

Corporate Overview Group

Chairman's Foreword

This annual report summarises the main work undertaken by the Corporate Overview Group 2021/22. The Corporate Overview Group oversees the Council's other scrutiny group work programmes based on concerns highlighted by quarterly financial and performance monitoring reports, as well as items on the Cabinet Forward Plan and priorities within the Corporate Strategy.

The Corporate Overview Group have ensured that the executive be held to account by approving topics to be discussed at scrutiny groups. Additionally, the Group have scrutinised financial and performance management reports on a quarterly basis to ensure the smooth running of the Council.

The Covid Pandemic and the economic downturn has continued to present challenges to the running of the Council's business and the Group will continue to evaluate the Council's performance over the next twelve months. On behalf of the rest of the Corporate Overview Group, I would like to thank the Council's resilient officers who have ensured that services continue, and our communities and residents are supported during this difficult time.

Councillor Tina Combellack
Chairman Corporate Overview Group



Councillor Tina Combellack
Chairman

What we are responsible for?

The Corporate Overview Group responsibilities include:

- Implementing identified improvements to scrutiny including training of scrutiny members, construction of new work programmes and reporting methods.
- Creating and receiving feedback on work programmes for the Growth and Development, Communities and Governance Scrutiny Groups based on the Cabinet Forward Plan, Corporate Strategy, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Investment Strategy and Transformation Plan.
- Scrutinising financial and performance management reports on a quarterly basis to ensure the smooth running of the Council and delegate any necessary investigations into concerning elements of these reports to the most appropriate scrutiny group via their work programme.
- Reviewing reports in respect of health and safety, diversity, and customer feedback to ensure the Council is meeting its statutory duties.

Our work this year

During this year, the Group considered many service areas and issues within its scrutiny role, particularly:

- Feedback from Scrutiny Chairmen
- Consideration of Scrutiny Work Programmes
- Finance and Performance Management
- Health and Safety Annual Report
- Customer Feedback Annual Report
- The Impact of Covid-19 on Rushcliffe Borough Council – Internal Focus
- The Impact of Covid-19 on Rushcliffe Borough Council – External Focus
- Diversity Annual Report

Feedback from Scrutiny Chairmen and Consideration of Scrutiny Work Programmes

At each meeting, each Chairman was invited to provide a brief summary of their previous meetings and the Group discussed suggestions of topics for scrutiny which were submitted either by Councillors or officers via the Scrutiny Matrix.

Feedback from Scrutiny Group Chairmen also led to a change to Chairman's Briefings which would now be held before the agenda was published to discuss the reports for the meeting and ensure that the key lines of enquiry detailed in the scrutiny matrix were addressed.

Additional Scrutiny Training was delivered by the Service Manager – Corporate Services covering listening and questioning skills and techniques, and a practical guide to completing the Scrutiny Matrix.

Chairmen also discussed the need for those submitting Scrutiny Matrices to discuss these in advance with officers as there had been a number of instances in the last year where matters were either not appropriate for scrutiny or could be addressed directly by officers or through a briefing note.

The Group also developed a Scrutiny Witness Guide during the year following an interesting session with the East Midlands Councils Scrutiny Network which was attended by the Chairman of Corporate Overview Group and the Service Manager – Corporate Services. The document outlines what witnesses should expect at a scrutiny meeting, and also make clear the provisions contained within the Council's constitution with regard to how witnesses could address the meeting and the limitations placed on their ongoing involvement in discussion.

Finance and Performance Management

The Group scrutinised financial and performance management reports on a quarterly basis to ensure the smooth running of the Council.

At the meeting in July 2021, the Group was informed that the year-end Capital Programme provision totalled £16.130m and that actual expenditure in relation to this provision totalled £9.306m (71% of the budget), giving rise to a variance of £6.824. A recommendation was made to carry forward £6.682m of this.

The Group were informed that projects in the Capital programme had commenced, and the majority of the work is expected to be completed in 2021/22. It was noted that the Capital Programme will be further updated with the revised budget position at September Full Council.

