

# MINUTES OF COUNCIL

13 DECEMBER 2023

## PRESENT:

The Mayor (Councillor Mrs O'Rourke), Councillors Mrs A'Barrow, Barnett, Mrs Brown, Daly, Douglas, Miss Dumbleton, Edwards, Mrs Garcia, Gillias, Harrington, Mrs Hassell, Karadiar, D Keeling, J Keeling, Lawrence, Lewis, Ms Livesey, Mrs Maoudis, Mrs McKenzie, Mistry, Moran, Mrs New, Mrs Parker, Picker, Rabin, Ms Robbins, Roodhouse, Mrs Roodhouse, Russell, Sandison, Mrs Sayani, Slinger, Srivastava, Mrs Timms, Ward, Ms Watson-Merret and Willis.

## 62. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Poole and Mrs Robinson.

## 63. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2023 were approved and signed by the Mayor.

## 64. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 6(a)(3) – Football Pitch Improvement Programme – Councillor Ward (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being Chair of Long Lawford Football Club).

Item 6(a)(6) – Support for Voluntary and Community Sector 2024/25 - Councillors Ward and Willis (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being a member of Long Lawford Community Association).

Item 6(a)(6) – Support for Voluntary and Community Sector 2024/25 - Councillors Miss Dumbleton and Ms Robbins (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being members of Overslade Community Association).

Item 6(a)(6) – Support for Voluntary and Community Sector 2024/25 - Councillor Mrs Brown (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being Chair of Overslade Community Association).

Item 6(a)(6) – Support for Voluntary and Community Sector 2024/25 - Councillor Mrs Timms (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being Chair of Long Lawford Community Association).

Item 6(a)(6) – Support for Voluntary and Community Sector 2024/25 - Councillor Rabin (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being a member of Brownsover Community Association and as a director of a community interests company).

Item 6(a)(7) – Housing Stock Condition Survey - Councillor Douglas (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of his employment).

Item 7(b) – Appointments to Outside Bodies – Miscellaneous Appointments – Councillor J Roodhouse (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being a trustee of the Almshouses and named in the report).

Item 7(b) – Improvements to Lawrence Sheriff Almshouses – Councillor Mrs Roodhouse (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being the Chair of Trustees of the Almshouses and being named in the report).

Councillors Roodhouse and Mrs Roodhouse left the meeting during the item in which they had declared an interest and took no part in the voting and discussion thereon.

## **65. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor thanked Councillor Mistry and community organisations who organised the Diwali celebrations in the town last month. The event was very successful and well attended.

The second lantern parade in the town was held last weekend and was also a great success. The Mayor thanked all community organisations, Rugby Forst and local businesses for their support to ensure the event went so well.

The Mayor recently attended the Rugby Male Voice Choir Christmas Concert at St George's Church. Proceeds of the concert were donated to her charity, Rugby Myton Hospice. The Mayor thanked the Male Voice Choir for their generous donation.

The Mayor thanked Horts Estate Agents for co-ordinating a donation of biscuits to Rugby Myton Hospice. This small gesture makes such a huge difference to those in care at the hospice and to their families when visiting loved ones.

Chief Officers, Mike Connell and Tom Kittendorf, did their bungee jump last weekend in aid of Myton Hospice and smashed their target of £500. The Mayor thanked them both for taking the plunge. Donations could still be made via the hyperlink sent to Members recently.

The Deputy Mayor and Mayoral and Civic Officer's skydive had been postponed for a second time. This was now due to take place on New Year's Eve.

Representatives of the Women's Socialist Network visited the Parlour recently and brought food donations to the Rugby Foodbank. Two shopping trolleys were filled and delivered to the Foodbank. The Mayor thanked the Network for their efforts.

**66. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 10**

**Councillor Sandison asked the Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder, Councillor Daly:**

“Whilst we appreciate the activities of Rugby Round Table and its fund raising events, we are receiving increasing numbers of complaints regarding the condition of Whinfield Recreation Ground is left in and the on street congestion it generates.

