

MINUTES
OF THE MEETING OF THE
CORPORATE OVERVIEW GROUP
TUESDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2023

Held at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Rushcliffe Arena, Rugby Road, West
Bridgford

PRESENT:

Councillors J Wheeler (Chairman), N Clarke, J Cottee, P Gowland, D Viridi and
G Williams

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

C Caven-Atack	Service Manager - Corporate Services
S Whittaker	Service Manager - Finance
E Palmer	Communications and Customer Services Manager
K Brennan	Finance Business Partner
E Richardson	Democratic Services Officer

22 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

23 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

24 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2022 were approved as a true record and were signed by the Chairman.

25 Finance and Performance Management Quarter 3 2022/23

The Communications and Customer Services Manager presented the Q3 Performance Scorecards.

The Communications and Customer Services Manager noted that there were five performance exceptions on the operational scorecard. He explained that the percentage of householder planning allocations processed within target had been impacted by Christmas office closures and staff shortages but that as the overall number of applications being received was decreasing it was expected that performance would increase. In relation to complaints responded to on time, he said that performance had been impacted by the complexity of complaints and that any delay had a greater statistical impact due to the low number received overall.

In relation to calls answered in 60 seconds, the Communications and Customer Services Manager said that this had been impacted by a high number of calls about the Government's energy rebate. He confirmed that the Council

continued to look at ways to reduce calls and signpost traffic to alternative and online resolutions. In relation to the income generated by parks and playing pitches, he explained that the Council's new online booking system was in operation and it was expected that this and upcoming marketing would lead to an increase in income generated.

The Chairman referred to customer contact and the need for the Council to adapt to meet future expectations. The Communications and Customer Services Manager confirmed that the Council continued to look at how to best educate residents in using online solutions. He said that Rushcliffe had the eldest demographic in the County which made it important for the Council to provide a balance between contact options.

The Group asked about methods used to educate residents and the Communications and Customer Services Manager said that the Council was in the processes of gathering data about how and why residents contacted the Council to explore how to best provide education. It was expected that a combination of in person assistance and telephone conversations would be provided. It was likely that contact needs would change over time with an increasing demand for fast access to services and answers.

The Group asked about usage of sports pitches and the Communications and Customer Services Manager said that they were well used through the year and the Council was hoping to increase this through marketing, particularly with the installation of the 3G pitch at Gresham.

The Finance Business Partner presented the Q3 Financial Report. She said that there was a predicted net revenue budget efficiency of £1.723m, mostly as a result of the Business Rates Pool, additional investment income and additional new burdens grants. It was proposed that the efficiency be earmarked for additional cost pressures. She said that there was also a capital budget efficiency expected of £3.758m.

The Finance Business Partner referred to Appendix A of the report which summarised the £1.723m efficiency and proposals for utilisation and also took the Group through the main variations from revenue efficiencies and pressures as set out in Table 1.

In relation to the Capital Programme, the Group was informed that with carry forwards and other adjustments, this had increased from £14.6m to £22.2m and that the current projected outturn was circa £18.5m, which gave an estimated underspend of £3.7m.

In providing an update about pressures faced by the Council, the Finance Business Partner said that staff pay negotiations were now complete resulting in a cost of approximately £0.55m. This represented a significant annual cost pressure to the Council now forming part of the MTF5 to be approved by Council in March. In addition, the potential associated impact on service provision contracts such as leisure were being monitored.

The Group was informed that knock on impacts from the cost of living pressures were also being monitored, in particular for any reductions in Council Tax collection (85.33% collected compared to 85.46% last year) and Business

Rates (87.3% collected compared to 83.7% last year). Inflation was set to peak at 11% which could also impact on general costs and on contracts due for renewal. She said that overall and given the challenges it was a mostly positive position that would be monitored closely going forward.

In relation to the Transformation Programme, the Finance Business Partner informed that the two most significant items were the Crematorium (£0.2m) and Bingham Arena (£0.2m). Due to delays in delivery due to external factors with the contractors the current projection was currently a shortfall of £0.284m for the Crematorium and £0.163m for Bingham.

The Group was informed that whilst pooled funds continued to fluctuate, the returns were stable and represented 65% of the Council's return on overall investments forming long term investments as part of the Council's Treasury Management Strategy.

