

Communities Scrutiny Group

Chairman's Foreword

This annual report summarises the main work undertaken by the Communities Scrutiny Group 2021/22. Following a review of the Council's scrutiny functions in 2018, it was recommended that a scrutiny group be created to oversee the Council's community partnerships, areas of community concern and the Council's responsibility to be environmentally sustainable.

The Communities Scrutiny Group have scrutinised topics such as the Council's Safeguarding Adults and Children Strategy and Police Performance and Resources in Rushcliffe.

The outbreak of Covid-19 undoubtedly presented challenges to the communities of Rushcliffe, however, the Group continued to monitor on-going projects and government policies over the next twelve months including the Council's Housing Delivery Plan.

I would like to thank all members of the Group for their very active involvement, support, and topic suggestions and particularly my Vice Chairman, Councillor Bal Bansal.

Councillor Jonathan Wheeler
Chairman Communities Scrutiny Group



Councillor Jonathan Wheeler
Chairman



Councillor Bal Bansal
Vice Chairman

What we are responsible for?

The Communities Scrutiny Group responsibilities include:

- Reviewing the Council's partnerships to ensure that community needs are being met and the partnership is providing good value for money.
- Identifying areas of community concern, exploring how this can be met and making recommendations to that effect.
- Considering concerns specific to the local area in terms of health and wellbeing and making recommendations to improve the health and wellbeing of local residents.
- Considering projects and initiatives to further the Council's efforts to protect the environment of the Borough and promote environmental sustainability to our residents.

Our work this year

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

- WISE: Environmental Crime Enforcement
- Safeguarding Adults and Children Strategy
- Police Performance and Resources in Rushcliffe
- YouNG and Positive Futures
- Housing Delivery Plan
- Feedback on Residents' Survey 2021
- Carbon Management Plan

WISE: Environmental Crime Enforcement

The Group received a presentation reviewing the Council's partnership with WISE, and how WISE operated.

Members of the Group noted the positive outcomes and behaviour change that had resulted from this trial and looked forward to the trial being extended for a further twelve months.

Members of the Group noted that the pilot was focussed on complaints relating to fly tipping, dog fouling and littering. The Group was informed that once a complaint was received, WISE officers had 24 hours to investigate and whilst in an area officers would also undertake proactive patrolling. During the six month trial WISE had initially been given a 'hot spot' list from Environmental Health and that had been expanded.

The Group was informed that for enforcement action against littering to take place, a person had to be seen by an officer in the act of littering, and in such cases the standard operating procedures would be followed for issuing a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN).

The Group noted that WISE would investigate all instances of fly tipping, and if evidence could be found, an FPN would be issued; however, there was an exemption in the legislation for a landowner to be able to deposit waste on their property or give permission to someone else to do so. With respect to cleansing, the Group was advised that if it was public land, WISE would investigate and contact Streetwise to remove it; however, if it was private land, it would be referred to Environmental Health for further investigation. Cases of waste storage on private land would also be referred to the County Council for investigation, as potentially those sites may require planning permission.

The Group was advised that in the first instance the Police were responsible for dealing with ASB. WISE could also work outside normal hours to deal with ASB and littering.

Safeguarding Adults and Children Strategy

The Group received a report from the Director, Neighbourhoods updating on the Council's approach to safeguarding and were advised that the Council worked closely with key partners as a team, to ensure the safety of children and vulnerable adults in the Borough. The Group was reminded of the key role that Councillors played whilst undertaking their duties.

The Group received a presentation relating to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. The Group asked about the possibility of having all Councillors signed up to the Nottinghamshire safeguarding website.

The Group was informed that Lex Leisure were fully involved in safeguarding and that the Council's Sports Development Officer worked with voluntary and community based clubs, ensuring that they had appropriate safeguarding policies in place and knew how to share information if they had any concerns. The Group noted that there was an expectation that each club would have a Safeguarding Officer and that they would know how to make any referrals. If any concerns were raised, they would be fed through the channels in a similar way, and officers were trained on how to make any safeguarding referrals to the MASH.

The Group noted that during the past year, there had been an increase in enquiries from families and neighbours, as more time was spent at home, and there had been a rise in concerns raised about domestic abuse and mental health.

The Group noted that during the pandemic an increased risk of domestic abuse had been identified, and Rushcliffe had worked closely with the County Council via the Local Resilience Forum. Two additional temporary domestic refuges had been set up in the County, which had proved to be very effective in providing a safe haven to those who needed it.

The Group noted the great example of partnership working with the County Council, who had responded positively to support the existing housing provision that Rushcliffe had, given that occupancy rates had been reduced because of social distancing.

The Group noted initiatives were taking place as a result of the new Domestic Abuse Act, with local authorities having a duty to provide local women's refuges. The Group

noted that the County Council and district and borough councils had received some funding from Central Government and a Domestic Abuse Partnership Board was being established. Refuges were commissioned by the County Council through the Public Health Service and through the new Partnership Board.