Can the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Wellbeing who has recently met with officers to discuss this matter advise the Council of the outcome of their deliberations?”

**Councillor Daly, Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder, provide the following response:**

“Following a meeting with officers, the Rugby Roundtable have been invited to attend the next Safety Advisory Group meeting on 20 December to discuss this year's fireworks event held at Whinfield Recreation Ground.

The meeting will discuss the group's event management plan, lessons learnt and open discussions about next steps.

I am happy to feedback to the Councillor following the meeting.”

Councillor Sandison then asked if the Portfolio Holder would offer an apology to all those affected by the damage to the recreation ground. Councillor Daly reiterated that it was unacceptable for a community to be affected by such an event and apologised to the residents of Eastlands Ward and other residents who used the recreation ground.

**Councillor Alison Livesey to ask the Communities, Home, Digital and Communication Portfolio Holder, Councillor Tim Willis:**

“On how many occasions this year has the Council been unable to collect rent via direct debit and what steps are being taken to prevent it from happening in the future?”

**Councillor Willis, Communities, Home, Digital and Communication Portfolio Holder, provided the following response:**

“Regrettably, there were initial configuration issues following the implementation of our new Housing Management system which went live in November 2022. This had a partial impact on 57 direct debit collections between 2nd January and 27th July 2023. None of these collections failed in their entirety and I must reiterate that only some payments were impacted within each run.

This issue was escalated to our IT supplier and has now been resolved. There is no expectation that these issues will be repeated, and I am happy to advise that the 37 direct debit runs that have taken place since 27 July have been without issue.

An extremely rare and unrelated issue arose with the collection of direct debits in late November 2023, whereby they were delayed by 2 days. Again, this issue has been resolved following officers’ careful analysis as to what went wrong, resulting in procedures having been reviewed to prevent this from happening again.”

**Councillor Alison Livesey to ask the Communities, Home, Digital and Communication Portfolio Holder, Councillor Tim Willis:**

"When will the Financial Inclusion Strategy, due for publication in December 2022, be published?"

**Councillor Willis, Communities, Home, Digital and Communication Portfolio Holder, provided the following response:**

“A standalone financial inclusion strategy has not been published as was set out in the Housing Strategy, adopted in March 2022. Global events have had a substantial impact on the wider economic outlook and our work has focussed on supporting communities with information, signposting and advice relating to matters such as the cost-of-living.

More broadly, banks, other financial institutions and utilities companies have rapidly continued to enhance their financial inclusion offers to households. These organisations also have a far wider audience reach than the council.

The Council has progressed multiple thematic works that all add up to more broadly securing improved financial outcomes for residents of the borough. Comprehensive cost of living help for households and businesses is available via the Councils web pages <https://www.rugby.gov.uk/w/help-for-households-and-businesses> This help includes:

- Debt management and money advice including mortgage / rent arrears and guidance on budgeting

- Utilities advice including energy, water, phone and broadband packages
- Services offered by the Rugby Credit Union –including affordable loans, online banking services and flexible savings accounts
- Support in relation to food, through the Rugby Foodbank and Free School Meals
- Support with home furnishing

In January 2023, a cross party scrutiny subgroup reported substantial assurance in respect of the cost-of-living work being delivered by the Council, underpinned by a robust action plan. Targeted interventions arising from this work have included:

- Our continued support of the local VCS through grants including the Rugby Foodbank, the New Bilton Community Association, The Benn Partnership, Newbold Community Association, Overslade Community Association, Brownsover Community Association and Long Lawford Community Association. The Grant Agreements considered by Cabinet on 4 December 2023 set out the objectives for this funding, including specifically tackling financial exclusion.
- Continuation of the Council's contract with CAB to provide financial advice and income maximisation support to residents.
- Supporting 86 vulnerable households to access highly energy efficient white goods via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to help them to manage utility costs.
- Ongoing work to increase access to high quality and energy efficient affordable homes through the regeneration of Biart Place – the groundbreaking for this new 100 home development will take place this week
- Successfully securing grant funding via the Local Authority Housing delivery fund (LADS) which resulted in the installation of energy efficiency measures into 39 homes. Act on Energy complemented this project by offering residents energy advice.
- Delivering energy performance improvements to 112 solid wall properties in Rokeby and Long Lawford utilising £1.1m of Council funding match funded by a government grant of £1.1m.