The Group were asked to comment on the monitored tasks which were outlined in the Corporate Strategy and the performance measures within the Corporate Scorecard and were pleased to note that there were no exceptions to report for strategic tasks and only six performance indicators falling below target in the corporate basket. It was noted that there were five performance exceptions on the operational scorecard:

- LINS06 Cumulative number of fly tipping cases (against cumulative monthly comparison for last year)
- LINS25 Number of households living in temporary accommodation
- LICO41 Percentage of householder planning applications processed within target times
- LIFCS56 Percentage of visitors satisfied by their website visit
- LINS19a Number of household waste collection (residual, dry and garden) missed twice or more in a 3-month period

The Group noted there had been 1,400 fly tipping incidents in which WISE had issued 72 fix penalty notices with prosecutions pending. The number of residents needing accommodation and the number of residential planning applications had both increased. The increase in the number of bin collections missed was due to an increase of agency staff not being familiar with assisted bin collections.

There were four additional tasks added to the Corporate Strategy:

- Implementation of proposals from the Resources and Waste Strategy for England
- Coordinate Rushcliffe's involvement in the Development Corporation and Freeport to support the redevelopment of the Ratcliffe on Soar site
- Support the recovery of local businesses and communities from the impacts of COVID

At its meeting on 2 November 2021, the Group were asked to consider the Quarter 1 position in terms of financial and performance monitoring for 2021/22.

The Group were informed of income losses related to the Covid pandemic; however, it was noted that for this financial year, the overall budget variance including Covid related pressures was expected to result in an overall efficiency on the Council's budgets. The Group were also informed of additional pressures on the Council's reserves that had been identified, including a financial contribution to Nottinghamshire County Council towards a feasibility study to pedestrianise Central Avenue and a £1000 one off retention payment to the refuse HGV drivers due to the unusual demand for HGV drivers nationally.

The Group noted that budgets within special expenses had been impacted by the Covid pandemic, particularly with loss of income from venue hire at Gamston Village Hall, which had been used as a vaccination centre. The Group were advised that the governments Sales, Fees and Charges Reimbursement Scheme had been extended to cover the first quarter of the year and this would be allocated to the West Bridgford Special Expenses fund to support the loss of income from closed facilities within West Bridgford.

The Group noted that the Council's projected financial position was stable, however risks remain present over the winter period with uncertainties in respect of Government funding and policies.

The Group were asked to comment on the monitored tasks outlined in the Corporate Strategy and the performance measures within the Corporate Scorecard. The Group noted that four strategic performance indicators had fallen below target, these were:

- LINS18 Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling, and composting
- LINS23 Residual waste collected per household, in kilos
- LICO64 Number of pavilion, community hall and playing field users
- LICO66 Percentage usage of community facilities

It was also noted that there were four operational performance exceptions:

- LIDEG01 Percentage of householder planning applications processed within target times
- LIDEG17 Percentage of planning enforcement inspections carried out in target time
- LIFCS61 Percentage of calls answered in 40 seconds
- LINS38 Robberies per 1,000 population

Detailed explanations were provided for all performance exceptions which the Group noted.

The Group approved the Council's Capital and Revenue Budgets and the expected outturn position and noted the comments for the performance exceptions, the performance of strategic tasks.

At its meeting on 1 February 2022, the Group were presented the quarter two position in terms of financial and performance monitoring for 2021/22.

The Group noted the variations in revenue efficiencies and Covid related pressures. It was noted that in respect of business rates, the Council expected a surplus, however, a significant proportion would need to be appropriated to the Collection Fund Reserves to cover the anticipated deficit expected to arise next year and in to 2023/24.

The Group welcomed the continued marketing of Edwalton Golf Course and other Council facilities following the Covid pandemic and this was fed back to the relevant officers involved.

The Group were asked to consider the performance measures within the Corporate Scorecard which reported that there were fourteen strategic performance indicators that had fallen below target, a summary of these were provided and noted by the Group.

The Group were advised that the Covid pandemic had affected residents' feelings of satisfaction in relation to Council services, which had been replicated nationally. It was noted that the Council would continue to engage with residents and were advised of its forthcoming Customer Service and Communications strategies expected in spring 2022.

The Group also noted that the lifting of Covid restrictions had seen an increase in venue usage and that a new booking system due to be launched in spring 2022 would assist the Community Facilities Teams to market the facilities and increase their usage further.

The Group noted the financial revenue and capital budgets and the comments in respect of performance.

At its meeting on 3 May 2022, the Group were presented the quarter three position in terms of financial and performance monitoring for 2021/22.

The Group were advised that budgets for quarter one had been set prudently in anticipation of an adverse impact on them due to the Covid pandemic. However, it was noted that the recovery had been quicker than expected due to revenue collected from car parks, leisure, planning and community facilities.