The Group asked about monies allocated for housing providers and the Service Manager Finance explained that a developer either had to provide affordable housing or contribute S106 funding to create affordable housing stock which would then be managed by the Council's housing association provider.

The Group asked about staffing in the Planning Team and the Finance Business Partner confirmed that the Council was currently utilising agency staff to fill vacancies and meet specific project demands, which was common practice. The Group was informed that there was allocation within the budget to cover these costs, including from fees income and staffing underspend due to vacancies. It was noted that planning applications were falling which would reduce pressure on the team. The Group was also informed that there was general difficulty recruiting within this sector and that some people preferred flexible agency work rather than a more fixed permanent position, but the Council sought to provide an attractive salary and working culture.

The Chairman asked about upcoming projects that may impact on the budget. The Service Manager Finance said that Council's programme over the last few years had involved large capital projects but that going forward projects were smaller and so slippage would be less likely and be less impactful. The Chair confirmed that the Council carried out sound financial management to ensure that there were funds available to cover eventualities.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Group noted:

- a) the expected revenue budget efficiency for the year of £1.723m and proposals to earmark this for cost pressures (para 4.1).
- b) the capital budget efficiencies of £3.758m including various re-profiling stated at paragraph 4.7, included in the MTFs to Full Council.
- c) the expected outturn position for Special Expenses to be £3.2k below budget (para 4.5).
- d) considered whether scrutiny was required for identified exceptions.

26 **Feedback from Scrutiny Group Chairmen**

The Chairman of Communities Scrutiny Group said that the last meeting had referred to the functionality of the scrutiny matrix to ensure that items coming to Committee were appropriate and sufficient in number to justify holding a meeting, whilst acknowledging that it was difficult to predict how much time an item would require. The Service Manager Corporate Services agreed that this depended on various factors such as the length of presentation, discussion and questions and engagement from the group. She said that two items were usually proposed working on the basis of one hour per item.

The Service Manager Corporate Services said that Councillors could put the matrix forward for scrutiny review and added that it was for Councillors and Officers to look at the Council's projects and performance and strategies and identify areas that they or where they thought the community would like to know more about and which they would like to be scrutinised.

The Chair highlighted the importance of attending scrutiny training to understand the function and value of the scrutiny process.

The Chairman of the Governance Scrutiny Group said that their next meeting was due to be held in two days' time and confirmed that the Committee had a very full agenda, including items about internal audit, risk management and the capital and investment strategy. He referred to the Redmond Review on internal audit practice across local authorities and said that independent contribution to the Governance scrutiny process may become a statutory requirement.

The Chairman of the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group said that the last meeting considered two items, one being the Levelling Up agenda regarding investment in the local community through the UK Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Funds at circa £3.2m over three years, to be by completed by March 2025. He explained that various projects had been agreed to be taken forward, including support for community projects and businesses, police and infrastructure, and that future projects had been approved to be developed further. The second item related to Hedges and Hedgerows with concern about how they could be conserved, how much they could be protected and how that protection could be enforced. The meeting had considered how the quantity and quality of a hedgerow was assessed and the possibility of attracting further rural funding. An update on biodiversity net gain was to be brought to a future meeting.

The Chairman referred to scrutiny Chairs training that had become available and confirmed that he thought it not appropriate to undertake this expenditure until the new scrutiny term commenced.

The Chairman highlighted the importance of scrutiny pre meetings and conversations with Officers to confirm agendas and reports.

27 **Feedback from Lead Officers**

There was no feedback to report.

28 Review of 2019-2023 Strategic Tasks

The Service Manager Corporate Services explained that the Corporate Strategy was due to expire in September 2023 and it was therefore timely to review what had been delivered over the last four years and to look at what the Council would wish to include in the Strategy going forward.

The Service Manager Corporate Services confirmed that there were seventeen actions in the original 2019-2023 Corporate Strategy which had been reported to the Corporate Overview Group over the last four years and that six additional tasks had been added into the action plan. She referred the Group to Appendix 1, which summarised each of the actions and looked at their impact on the community. She also referred to the insourcing of Streetwise which did not feature in the Corporate Strategy but which had nonetheless presented a substantial task for the Council to deliver. She noted that the Strategy had been delivered against a backdrop of the covid-19 global pandemic, the cost of living crisis and the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The Chairman said that much could change over a four year timeframe, particularly with future projects such as the Freeport ongoing, and suggested that the Strategy be reviewed at the midway point to assess progress and relevancy. He thought it important that all the various strategies linked together to deliver the overarching priorities. The Service Manager Corporate Services said that Officers agreed that reviewing the Strategy at a strategic point would be beneficial and that this would be incorporated into the future Strategy.