Moving forward, the Area Action work, agreed as part of the Corporate Strategy Delivery Plan (CSDP), seeks to ensure a hyper- local approach to levelling up and in turn address the causes of multiple disadvantage in targeted areas.

As agreed in the CSDP, this work will begin with pilot projects in the Benn and New Bilton Wards. The Benn and New Bilton Wards have been chosen as they overlap with one of the Borough's Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) which is in the national top 20% most deprived and thus statistically experiences the greatest disadvantage. There are two LSOAs in Rugby in the top 20% most deprived, the other is Brownsover North & Lakeland South and whilst some of the current work extends to this location, the intention is to take learning from these pilot Area Action projects and apply it to other locations around the Borough as the overall project progresses.

Area Action seeks to implement a holistic approach to tackling disadvantage, recognising that in many cases issues such as health inequality, financial exclusion, digital exclusion and other social factors can be interconnected. This work will progress with the engagement of ward councillors and a further report to Cabinet in February 2024.

Recognising that there is not a standalone Financial inclusion Strategy, as was the original intention nearly two years ago and that much has changed since this original commitment, I would be pleased to provide you with a full update on the work in progress and completed which all contributes to the broader financial well-being of our residents."

Councillor Ms Livesey then asked the Portfolio Holder if he could confirm at which meeting it was agreed to not proceed with a Financial Inclusion Strategy and who attended the meeting. Councillor Willis agreed to provide a written response to Councillor Ms Livesey.

**Councillor Michael Moran to ask the Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder, Councillor Daly:**

"Why was the Rugby Parkrun cancelled this year with little or no notice, why has the Park Run not been reinstated after a number of weeks' absence, when will it be reinstated and what lessons are being learnt to ensure this valuable community event does not suffer a similar fate next year?"

**Councillor Daly, Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder, provided the following response:**

"The recreation ground was inspected as part of usual practice following a large-scale community event delivered on the Council open space. Unfortunately, following the inspection, the ground surfaces including both grass and footpaths, were deemed to be unsafe and in need of repair before further use.

The Rugby Parkrun organisers were informed at the earliest opportunity to request cancelling the next scheduled event on the forthcoming weekend. They then communicated to their members via social media.

Poor weather and scheduled repairs being delayed has meant further cancellation to the weekly event. Officers remain in contact with the organisers who are currently considering options for adapting the route and subsequently updating their risk assessments for approval with Parkrun to avoid undue damage to the grass football pitches specifically.

We are liaising with organisers to ensure this valuable event returns as soon as possible with expectation for it to restart on 23 December with an extra event for New Year's Day being considered."

Councillor Moran asked if there could be better dialogue with Rugby Parkrun organisers. Councillor Daly apologised to all those affected by the cancellation of the recent Parkruns.

## **67. REPORT OF CABINET – 4 DECEMBER 2023**

Council considered the report of Cabinet dated 4 December (Part 1 – agenda item 6(a)).

