

MINUTES OF COUNCIL

25 SEPTEMBER 2024

PRESENT:

The Mayor (Councillor Ward), Councillors Barnett, Bennett, Brown, Daly, Dumbleton, C Edwards, S Edwards, Freeman, Garcia, Gillias, Harrington, Hassell, Henderson, Howling, Karadiar, Lawrence, Lewis, Livesey, Maoudis, McKenzie, Mistry, Moran, New, O'Rourke, Parker, Picker, Poole, Robinson, Roodhouse, Russell, Sandison, Sayani, Simpson-Vince, Slinger, Thomas, Timms, Trimble and Willis.

23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors D Keeling and J Keeling.

24. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2024 were approved and signed by the Mayor.

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor informed the meeting that, with regard to the notice of motion relating to the winter fuel allowance, those Members affected by the proposed changes would not have a pecuniary interest and would, therefore, be able to participate in the debate and vote.

Members who are currently in receipt of winter fuel allowance may have a non-pecuniary interest and Democratic Services would engage with Members to ensure these were recorded in the minutes.

Councillors Srivastava and Trimble declared non-pecuniary interests as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of having been in receipt of the winter fuel allowance.

26. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) The Mayor's Civic Sunday Service was held at St Andrew's Church on Sunday and he thanked all who were involved in organising, and everyone who attended and took part in, the service. It was lovely to have such community engagement from the youth of our Borough also which ties in with the mayoral theme of youth this year. This included the Mayor's local village school choir from Long Lawford Primary School, two young children from the Rugby Ukrainian Community, the Mayor's cadet and other local cadet groups and many more. The Mayor thanked everyone who took part in the service and showed their support.

(b) The Mayor had been meeting all the different teams within the Council and promoting what they do and how to contact them and had been delighted to see the enthusiasm within each team. The Mayor wished to give a special mention to two members of Works Services Unit, refuse collectors Darren and Snowy who had developed a wonderful relationship and friendship with 4-year-old Rory, a local boy, who has cerebral palsy and autism. Rory is an absolute superstar and has a passion for the refuse lorries. Darren and Snowy always go out of their way to speak to Rory and spend a bit of their time with him whilst on their rounds every fortnight. In their words "it's only 15 minutes of our time every fortnight" but to Rory those 15 minutes mean the absolute world to him. The Mayor wished to thank Darren and Snowy for their kindness and for going above and beyond.

(c) The Mayor wished to mention to the Borough's returning Olympians from Paris 2024, Lauren Henry, Chelsie Giles and Kimberley Woods. The Mayor had been championing and promoting their events at the Olympics and beyond and the whole of Rugby had been supporting them. The Mayor had already had the pleasure of meeting and welcoming home Kimberley and Lauren and in contact with Chelsie too. The Mayor and the three Olympians are looking to link up at several different engagements including potential school visits as they are all such inspirations to the youth of our Borough. Lauren Henry had been the Mayor's guest at a couple of events recently including meeting the newly formed Rugby Police Cadets and the school's Rugby in Bloom awards. Following the conclusion of the Olympics and Paralympics, the Mayor was delighted that the Olympians would be honoured with the title of Freedom of the Borough and looked forward to the formal confirmation.

(d) On Monday the Mayor attended Rugby High School along with other distinguished guests including the High Sheriff of Warwickshire, the former High Sheriff of Warwickshire and Eric Wood, OBE for the launch of this year's High Sheriff for the day. For 2024, the competition will be open to students in years 10-13, age 14 – 18, from all 13 schools in the Borough of Rugby. The closing date for entries is 18 October.

The Mayor was delighted to be one of the judges for this prestigious competition being held in Rugby. With his Mayoral theme of youth it was wonderful to see opportunities like this for youngsters and the Mayor encouraged all to enter as this was a fantastic opportunity.

The Mayor also reminded everyone to follow his social media pages to see some of the many great things going on in the Borough.

The Mayor then invited Councillor New to speak.

Councillor New stated that during the debate relating to shopfronts at Council on 10 July she had raised comments with regard to Don't Tell Mum, a bubble tea store in the town centre. She wished to clarify that her comments only related to the name of the shop and were not directed at the management of the company. She wished to offer her sincere apologies for any offence caused to the management of the company.

27. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 10

A. Councillor Poole asked the Regulation and Safety Portfolio Holder, Councillor Claire Edwards:

“At Council on the 10 July 2024, the Portfolio Holder for Regulation and Safety, Cllr Edwards outlined the changes in fees charged to customers at Rugby Borough Council owned car parks. The new fee being £1.00. The cost of parking is 80 pence and the 20 pence fee paid to Ringo is to be paid by the Council. Can the Portfolio Holder please explain to the Council where the estimated £25,000 that will have to be paid to Ringo is coming from?”

Councillor Claire Edwards, Regulation and Safety Portfolio Holder, provide the following response:

“The cost is being covered by higher than predicted pay and display ticket sales than the budget set for 2024/25, as stated in the Cabinet report.

We introduced the cover of the 20p flat fee as a one off for a limited period of time to enable a fair assessment of the different ways in which people pay so that when we look at the wider car parking strategy, we have all the data we need to make those decisions. The 20p was cited as a deterrent for customers who didn't have a mobile phone app and wanted to pay by another means. For many that meant getting to a remote town centre paypoint that may be a long distance.

We want to make parking in the town centre as easy and attractive as possible for customers to enable the town centre to be more attractive. Work continues and we will assess whether that 20p flat rate is acting as a deterrent or not. Councillor Poole will remember that the trial with RingGo came to an end in June and a quick decision had to be made. We also had to make a quick decision to replace ageing ticket machines that were breaking down and now obsolete. The new machines are due to be delivered in the next weeks and will enable, along side much improved signs, a better and easier way for our residents and visitors to park in the town centre.

The cost of parking has not changed.”

Councillor Poole then asked the Portfolio Holder to provide details of the increase in income generated which the Portfolio Holder agreed to provide by email.

B. Councillor Gillias asked the Growth and Investment, Digital and Communications Portfolio Holder, Councillor Robinson:

“In view of the forthcoming changes to national and local planning policies, can the portfolio holder for Growth and Investment reassure our communities that protection by the RBC enforcement team of the borough's historic environment, including its listed buildings, will be fully resourced to enable prompt responses to serious planning breaches and in particular during periods of out of working hours breaches, when intentional unauthorised development and damage to our countryside takes place?”

Councillor Robinson, Growth and Investment, Digital and Communications Portfolio Holder provided the following response:

“The proposed changes to national policy currently being consulted on do not impact on breaches to the historic environment nor on unauthorised development and damage to the countryside.

At a local level, this Council is reviewing our Local Plan. As a Member of Planning Services Working Group, Cllr Gillias, can review and help shape the policies, allocations, and designation of the Local Plan before public consultation and before it is referred to the Planning Inspectorate for examination.

On issues of enforcement:

1. Councillors may remember the previous administration of this Council removed the Conservation Officer post from the Planning Service. Conservation Officers are employed to enhance and conserve the Boroughs heritage assets. In the absence of a dedicated Conservation Officer this work was undertaken by Planning Officers alongside their existing roles. To ensure that expert advice is available on heritage matters this administration has now employed a Conservation Officer in a shared service with a neighbouring authority.

2. One form of unauthorised development in the countryside is Gypsy and Traveller encampments. This issue is exacerbated because of the failure of this council over many years (under the last administration) to allocate Gypsy and Traveller sites. The new Local Plan is the primary means by which this Council can allocate sites to meet the identified need. This will give the Council the ability to take more control over this issue in the future. In the interim this administration is committed to exploring interim measures and solutions.

3. The Council's Planning Enforcement team investigate breaches of planning control. The Council Wardens provide the front-line response to breaches escalated outside of office hours. The Council has an adopted Local Enforcement Plan, and the team has sufficient capacity to deliver a service in accordance with that plan, therefore meeting the statutory duty." Councillor Gillias then asked the Portfolio Holder when, after a prolonged cycle of planning permission refusals and dismissals at appeal where intentional unauthorised development of sites continue to breach enforcement notices, will this Council be prepared to implement direct action powers under Section 178 of the Town and Country Planning Act which is entirely in the powers of this Council? The Portfolio Holder stated that there were ongoing conversations to address difficult situations communities within the Borough find themselves, including the gypsy and traveller community. These will continue to progress at Planning Services Working Group to ensure measured decisions were taken.