The Group asked about the process and decision making for adding additional tasks to the Strategy and how criteria were applied and resources allocated. The Service Manager explained that the current additional items had been identified through the Council's internal service planning process but said that she would take these comments back to the Officer management group for review.

The Group referred to the challenge faced by the Council in delivering its 13k housing requirement and noted that its housing land supply now stood at around nine years which it hoped gave some leeway against pressures for large site allocations. The Group also referred to the importance of making sure that infrastructures were in place to provide the supporting community facilities.

The Group referred to climate change and the Council's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2030 and the need to make sure that it continued to work to achieve this and to look for new ways to save energy and protect the environment.

The Group referred to the Growth Boards and asked if there were any plans to review how they were working, with a view to reenergising them and making them action focussed. The Service Manager Corporate Services said that Councillors could put this forward as a scrutiny matrix and said that the Service Manager Economic Growth and Property would be able to support them with this. The Chairman said that he would discuss this with the Service Manager, he was conscious that the new administration may decide how they would like the Boards to be taken forward but thought that it could still be put forward as a scrutiny item for review.

The Chairman suggested that Councillors submit feedback about what they thought was and wasn't working well in relation to the scrutiny matrix.

The Group asked whether it would be possible to colour code where tasks were completed or ongoing.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Corporate Overview Group:

- a) reviewed the progress reported against each strategic action set in the 2019-2023 Corporate Strategy.
- b) made suggestions as to future actions that could be included in the 2023-2027 Corporate Strategy to be drafted later this year.

29 **Consideration of Scrutiny Group Work Programme**

The Chairman explained that the Group had agreed to invite Councillors who had put forward a scrutiny matrix to attend the meeting to explain their reasons for putting the item forward for scrutiny.

Councillor Thomas joined the meeting to present her matrix for Council Tax options for empty homes. She explained that the budget briefing session had included a session on reducing the period for applying the empty homes premium from twenty four to twelve months and that discussions had included reference to a variety of factors such as including furnished and unfurnished properties, derelict homes and probate. She said that the proposals had referred to the financial impact but thought that the social impact also needed to be included. She said that there was no data about what the social impact from reducing the time period would be.

Councillor Thomas noted that Officers had suggested reviewing the Empty Homes Strategy but had concern that this would only review what the Council was already doing and not what it was not doing. She said that the Strategy did not include derelict homes or furnished homes that were empty for long periods of time. She wanted to understand the fuller picture, including what was discretionary in terms of premiums and discounts. She referred to section 76 of the Levelling Up Bill about dwellings occupied periodically which included furnished properties which were often empty, such as second homes.

Councillor Thomas supported the scrutiny item as revised by officers but asked that her original lines of enquiry be included in the scope, including the possibilities from section 76 of the Levelling Up Bill, to provide a wider understanding of who paid Council Tax, who could receive a waiver, what discounts and premiums were available and what powers the council had available to it, to examine the data and look at the impact from a social context. She thought that the Council did a good job but relied on empty homes being reported to it.

The Service Manager Corporate Services said that Officers had suggested reviewing the Empty Homes Strategy to provide more information about the range of tools the Council had available to it in terms of empty homes, as Council Tax charging formed only a small part of the process. She added that it

was hoped that providing fuller information would put Council Tax charging into context, to help provide a clearer view of how many empty homes there were, their impact on the community and how the Council dealt with specific cases. She said that Environmental Health Officers would be able to attend to explain what they did and what finance could do, to give a more overarching picture.

The Group thought that including the original submission along with the additional information requested by Councillor Thomas and the Empty Homes Strategy in the review would form a reasonable recommendation. The Chairman suggested that the item be titled a Review of Empty Homes Strategy including Council Tax and the Group agreed that this item be taken forward in the scrutiny work programme.

Councillor Thomas presented her matrix for Biodiversity Net gains – New Legislation. She said that she had put this item forward approximately a year ago and whilst it had been a newer concept at that time, things had since moved forward and it was nearer to being implemented.

