have been working as part of the Warwickshire Financial Inclusion Partnership, made up of representatives from the districts, boroughs, country council and the voluntary and community sector to address issues of financial hardship. In 2019, this resulted in the Warwickshire Welfare Rights Advice Service (WWRAS) being contracted to undertake a project across the County specifically looking to increase the take-up of free school meals (FSMs)

WWRAS worked with nine schools within the Borough, receiving a total of 112 referrals. Of these, 70 families are now receiving FSMs. In addition, welfare benefit checks also identified benefit gains of £124,109 for those families.

Schools also benefit by receiving an additional pupil premium for each child in receipt of FSMs, with additional pupil premiums of £87,010 per annum having been identified. As the Pupil Premium is awarded for six years this will result in an additional £522,060 being available to local schools.

Although the funding provided by Warwickshire County Council has ended, this project secured a return on investment of £32 for every £1 of investment and represents outstanding value for money.

The Communities and Homes Service will be working with WWRAS over the Summer to investigate how we may be able to support them to continue this activity which benefits, the children through the provision of healthy meals, the schools through the increased pupil premium, the families through the identification of additional benefits and also supports the local economy of Rugby, where increased income may be spent on goods and services.

Under normal circumstances, schools do not provide free school meals to eligible children who are not in school. But during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, the Government expects schools to continue supporting children eligible for benefits-related free school meals who are at home during term time, and in accordance with their circumstances. There is also a Summer Food Fund which will enable children who are eligible for benefit related free school meals to claim vouchers for the 6 weeks holiday. Schools were required to claim vouchers for the 6-week holiday period at least one week ahead of the end of the summer term.

It should be noted that FSMs are different to the provision of Universal Free School Meals that are provided to all in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 classes, these do not continue if the child is not in school and therefore it is important that in these cases parents apply for FSMs to ensure that they still receive support if eligible.

The Council also works closely with the more financially vulnerable in terms of advice and support – primarily through the CAST Team which deals with housing advice, homelessness, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction. The team are also able to provide additional financial support through the provision of discretionary awards which are intended to provide additional short-term financial support and help with the prevention of homelessness. They also provide information on financial issues, which is published on the Council's website.

Preventing Homelessness Improving Lives, known as p.h.i.l. is Warwickshire's homelessness early intervention project. It is funded by central government and hosted by Rugby Borough Council. The focus of the project is early intervention, homelessness prevention and maximising wellbeing. It has prevented 235 individuals and families becoming homeless. It is known through follow-up phone calls that 83% of these preventions were sustained for at least 6 months and 85% of the preventions were able to stay in their own home. It has prevented homelessness for 89 families and individuals in Rugby. In addition, £433,000 of supplementary household income was achieved for Warwickshire residents through income maximisation work. This was £143,000 for Rugby residents.

The Housing Service provides tenancy support to those living in our Council housing stock. This is underpinned by a philosophy of ensuring tenancy sustainment, where possible. In 2018/19, as a last resort, there were 8 evictions, 6 of which were for rent arrears.

The continued provision of new affordable and quality housing, through the Planning system, the Council and Registered Providers helps to ensure that the people that need to access to affordable homes can do so.

The substantial regeneration projects we have in progress at Biart Place and Rounds Gardens are also evidence of our commitment to providing new high-quality homes, which will be more affordable to heat, than the current concrete constructed homes. The new statement of intent for Rugby agreed by Cabinet in June 2020 will help more vulnerable households to access measures to help them more affordably heat their home through Eco Flex, part of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO).

Our close work with the voluntary and community sector is also part of the wider picture, with a new 2-year contract in place with the CAB from April 2020. During 2018/2019, specific to Rugby they dealt with 4,221 clients of which 3,408 were new cases to the bureau. These clients generated 14,581 issues across their main enquiry areas. Out of the resulting 3,044 outcomes, 870 resulted in monetary gain for Rugby residents of £2,110,000 (aggregated).

The top three areas with residents raising the most issues were:

- Benn Ward
- New Bilton
- Newbold and Brownsover

These coincide with areas where there are Community Associations in receipt of Service Level Agreement funding from the Council, an indication that resource is being directed to where it is most needed.

New for this year is also the funding of an additional service level agreement for Long Lawford Community Association, utilising proceeds received by the Council from the Rugby Lotto. In addition, SLA's with New Bilton, Overslade, Brownsover, Newbold and the Benn Partnership are indicative of our support to communities to help themselves.

Whilst this does not provide commentary on all that we are doing to help our more financially vulnerable households, it does give a taste of activities in progress and being led by the Head of Communities and Homes, but more importantly how joined up this work is. It is not something that the Council alone can remedy, we are reliant on a whole range of partners to work together to deliver best outcomes for Rugby and by putting our customers first."