Police Performance and Resources in Rushcliffe

The Group received a presentation from the Neighbourhood Policing Inspector for Rushcliffe regarding South Nottinghamshire Community Safety Partnership (SNCSP). The Group noted that the Partnership covered the administrative areas of Rushcliffe, Broxtowe, and Gedling.

The Group was informed that the Safer Nottinghamshire Board aimed to bring together key agencies involved in community safety and had a strategy and action plan to help tackle crime against the vulnerable, as cybercrime had increased by over 340% in the last 12 months. The Group was also informed that a local action plan for community safety work in the borough was funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner, split between Gedling, Broxtowe, and Rushcliffe and that much of the proactive work of this plan was delivered in partnership with Rushcliffe's Community Safety officer.

The Group noted that the Police and Crime Commissioner funded JUNO Women's Aid across the county and also Equation which was an organisation providing support for men experiencing domestic abuse.

The Group noted that if crime was reported, it was more likely to be added to the neighbourhood policing teams' list of priorities.

The Group welcomed discussions with the local education authority about methods to educate boys about violence against women.

YouNG and Positive Futures

The Group received a presentation which detailed the Borough's activities for children and young people. The Group noted that the Council's largest project supporting children and young people was the Trent Bridge Community Trust (TBCT) who facilitated delivery of the Positive Futures and YouNG programmes in Rushcliffe.

The Group noted that a young person could be referred by teachers, the police, parents and even by the young person themselves. The majority of young people that the TBCT were working with on a one-to-one basis were suffering from mental health related illnesses and TBCT supported them in undertaking activities such as walking, going to the gym, and making jewellery. The TBCT also facilitated a transition programme for year 6 pupils in the lead up to starting secondary school.

The Group were pleased to learn that YouNG markets were due to take place across the Borough at the Christmas light switch on events in West Bridgford and Cotgrave.

The Group suggested that the TBCT could benefit from funding from the Council's Community Support Scheme and Nottinghamshire County Council's divisional fund which could help fund additional markets in Rushcliffe.

The Group endorsed the work of the TBCT and in particular praised the activities which had taken place in Cotgrave in the summer, which were attended by over 400 young people.

Housing Delivery Plan

The Group received a presentation from the Strategic Housing Manager and noted that the Housing Delivery Plan would be an overarching document which set out priorities for housing and the actions being taken to secure improvements. The proposed plan aimed to link the housing service more closely with corporate priorities, for example the Carbon Management Plan and the South Nottinghamshire Homelessness Strategy.

The Group was informed that it was more challenging to deliver bungalows due to the increased land take and associated costs which may impact on site viability, however, the provision of bungalows was important to support downsizing for older tenants who may be under-occupying family housing. Through successful affordable housing negotiations, a mix of affordable accommodation types, including bungalows were planned on the Council's strategic sites.

The Group noted that there was a higher need for social rented accommodation rather than affordable housing for sale, such as shared ownership, and therefore any opportunities to bring forward additional affordable housing would seek to prioritise social rented housing.

The Group noted in relation to empty homes that whilst enforcement action and Empty Development Management Orders were options that the Council could consider, in the first instance Officers would support owners to bring the properties back into use as a preferred approach.

The Group raised their concerns about homelessness within the Borough and were informed that the annual Rough Sleepers Count in 2021 had identified four rough sleepers in Rushcliffe who were 'bedded down' and met the evidence-based criteria. The Group were informed that the Council had a number of landlord incentives to house homeless people in private rented accommodation, including rent deposit guarantees, rent in advance, and Golden Hello' payments, which resulted in a six-month assured shorthold tenancy.

The Group also noted that two successful bids to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities as part of the Next Steps Accommodation Programme and the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme had provided thirteen units of supported accommodation for rough sleepers across south Nottinghamshire. In addition, a fourth successful countywide bid for Rough Sleeper Initiatives funding had provided homeless people with access to floating support services, health and wound care, a Community Psychiatric Nurse, substance and misuse services and landlord liaison officers to facilitate access to private rented accommodation.

The Group were pleased to note that veterans were not disadvantaged in accessing the housing register due to local connection criteria and if they qualified for housing, they were given additional preference.

Feedback on Residents' Survey 2021

The Group received the report of the Director – Finance and Corporate Services which outlined the results of the residents' survey that took place in summer 2021. The survey was conducted every three years and asked for feedback from residents on key Council services and suggestions for making the Borough an even better place to live and work.

The Group was informed that there was a small downward trend in the levels of satisfaction indicated by residents in a number of areas, which had been anticipated given the impact of the COVID-19 over the last 18-months on Rushcliffe communities. The Group noted that the Local Government Association had reported that councils who carried out surveys this year were seeing a drop of 4-6% on previous results.

The Group was pleased to note that the percentage of people having overall satisfaction in the local area as a place to live remained very high at 84% and had slightly increased since the previous survey.