C. Councillor Daly asked the Partnerships and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder, Councillor O'Rourke:

"Can the Portfolio Holder for Partnerships and Wellbeing update Council on the progress of park improvements which had funding approved at Full Council on 6 February 2024?"

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

"The Parks and Open Spaces team deliver the Council's Park refurbishment projects ranging from minor repairs, to full refurbishments.

In line with the Council's capital strategy, budget requests are brought forward for Cabinet and/or Council approval and are required to be delivered and finalised within a 2-year timescale to ensure effective and efficient financial management.

The report approved at Full Council on 6 February 2024 included a variety of capital budget requests to ensure projects that had either identified works or section 106 funding identified and could be brought into the team's work programme.

Since the formal approval of budgets, schemes were added to the 2024/25 work programme.

The Aspen Road play area safety improvements have been completed.

The Betony Road play area is subject to the relevant procurement exercise for which a specification is currently being drafted. The parks and open spaces team have been considering the RoSPA guidelines regarding the proximity of the play area to a water hazard and the appropriate safety measures that may be required to ensure best practice is maintained as with other council owned play areas.

Officers recently attended a community meeting in Newbold to discuss the proposed allotments at Centenary Park, Newbold. Members of the public and ward councillors were presented with an architectural drawing for the proposed layout of the site and answered questions around the sites facilities such as whether it would have running water.

The capital budget for Brindley Road and Lennon Close is funded through section 106 agreement that is also inclusive of Hillmorton Recreation Ground at Featherbed Lane. Recent safety works have taken place to replace the wooden bridge and safety surfacing.

Brindley Road is currently being reviewed following the annual inspections. Surfacing works will be carried out post the replacement of aged equipment for a new item that is more inclusive in design.

In addition, the capital refurbishment programmes at Bawnmore Road, Charwelton Drive and New Bilton have recently appointed landscape architects to enable the projects to have draft designs and second phase community consultation ahead of a full procurement exercise.”

Councillor Daly then asked that the Portfolio Holder to give priority to improvements at York Street and Frobisher Road play areas as soon as possible.

D. Councillor Daly asked the Finance, Performance, Legal and Governance Portfolio Holder, Councillor Mistry:

“Following July's general election, it is expected that there was a surge in applications for residents to join Rugby's electoral roll. Can the portfolio holder please provide an update on the wards which have seen the largest increase in roll numbers and can they confirm the difference between the 3-member wards with the smallest and largest number of registered voters?”

Councillor Mistry, Finance, Performance, Legal and Governance Portfolio Holder, to reply as follows:

“As per previous general electoral cycles the parliamentary register did have an increase in registrations. To respond to this question, it would be helpful to understand the benchmark for comparison and whether Councillor Daly is referring to the register for local elections or the register for the Parliamentary election? Each register has a different number of voters given the relevant voting rights.

In terms of the benchmark and comparison, is this for registered voters from the 2019 General Election? Moving onto the reference to wards, the figures will be skewed given each ward varies in terms of new developments and this has an impact upon those that subsequently register to vote.

Once this clarity is provided then I am happy to engage with the Council's Returning Officer and provide this information."

Councillor Daly then asked the Portfolio Holder, in view of some wards growing more disproportionately compared to others what the potential impact was on voting within the Borough and how far away was the Council from a boundary review. Councillor Mistry informed Councillor Daly that the Council was waiting for the Electoral Commission to instigate a review and officers were monitoring and pursuing this matter.

28. REPORT OF CABINET – 16 SEPTEMBER 2024

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

29. REPORT OF OFFICERS

(a) Urgent Decision under Delegated Powers – Temporary Transport Manager post

Council considered the report of the Chief Executive (Part 1 – agenda item 7(a)) concerning an urgent decision taken under delegated powers with regard to the establishment of a temporary transport manager post.