With regard to item 6(a)(7) relating to the Housing Condition Stock Survey, Councillor Mrs Brown moved and Councillor Harrington seconded the following amendment (in italics):

- (1) The proposed phase 1 (as outlined in section 3.2 of the report) stock condition survey be approved;
- (2) a supplementary budget of £283,000 from Housing Revenue Account reserves be established for phase 1 of the stock condition survey;
- (3) provision be made at Housing Revenue Account budget setting for 2024/25 onwards for a rolling programme of 20% stock condition surveys and 350 Energy Performance Certificates per annum, or in compliance with the prevailing requirements of the Regulator for social housing, or its equivalent;
- (4) *2,300 surveys spread across all communities in Rugby where the Council owns tenanted properties (60% in each location, or the nearest whole number of properties) and 40% of properties in each location be surveyed to include the most vulnerable tenants in the area. This will ensure a comprehensive picture of property condition across the borough is achieved in phase one. Subsequent phases to be carried out in a similar fashion; and*
- (5) *the Council to carry out tenant engagement to lay the ground for the contractor's communications with tenants, so that they know to expect to hear from the contractor. This is important for elderly or vulnerable tenants who may distrust organisations claiming to work for the Council and, as a result, be reluctant to co-operate. The Council to also carry out tenant engagement post the building condition survey to address tenants'*

*expectations around how any repairs/upgrades identified by the survey will be prioritised.*

Further to debate, the Mayor put the amendment to the vote and declared it lost.

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

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

## **68. REPORT OF OFFICERS**

### **(a) Localism Act - Pay Policy Statement**

Council considered the report of the Chief Officer – Legal and Governance (Part 1 – agenda item 7(a)) concerning the Council's pay policy statement.

**RESOLVED THAT** – the new Pay Policy Statement, as at Appendix 1 to the report, be adopted with immediate effect.

### **(b) Appointments to Outside Bodies – Miscellaneous Appointments**

Council considered the report of the Chief Officer – Legal and Governance (Part 1 – agenda item 7(b)) concerning the appointment of trustees to Lawrence Sheriff Almshouses.

The Council placed on record its thanks for Councillors Roodhouse and Mrs Roodhouse for their work as trustees of the charity.

**RESOLVED THAT** – Councillors Mrs Roodhouse and J Roodhouse be re-appointed to the Trustees of Lawrence Sheriff Almshouses for a term of office expiring on 13 December 2026.

### **(c) Polling Districts and Polling Places Review 2023**

Council considered the report of the Returning Officer (Part 1 – agenda item 7(c)) concerning a review of polling districts and places for 2023.

**RESOLVED THAT** – the Polling Districts and Places, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be adopted

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

(a) Councillor Mrs McKenzie moved and Councillor Roodhouse seconded the following motion, notice of which had been given under Standing Order 11:

*“Rugby Borough Council has declared a Climate Emergency. Government policy is for heat source air pumps to be used.*

*The Government definition for noise policy standards is that “the noise has no adverse effect so long as the exposure does not cause any change in*

*behaviour, attitude or other physiological responses of those affected by it” the policy is unclear regarding community buildings /churches etc. A domestic dwelling installation is a permitted development if it meets the noise standard of MCS20. On the other hand, community buildings must incur the cost of planning permission, and on top of that this Councils practice is to require a sound survey to BS4142 – although this standard is not appropriate for non-residential premises such as offices, schools, churches.*

*This condition adds extra cost to organisations and need only be made known to the community group at the end of the consultation period leading to further delays and unnecessary hindrance to the implementation of CO2 reduction technology and so is not in line with the declared climate emergency.*

*Council requests that the Climate Emergency Working group review this Councils policy regarding this matter with the view to making it more appropriate to apply the noise requirements of MCS20 to community buildings.”*

Further to debate, the Mayor put the motion to the vote and declared it carried.