The Group were provided with the summary position for Quarter 3, including lost income and costs due to the Covid pandemic. It was noted that there was a Business Rate surplus which would be transferred to the Council's reserves to cover the anticipated deficit likely to arise next year and in 2023/24.

The Group were advised that there was a forecasted underspend in the Capital Programme in relation to the Bingham Hub, Crematorium and LAD funding for green energy grants and due to current projections, it was unlikely that there would be a need to borrow.

The Group noted a positive projected position. However, uncertainties over funding, increased costs of goods and services along with Government policy reviews, means that a healthy reserves position is vital to ensure the Council remains financially resilient.

The Group were asked to comment on the monitored tasks outlined in the Corporate Strategy and the performance measures within the Corporate Scorecard. The Group noted that two strategic tasks were still at 0% due to delays new legislation in respect of Planning and Waste services.

The Group were advised of one Performance Indicator exception in respect of:

- LINS32 Average waiting time of applicants rehoused by Choice Based Lettings

It was noted that this was due to delays relating to the Covid pandemic caused by a backlog of residents waiting to be rehoused by Metropolitan Housing.

The Group noted the financial revenue and capital budgets and the progress to date on the Strategic Tasks in respect of performance and whether additional scrutiny was required.

Health and Safety Annual Report

At its meeting on 20 July 2021, the Health and Safety Advisor presented the Health and Safety Annual Report which summarised the Council's operational health and safety performance during the period 1 April 2020 to the end of March 2021, including health and safety policies, procedures and activities which had taken place, training programmes delivered, statistical data and the proposed health and safety objectives for 2021/22.

The Health and Safety Advisor informed the Group that at the height of the Covid Pandemic when the majority of staff were working from home the Business Support Unit staff were provided with first aid training as they had a greater presence at the Arena.

The Group raised concerns regarding the percentage of staff who had not completed the fire safety e-learning course and the display screen assessments. It was noted that the e-learning system had recently been upgraded allowing managers to monitor staff with electronic reminders if courses had not been completed.

The Group were informed that members of staff had been provided with the opportunity to attend Red Umbrella webinars during the Covid pandemic, which covered topics such as anxiety, working from home and working collaboratively as a team. The Group acknowledged that the Council was in a strong position at the outbreak of the Covid pandemic, with most staff already working remotely.

The Group requested information regarding the impact the Covid pandemic had on the working environments for staff at home and in the office and it was agreed that this would be incorporated in the Council's response to Covid-19 to be scrutinised at a later meeting of the Corporate Overview Group.

The Group noted the Health and Safety Annual report and endorsed the health and safety objectives.

Customer Feedback Annual Report

The Service Manager – Finance and Corporate Services summarised the complaints which the Council received during 2020/21 with a comparison to previous performance. It was noted that:

- 49 complaints were received by the Council at Stage 1 of its complaints process – this is comparable with recent years despite the service pressures and hardships to residents caused by the pandemic
- The percentage of complaints escalated past Stage 1 has increased slightly from 20.0% in 2019/20 to 22.4% (11 from 49)
- Consistency in handling complaints has stayed at a high level, as has the number of complaints that are responded to within target time – 48 out of 49 – this is despite the additional work pressures of the last eighteen months
- Analysis of the 49 complaints received in 2020/21 showed that 61.2% were unjustified
- Seven complaints were directly related to the pandemic
- Fourteen complaints were referred by complainants to the Local Government Ombudsman – none of these complaints were upheld
- The Council received 155 compliments about its services in 2020/21 – 23 more than the previous year

The Impact of Covid-19 on Rushcliffe Borough Council – Internal Focus

At its meeting on 1 February 2022, the Group received a report which focused on the impact of Covid-19 on the Council internally, outlining how Rushcliffe Borough Council had responded and reacted to the Covid pandemic, and how the Council had activated its emergency plan. The report also detailed the effect of the Covid pandemic on staff, Council services and projects.

The Group questioned issues in relation to broadband connectivity and indicated that it wasn't only staff who were affected but some residents in the Borough were still without broadband. The Group were advised that despite broadband vouchers being available from Nottinghamshire County Council there were still issues and both the supplier and Nottinghamshire County Council should be encouraged to ensure no one is without broadband or mobile connectivity.