RESOLVED THAT – the report be noted.

30. NOTICES OF MOTION PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 11

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

“Council notes the recent announcement by the Labour Government to end universal winter fuel payments and restrict eligibility to only those in receipt of Pension Credits and other benefits.

Although some suggest that Universal Winter Fuel Payments are not necessary, Council is deeply concerned that many pensioners on lower and middle incomes will now not receive the payments. Across England and Wales the number of people eligible for winter fuel payments will fall by 10 million (from 11.4 million to only 1.5 million).

In Rugby, the number of pensioners affected by the change in eligibility criteria is 17,859. That means 91.8% of pensioners currently eligible for winter fuel payments will no longer be able to claim the payment from this winter onwards.

Council believes that the Labour Government has set the threshold at which pensioners do not qualify for Winter Fuel Payments far too low. Only

those receiving a pension of less than £218.15 a week (or £332.95 a week for couples) are eligible for pension credits. This is significantly lower than the living wage rate. Many pensioners with small private pensions taking them just above the threshold for pension credits will also suffer.

Council is also concerned by the low take up of pension credit with only 63% of those eligible nationwide receiving them – and over 880,000 pensioners not doing so. Council recognises the role we have to play to increase awareness of benefits such as Pension Credit to ensure people are aware of the support they are entitled to.

Council further notes that the Energy Price Cap is due to rise by 10% in October, which combined by the removal of Winter Fuel Payments will push thousands of local pensioners into fuel poverty.

Council resolves to:

- (1) request that the Chief Executive write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer asking her to make greater support available through local authorities to assist residents at risk of hardship this winter and for the policy on linking Winter Fuel Payments to Pension Credit receipt to be immediately paused and introduce a new threshold to determine eligibility for Winter Fuel Payments. Council further requests the Chief Executive writes to Rugby's MP asking them to give their formal support to halting the changes to the Winter Fuel Payment eligibility this year;*
- (2) request all Group Leaders within Rugby Borough Council to sign a joint letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the new Winter Fuel Payment policy to be suspended and reviewed.*
- (3) urgently commence a significant awareness campaign to maximise uptake of pension credits. This will include use of Council noticeboards, social media, promotion in local press and also targeted letters to those who may be eligible for Pension Credit, and to support them with applications where necessary; and*
- (4) continue the previous administration's partnership work with other public and voluntary sector organisations to support our most vulnerable residents."*

Further to debate, three Councillors requested that a recorded vote be taken on the motion, in accordance with Standing Order 15.4.

For the motion: Councillors Bennett, Daly, Dumbleton, S Edwards, Garcia, Gillias, Hassell, Howling, Lawrence, Lewis, Maoudis, McKenzie, New, Parker, Picker, Poole, Roodhouse, Russell, Sandison, Sayani, Simpson-Vince, Srivastava, Thomas, Timms, Trimble, Ward and Willis – 27 votes

Against the motion: Councillors Barnett, Brown, C Edwards, Freeman, Harrington, Henderson, Karadiar, Livesey, Mistry, Moran, O'Rourke, Robinson, Slinger – 13 votes

The Mayor declared the motion carried.

RESOLVED THAT –

- (1) the Chief Executive writes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer asking her to make greater support available through local authorities to assist residents at risk of hardship this winter and for the policy on linking Winter Fuel Payments to Pension Credit receipt to be immediately paused and introduce a new threshold to determine eligibility for Winter Fuel Payments. Council further requests the Chief Executive writes to Rugby's MP asking them to give their formal support to halting the changes to the Winter Fuel Payment eligibility this year;
- (2) all Group Leaders within Rugby Borough Council sign a joint letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the new Winter Fuel Payment policy to be suspended and reviewed;
- (3) a significant awareness campaign to maximise uptake of pension credits be commenced urgently. This will include use of Council noticeboards, social media, promotion in local press and also targeted letters to those who may be eligible for Pension Credit, and to support them with applications where necessary; and
- (4) the previous administration's partnership work with other public and voluntary sector organisations to support our most vulnerable residents be continued.

MAYOR