Councillor Thomas said that she was happy with the Officers suggested scope for the scrutiny item but wanted to make sure that two things were covered. She referred to the wording ‘method for establishing a baseline required for monitoring’ and said that there was concern about land owners destroying sites before they were assessed so that sites were given a low baseline. She thought it was important that sites were assessed early and before they were submitted for planning permission, to ensure that the original value of the land was captured.

Councillor Thomas also requested that the hierarchy of mitigation for biodiversity net gains be included. She said that there was scope to tighten policy to ensure that better biodiversity net gain was implemented. She took the Group through Rushcliffe’s proposed Local Development Order biodiversity net gain hierarchy. The preferred option was to deliver biodiversity net gains onsite, the next option was for units to be provided offsite but within Rushcliffe. Councillor Thomas asked how the Council was preparing for this, did it need to have a call for sites and could small sites such as corners of fields be included. The next stage was to provide other environmental mitigation proposals as agreed with the Council which could include things such as the fish pass at Thrumpton. The stage after that was units being provided offsite, not within Rushcliffe, but within neighbouring authorities. Councillor Thomas asked how these would be identified and decided. The penultimate stage was to provide a financial contribution to the Council in lieu of delivery which she said would lead to money being held by the Council and questioned how any decision about expenditure would be made. The final stage was for the developer to purchase credits under the Government scheme which gave concern about potential unethical and exploitative options.

The Group noted that biodiversity net gain was proposed as a scrutiny item for July and also that as discussed at the last Growth and Development Scrutiny Group meeting, the methodology for reporting biodiversity net gain was yet to be outlined in detail by Government with a further report to be presented to scrutiny when that information became available. The Group questioned whether July would be too early for review as there may be further questions for Officers as legislation became clearer.

Councillor Thomas said that there was much that needed to be clarified prior to the policy coming into operation in November 2023 and therefore thought it appropriate for it to be reviewed.

The Chairman said that Officers were in agreement with including the information requested by Councillor Thomas. The Group agreed for this item to be taken forward in the scrutiny work programme.

Councillor Clarke presented his matrix for How the Borough works with partners to plan for the infrastructure required to support growth. He said that with all the growth taking place within the Borough it was important to ensure that the relevant infrastructures were in place. He said that whilst supporting facilities were included in planning conditions they were often delivered at late stages or at the end of a development, which meant that people who had moved in before facilities were implemented weren't benefitting from them.

Councillor Clarke added that sometimes mid-way into delivery a developer would state that it was not viable for them to deliver a facility for various reasons. He therefore wanted to look at how the Council could ensure that supporting facilities be delivered at an earlier stage, including making conditions on applications and developments more robust. Councillor Clarke said that he wanted to create communities rather than housing estates.

The Group discussed the importance of how the Council communicated to the public as to why things were being done in certain ways, perhaps due to constraints. The Group thought that the slowing of the housing market could delay delivery of facilities if housing sales milestones took longer to achieve and supported looking at potential to accelerate bringing S106 monies forward. The Group agreed for this item to be taken forward in the scrutiny work programme.

Councillor Clarke presented the scrutiny matrix for Sewerage Infrastructure and Discharge within Rushcliffe. He said that regrettably all Councillors had had experience of sewerage problems in developments. He referred to the general phrase that all developments had to be able to connect into the sewerage system which Severn Trent were charged with delivering, and said that the process needed to be more comprehensive and robust, with more assurance that provision was being made by Severn Trent, and that comprehensive discussion between Officers and Severn Trent took place about delivery of the additional sewerage.

Councillor Clarke said that the sewerage system would be under immense pressure from the upcoming large development at Fairham and potentially Gamston. He said that Severn Trent were aware of their responsibilities but more assurance was required by residents that adequate systems were in place.

The Group discussed whether this was an issue for the Borough Council or whether it was more about how the Planning Department accepted advice from other organisations, such as water and transport advice. The Group questioned whether this was beyond the power of the council to control and whether it was more about reviewing how it scrutinised the advice it received from other

authorities.

Councillor Clarke thought that the Council had a responsibility to its residents as sewerage was often raised at Planning Committee and said that he wanted more assurance and evidence that the infrastructure could be delivered before an application was approved. He said that bringing it to scrutiny would allow review of what powers the Council had in a comprehensive way involving partners.