The Group noted that the Council had remained connected with its employees by encouraging staff to return to the Arena or contact centre once or twice a week. It was also acknowledged that staff were able to remain connected with events such as Red Umbrella sessions and virtual coffee mornings. It was noted that there had been some remuneration adjustments for those who had taken on extra roles and

responsibilities during the pandemic but that it was not always possible to recognise staff financially and that other reward systems were in place. It was noted an agreed that staff well-being should continue to be monitored.

The Group were informed of the 'Everybody In' grant which enabled the Council to offer bed and breakfast accommodation to those in need and after the initial lockdown these people were provided with alternative types of accommodation and support.

The Group raised concerns regarding the increase in fly-tipping and littering in the Borough during the Covid pandemic and were encouraged by the introduction of WISE for enforcement which had already seen positive outcomes with a drop in fly-tipping incidents in the last year. It was noted that the increase in littering was due to the Covid restrictions being lifted and when parks and green spaces had been heavily used.

The Group resolved that a copy of the report be circulated to all Councillors for consideration and comment and that employees be thanked in the next edition of Staff Matters.

The Impact of Covid-19 on Rushcliffe Borough Council - External Focus

At its meeting on 3 May 2022, the Group received a report concerning specific work undertaken by the Council to support communities and businesses during the Covid pandemic, focusing on the delivery of Council services.

The Group acknowledged that this included redeployment of staff to the Community Support Hub, hosted by Nottinghamshire County Council to support residents. Support was provided to:

- Those who could not work as they were self-isolating or were on low incomes with payments of £500 provided from Government funding with 531 payments made, amounting to £265,500
- Community groups, voluntary organisations, and charities for applying for Social Recovery Funding and Community Food funding
- Sports clubs with the allocation of Sport England's Emergency Fund and by providing Covid documentation, guidance, and risk assessments when re-opening
- The business community through a dedicated Covid-19 business support webpage which had received 41,000 views, and the allocation of £212,000 of Welcome Back Funding from the European Regional Development Fund to support the safe re-opening of town centres
- The offer of rent holidays to tenants in Council-owned commercial property
- Support to Leisure Centres to ensure safe re-opening
- support to businesses by the Environmental Health Team with complying with the Government's Covid guidance

It was noted that between May 2020 and August 2021, Rushcliffe Councillors had spent around £9,000 through the Community Support Grants Scheme, on projects to support local communities with managing the impact of the pandemic.

The Group was pleased that community facilities throughout Rushcliffe had been used as vaccination and testing sites and commended the amazing uprising from

communities across the Borough and the support from Parish Councils which had enabled the rapid provision of support to communities during the pandemic.

Diversity Annual Report

In May 2022, the Service Manager – Corporate Services gave a presentation to support the report of the Chief Executive which provided the Group with an update on delivery of the action plan for the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Scheme and included the annual diversity report update.

The Group noted that the data included in the report was from the Census 2011 as the data from the Census 2021 would not be available until October 2022 and was pleased to note that the data provided was not significantly different to that included in the previous report received - the demographic of the Council's workforce was higher (94%) than that for the Borough, and that the figure for the Borough was higher than that for the East Midlands (89%) and nationally (85%).

The Service Manager Corporate Services noted that Rushcliffe had a larger proportion of residents over 60 years of age (25%) than the East Midlands (23.5%) and nationally (22%), with a larger proportion of residents aged 45-59 and fewer younger residents aged 18-24 when compared to the rates for the East Midlands and Nationally. The Group was pleased that the Council continued to support employees who wished to continue working, keeping knowledge within the organisation as well as working towards ensuring effective succession planning by improving the age diversity of the workforce.

The Group was informed that the number of employees who declared they had a disability was the same as the previous year (5%) and, as a Disability Confident Employer, the Council continued to support them in their employment.

The Service Manager – Corporate Services informed the Group that the gender pay gap had narrowed from 8.9% (in 2017) to now a difference of less than 1%, which was due to an improved gender balance in senior positions.

The Group was pleased to hear that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion actions were embedded in Service Plans and that a range of actions had been taken including: the Council's website complied with Accessibility Regulations, an event had been held for 30 Year 10 students from Toothill School to engage them in democracy and that training in British Sign Language was being explored for customer services staff.

Member Panels

The Group did not establish any Member Panels this year.

Call-ins

The Group did not discuss any call-ins this year.

Looking forward to the year ahead

Following a busy year for the Council's scrutiny functions, all members of Corporate Overview Group are looking forward to developing comprehensive work programmes for the scrutiny groups in 2022/23.