- (b) Councillor Mrs Brown moved and Councillor Mrs McKenzie seconded the following motion, notice of which had been given under Standing Order 11:

*“Recent evidence demonstrates that the Borough of Rugby is seeing increasing number of families and individuals in food poverty. Data from the Rugby Foodbank shows that there has been a 34% rise in the number of users this year compared to a similar period last year, and many of those are people in work. Figures from BRANCAB show that in the quarter April- June this year 634 people needed help with debt, 1086 with benefits and tax credits, 264 with Universal Credit and 417 with help for food banks.*

*The Council’s recently adopted Corporate delivery plan included tackling health inequalities as a priority:*

### *3.8 Health & Wellbeing*

*para 3.8D calls for the identifying and removal of barriers to health inequality. It is also well recognised that healthy eating is better for your general and mental health.*

*Council therefore requests that a task and finish group be established and such group make recommendations to come forward with proposals for the establishment of a community supermarket. With the involvement of stakeholders (including the foodbank) and the community this would be a way of providing fresh food at an affordable price over a sustained period of time rather than the emergency service provided by the foodbank. The*

*shop will ideally be in the town centre for ease of access and provide fresh food from suppliers such as Fare Share to those people who struggle to afford high costs of food. Such projects also provide signposting to other support services, advice on healthy eating and cookery classes. There are different models we can learn from in Leamington and Coventry. Evidence from similar projects elsewhere have shown that they are very effective way of engaging with residents and of addressing health inequalities.*

*In 2020 Rugby Borough Council started to develop a plan to open such a project. It is now time to revisit that plan and involve registered social landlords and the wider community in the work to provide a community supermarket in our borough. This work should be aligned with any existing work that is currently underway.”*

The motion stood referred to Scrutiny Committee.

- (c) Councillor Ms Livesey moved and Councillor Mistry seconded the following motion, notice of which had been given under Standing Order 11:

*“Council requests that officers prepare an options appraisal presenting the pros and cons of different options for Rugby Borough Council’s cycle, namely:*

- 1. Elections by thirds; three annual elections over a four-year cycle (current model).*
- 2. Elections by halves; with half the councillors being elected every other year.*
- 3. Whole of Council elections; all councillors elected once every four years.*

*The scope of the paper should include:*

- a) Quantitative cost benefit analysis based on estimates of election costs and demands on officers’ time for each option.*
- b) Quantitative/Qualitative evidence from other councils of the realised pros/cons of each option.*
- c) An outline of the likely timing and content of guidance from the electoral commission on ward/boundary changes.*
- d) The statutory requirements in respect of any proposed change to the electoral cycle.*
- e) Any other information the officer responsible considers relevant to include.*

*The purpose of the options appraisal is to provide evidence that Council can use as a basis for public consultation and decision-making. The paper should outline the consultation requirements in respect of any electoral change from the status quo.*

*The paper should be delivered within 2 months from the date of the Council meeting (or by the Council meeting on 21 February 2024).”*

Councillor Picker then moved and Councillor Roodhouse seconded the following amendment:

*“Council recognises that there are pros and cons of different options for Rugby Borough Council’s cycle, namely:*

- 1. Elections by thirds; three annual elections over a four-year cycle (current model).*
- 2. Elections by halves; with half the councillors being elected every other year.*
- 3. Whole of Council elections; all councillors elected once every four years.*

*Council further notes that ward boundaries for Rugby Borough Council are within the timeframe for review by the Local Government Boundary Commission, and that these two issues should be considered together.*

*The Council therefore requests continued engagement with the Boundary Commission to ascertain whether any relevant triggers have been met to require to bring forward a review of Rugby’s ward boundaries.*

*This will run in parallel with a review of the Council’s electoral cycle. This should include full public engagement, including consultation with partner organisations and residents, with a report issued to Full Council.*

*This work will be undertaken during the borough “fallow” year in 2025.”*

Further to debate the Mayor put the amendment to the vote and declared it carried. This became the substantive motion.