Councillor Ellis then asked the Leader of the Council if he would be willing to contact Ashlawn School to ascertain if any support could be provided by this Council. The Leader of the Council was happy to speak to representatives of the school.

## **6. REPORT OF CABINET – 1 JUNE 2020**

**RESOLVED THAT** - the report be confirmed and adopted.

## **7. REPORT OF CABINET – 6 JULY 2020**

**RESOLVED THAT** - the report be confirmed and adopted.

**8. ANNUAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REPORT 2019/20 – REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

Council considered the report of Overview and Scrutiny (Part 1 – agenda item 7) concerning their annual report for 2019/20.

**RESOLVED THAT** – the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2019/20 be approved for publication.

**9. REPORTS OF OFFICERS**

**(a) Urgent Decisions under Emergency Powers – May and June 2020**

Council considered the report of the Executive Director (Part 1 – agenda item 8(a)) concerning the urgent decisions taken under emergency powers due to the coronavirus pandemic during May and June 2020.

**RESOLVED THAT** – the report be noted.

**(b) Localism Act – Pay Policy Statement**

Council considered the report of the Executive Director (Part 1 – agenda item 8(b)) concerning the Council's annual pay policy statement.

**RESOLVED THAT** - the new Pay Policy Statement be adopted with immediate effect.

**(c) Membership of Planning Committee 2020/21 – Proposed change**

Council considered the report of the Executive Director (Part 1 – agenda item 8(c)) concerning a proposed change to the membership of Planning Committee for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.

**RESOLVED THAT** - Councillor Bearne be replaced by Councillor Cranham as a member of Planning Committee for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.

**(d) Appointments to Outside Bodies – by virtue of office and miscellaneous appointments**

Council considered the report of the Executive Director (Part 1 – agenda item 8(d)) concerning appointments to outside bodies by virtue of appointment and miscellaneous appointments.

**RESOLVED THAT** -

(1) a new representative be appointed to Rugby Welfare Charities until 21 May 2023, details to be submitted to Democratic Services as soon as possible;

(2) Councillors Mrs Parker and Cade be reappointed to Bilton Poor's Land and other Charities until 21 May 2024; and

(3) Mr W Sewell be reappointed to the Trustees of Hillmorton Charities until 21 May 2024.

## **(e) Commissioning of a Joint Review into Local Government Structures in Warwickshire**

Council considered the report of the Executive Director (Part 1 – agenda item 8(e)) concerning the proposed commissioning of a joint review with all other local authorities in Warwickshire with regard to local government structures for the county.

### **RESOLVED THAT -**

(1) a review of local government across the Warwickshire county area, ideally jointly-commissioned by the five Warwickshire district and borough councils and Warwickshire County Council as equal partners, in consultation with WALC, be approved;

(2) the Leader of the Council be Rugby Borough Council's nominee on a Warwickshire multi-Council working party to steer the review;

(3) the final brief for the review be delegated to the Executive Director in consultation with Group Leaders with a view to the report being procured as a matter of urgency; and

(4) the budget for the review (indicatively in the region of £25k) be approved to be funded from General Fund balances in 2020/21 (the actual budget required will depend upon the tender process and the number of Warwickshire councils agreeing to take part in the jointly-commissioned review).

## **10. NOTICES OF MOTION PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 11**

In accordance with the Council's Constitution, no motions on notice had been received for consideration.

## **11. CORRESPONDENCE**

There was no correspondence.

## **12. COMMON SEAL**

It was moved by the Mayor, seconded by the Deputy Mayor and

**RESOLVED THAT** - the Common Seal be affixed to the various orders, deeds and documents to be made or entered into for carrying into effect the several decisions, matters and things approved by the Council and more particularly set out in the Panels and Committees reports adopted at this meeting.

**13. MOTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC UNDER SECTION 100(A)(4) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**RESOLVED THAT** - under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of information as defined in paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

**14. PRIVATE REPORT OF CABINET – 6 JULY 2020**

**RESOLVED THAT** - the report be confirmed and adopted.

**15. PRIVATE REPORT OF OFFICERS**

**(a) Reorganising to prepare for recovery**

Council considered the report of the Executive Director (Part 2 – agenda item 2(a) concerning an initial report with regard to the reorganisation of the Council to prepare for recovery.

**RESOLVED THAT -**

(1) the previous emergency decisions as detailed within Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 of the report be ratified; and

(2) the appointment as verbally updated at Full Council to the post of Deputy Executive Director be approved.

**16. VOTE OF THANKS TO ADAM NORBURN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

The Mayor informed Members that this was Adam Norburn's last Council meeting as Executive Director of the Council, as he retired from the Council at the end of this month.

**RESOLVED THAT** – the Council places on record its thanks to Adam Norburn, Executive Director, for his hard work and commitment during his employment at Rugby Borough Council.

**MAYOR**