The Group noted that the largest proportion of less positive comments related to services run by the County Council and that a large number related to potholes, road, and pavement maintenance. In addition, 68 comments were made in regards to services provided by the Police including anti-social behaviour. The Group concluded that the fact that so many residents left feedback that related to other organisations suggested that there was still a lack of understanding about which organisation did what, and so feedback that related to levels of satisfaction may also be influenced positively or negatively by residents' perceptions of services that the Borough Council did not provide.

The Group noted the suggestion that a focus group be formed so that the Council could target its response to the survey feedback in areas where it believed it could make a measurable difference. The Group noted that residents involved in the focus group would more than likely be those who already engaged with the Council and suggested that the Council reach out to community groups to improve engagement.

The Group proposed that the next residents survey in 2024 should ask for residents to submit their postcode so that issues raised could be narrowed down by area. The Group also recommended that the survey take place at a different time of year rather than the summer to see if different concerns were raised. The Group suggested that the survey should be promoted on social media including local Facebook groups and at parish council meetings.

Carbon Management Plan

The Group received a presentation from the Service Manager – Neighbourhoods updating on progress of delivery of the Carbon Management Plan for the year 2021/22 and proposed actions for 2022/23, in order to become carbon neutral by 2030.

The Group recognised that the target to be carbon neutral by 2030 was ambitious as only 7% of emissions were generated by the public sector; and that a large proportion of emissions came from public transport, people commuting to work and domestic use in houses. The Carbon Management Plan addressed emissions generated by the Borough Council only.

The Group was informed that 'Carbon Clever' branding was included on all Council communications as a means of promoting the work being carried out.

The Group welcomed updates on the Council's emissions, noting that Rushcliffe Oaks was one of the first electrically powered cremators in the UK, which would reduce carbon emissions by up to 80% compared to a traditional gas cremator.

The Group noted that the Council had undertaken a waste vehicle biofuel trial which had been successful and resulted in a carbon saving reduction of over 12000 tonnes of CO₂. The Council was exploring the roll-out of the product across the waste collection fleet. The Group also noted the planned purchase of electric vehicles at Rushcliffe Country Park with the aim of the Country Park becoming net zero in its operation.

The Group was informed that 1,361 trees had been supplied to Rushcliffe groups and residents, which would remove two tonnes of CO₂ per year from the atmosphere. Small areas around the Borough would also be left to grow as part of the 'No Mow' scheme to support pollinators.

The Group learned that there were seven electric vehicle charging sites across the Borough and it was planned that 34 would be available by the end of 2022. The charging hub at Gamston Community Centre was powered by natural solar light.

The Group noted that The Big Business Carbon Club worked with local businesses to share best practice and ideas and also that the Council had been instrumental in setting up a Green Rewards platform for residents to record their green activity in exchange for points, with the points being attached to incentives such as discounts in local shops and restaurants.

The Group noted that officers had completed an energy audit of all Council assets, to understand the carbon footprint of each and to prioritise those that needed addressing urgently. The Group commended officers for the quantity of activity being undertaken in order to achieve carbon neutral by 2030 and net zero by 2050.

In relation to Carbon Literacy training, the Group suggested that this be focused on developers so as to have a greater impact and noted the suggestion to include such training within the Council's staff induction processes. Additionally, the Group were informed that rolling-out the training to town and parish councils would be explored to encourage them to set their own targets.

Regarding energy audits of Council-owned property, the Group was informed that the Leisure Strategy would be reviewed next year, with a mid-point review of the Leisure

Strategy 2017-27 undertaken later this year, with findings to be reported back to the Group.

In relation to planting of trees and wildflowers to aid carbon management by offsetting emissions, the Group was informed that this was a delicate balance as many open spaces, for example Rushcliffe Country Park, were used as amenity space, so could not be planted fully with trees. An Offsetting Strategy would be developed to aid achievement of targets by 2030.

The Group expressed concern about the use of building materials, for example the steel posts used to build Rushcliffe Oaks which had been imported and the use of concrete which was not carbon neutral. The Group was informed that although innovation was welcomed the Council needed to balance costs and the return on investment with the need to meet carbon reduction targets.

The Group recognised the volume of activity being undertaken to achieve the carbon reduction targets and suggested that more promotional activity should be undertaken to make residents aware of the Council's activity, the support in place to enable them to work towards being carbon neutral including more walking and cycling, inform them of the installation of EVCPs, what could be recycled at Recycling and Household Waste Sites and also to promote the work of the Nottingham Energy Partnership.

Regarding recycling and waste, the Group was informed that an ongoing campaign regarding recycling was undertaken across Nottinghamshire through the Joint Waste Officer Group and the Joint Waste Member Group. The Council also carried out waste audits and received monthly contamination reports to identify issues with the contents of recycling bins and carried out communication campaigns to inform residents of items that should be recycled. Officers agreed to explore the distribution of leaflets through Estate Agencies.

The Group was informed that Rushcliffe continued to have the highest recycling rate in Nottinghamshire.

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

The Communities Scrutiny Group is looking forward to developing a comprehensive work programme for the year ahead.