The Group agreed for this item to be taken forward in the scrutiny work programme.

The Group agreed that the June Corporate Overview Group meeting review the scrutiny work programme, including items already approved by the Group, to ensure that the new administration was happy with the programme as set out.

The Group acknowledged that Governance Scrutiny Committee often had a very full agenda and whilst this was due to statutory and legislative standing items needing to come before the Committee at set times, the Service Manager Corporate Services said that she would take this back to Officers for review.

The Service Manager Corporate Services confirmed that she would take back the Group's concerns about the timing of the biodiversity net gain item to make sure that there was sufficient information available to bring it forward to Growth and Development Scrutiny Committee in July. The Group asked whether if it needed to be delayed, the Sewerage item could be brought forward to July instead.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Corporate Overview Group:

- a) considered any additional items for scrutiny from the current Cabinet Forward Plan, Corporate Strategy, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Capital and Investment Strategy and Transformation Plan (Appendix One).
- b) considered the scrutiny matrices submitted by Councillors and officers (Appendix Two).
- c) determined any additional topics to be included in a scrutiny group work programme for 2023/24 for each of the scrutiny groups.
- d) reviewed the current work programme for each of the scrutiny groups (Appendix Three).

Work Programme 2022-23 – Corporate Overview Group

21 February 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Standing Items<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Feedback from Scrutiny Group Chairmen○ Feedback from Lead Officer○ Consideration of Scrutiny Group Work Programmes○ Financial and Performance Management
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rolling Items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review of 2019-23 Strategic Tasks
6 June 2023 (provisional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing Items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feedback from Scrutiny Group Chairmen ○ Feedback from Lead Officer ○ Consideration of Scrutiny Group Work Programmes ○ Financial and Performance Management • Rolling Items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review of the draft Business Continuity Strategy ○ Diversity Annual Report and update on the Equality and Diversity Strategy
5 September 2023 (provisional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing Items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feedback from Scrutiny Group Chairmen ○ Feedback from Lead Officer ○ Consideration of Scrutiny Group Work Programmes ○ Financial and Performance Management • Rolling Items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Health and Safety Annual Report
7 November 2023 (provisional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing Items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feedback from Scrutiny Group Chairmen ○ Feedback from Lead Officer ○ Consideration of Scrutiny Group Work Programmes ○ Financial and Performance Management • Rolling Items <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Customer Feedback Annual Report

Work Programme 2022-23 – Governance Scrutiny Group

23 February 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit Progress Report • Internal Audit Strategy • Risk Management Strategy • Risk Management – Update • Statement of Accounts • Treasury and Asset Investments Strategy 2023/24
29 June 2023 (provisional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit Progress Report • Internal Audit Annual Report • Annual Governance Statement (AGS) • Treasury Management Update • Constitution Update • Code of Conduct • External Audit Annual Plan • Annual Audit Letter and Value for Money Conclusion
28 September 2023 (provisional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Management • Going Concern • Asset and Investment Outturn 2022/23 • Treasury Management Update
23 November 2023 (provisional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Audit Progress Report • Annual Audit Report 2021/22

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treasury and Asset Investments – 6 monthly update • Asset Management Plan
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Work Programme 2022-23 – Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

8 March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An update on the Fairham development
19 July 2023 (provisional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium • Biodiversity Net Gains – New Legislation
4 October 2023 (provisional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the Borough works with partners to plan for the infrastructure required to support growth
3 January 2024 (provisional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sewerage Infrastructure and Discharge within Rushcliffe

Work Programme 2022-23 – Communities Scrutiny Group

16 March 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carbon Management Plan • Environment Policy
20 July 2023 (provisional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Empty Homes Strategy including Council Tax
5 October 2023 (provisional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
18 January 2024 (provisional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

ACTION SHEET

Minute Item	Action	Officer responsible
20	Review the decision making process for adding additional tasks to the Corporate Strategy.	Service Manager Corporate Services
21	Review whether anything could be put in place to alleviate Governance Scrutiny having full agendas.	Service Manager Corporate Services
21	Check if there will be sufficient information available to bring the Biodiversity Net Gain item to Growth and Development Scrutiny Committee in July. If not, to assess whether it would be possible to bring the Sewerage item forward to July.	Service Manager Corporate Services

The meeting closed at 9.01 pm.

CHAIRMAN