Councillor Moran then moved and Councillor Edwards then seconded an amendment to the substantive motion:

*“Council recognises that there are pros and cons of different options for Rugby Borough Council’s cycle, namely:*

- 1. Elections by thirds; three annual elections over a four-year cycle (current model).*
- 2. Elections by halves; with half the councillors being elected every other year.*
- 3. Whole of Council elections; all councillors elected once every four years.*

*Council further notes that ward boundaries for Rugby Borough Council are within the timeframe for review by the Local Government Boundary Commission, and that these two issues should be considered together.*

*The Council therefore requests continued engagement with the Boundary Commission to ascertain whether any relevant triggers have been met to require to bring forward a review of Rugby’s ward boundaries.*

*This will run in parallel with a review of the Council's electoral cycle. This should include full public engagement, including consultation with partner organisations and residents, with a final report issued to Full Council in 2025.*

*In addition, officers are kindly asked to use all their reasonable endeavours to produce an interim report, for consideration by Full Council no later than April 2024, outlining indicative assessments of the various options available to Council as well as an update on their latest engagement with the Boundary Commission."*

Further to debate, 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.

- (d) Councillor Moran moved and Councillor Slinger seconded the following motion, notice of which had been given under Standing Order 11:

*"Council requests that Officers prepare a detailed assessment of take-up and participation levels for the current Rugby Local Plan Issues & Options consultation phase once concluded and that this analysis is reported back to Full Council for consideration.*

*There exists a concern that many residents are unaware of the Local Plan consultation process at all, how it works and the difference between informal consultations and statutory consultations.*

*Effective consultation is the lifeblood of any healthy local democracy, not only in its delivery but also its public perception to honestly engender and maintain the trust of communities.*

*Residents have complained about lack of awareness of consultations due to poor communications, badly targeted advertising and / or ineffective media being used.*

*Council acknowledges the primary objective of any public consultation should be to gather the opinions and views of residents and take these into account in any decision-making process. There are residents who believe their opinions may well be ignored or dismissed. Council further acknowledges it should be made clear whether the outcome of a consultation is advisory or binding.*

*There also exists significant concern that many sections of our society are being excluded from the Local Plan consultation process and officers are asked to report back on how engagement levels are being monitored by, for example, age group, urban/rural status, ethnic minority groups, special interest groups, sports and recreation clubs, socio economic standing, education, and religious bodies as well as other key stakeholder groups across the Borough.*

*Council further acknowledges that trusted and effective consultation is needed now more than ever and therefore commits to re-consulting on the Rugby Local Plan if the initial phase is deemed to be unsatisfactory by Full Council.*

*The paper should be delivered within one month from the date of the conclusion of the Consultation phase (or by the Council meeting on 21 February 2024).*

*Beyond this Local Plan process Officers are asked to commit to the highest levels of effective consultation and other forms of public engagement such as focus groups, co-production etc, where appropriate in all major future engagements. These targets should be explicitly communicated to Council at the outset of any future work.”*

Councillor Sandison then moved and Councillor Picker seconded the following amendment:

*“Council requests that Officers prepare a detailed assessment of take-up and participation levels for the current Rugby Local Plan Issues & Options consultation phase once concluded and that this analysis is reported back to Planning Services Working Party for consideration.*

*There exists a concern that many residents are unaware of the Local Plan consultation process at all, how it works and the difference between informal consultations and statutory consultations.*

*Effective consultation is the lifeblood of any healthy local democracy, not only in its delivery but also its public perception to honestly engender and maintain the trust of communities.*

*In light of broader concerns regarding the Councils consultation process for all forms of consultation, officers are asked to review how engagement levels are being monitored by, for example, age group, urban/rural status, ethnic minority groups, special interest groups, sports and recreation clubs, socio economic standing, education, and religious bodies as well as other key stakeholder groups across the Borough and this should be considered by the Scrutiny Committee with recommendations reported to Full Council.”*

Further to debate, 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.

## **70. CORRESPONDENCE**

There was no correspondence.

## 71. 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 reports adopted at this meeting.

The Mayor wished the Rugby communities a joyful Christmas and a happy new year. She thanked all town centre businesses, charities, community groups and volunteers who give so much to make Rugby the very special place it is.

The Mayor asked everyone to remember the words of Mother Theresa - "It's not how much we give but how much love we put into giving."

The Mayor then wished all Members and officers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

**MAYOR**