



## **Communities Scrutiny Group**

**Thursday, 19 January 2023**

### **Establishment of a Youth Council**

## **Report of the Director Neighbourhoods**

### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1. A motion to create a youth council focused on environmental topics was proposed (and lost) at Council in December 2021. A scrutiny matrix was subsequently submitted that asked for an investigation into whether a broader youth council for Rushcliffe could be established.
- 1.2. Investigations have taken place which have found that Rushcliffe has a fledgling Youth Forum chaired by the Member of Youth Parliament for Rushcliffe and supported by the County Council. This group would like to build links with the Borough Council and is interested in support that the Borough Council could offer.
- 1.3. This report provides information about the Rushcliffe Youth Forum and suggests a number of ways that the Borough Council could support its development and growth if a collaborative relationship is sought.

### **2. Recommendation**

It is RECOMMENDED that Communities Scrutiny Group:

- a) Consider the information about youth councils in the report and provided by officers at the meeting
- b) Recommend to Cabinet that the Borough Council supports the existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum for the next two years to help expand membership, increase awareness and increase opportunities for collaboration.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1. Investigations have shown that youth councils can be a valuable part of democracy within a district area and that given the right support young people can affect change at a local level.
- 3.2. Rushcliffe has a fledgling Youth Forum chaired by the Member of Youth Parliament for Rushcliffe. The Forum is owned and run by young people – this is an important part of its future effectiveness and acceptance by young people. The Council can support its growth and build a productive working

relationship with its members providing opportunities for collaboration in the future.

## **4. Supporting Information**

### *Background*

4.1. In December 2021 Councillor R Jones submitted a motion as follows:

“Threats from avoidable Climate Change to the future are all too real and Council has a leadership role in promoting action to reduce the local carbon footprint. Council believes that the voice of young people in Rushcliffe should be enhanced through the implementation of a structure for considering and advocating carbon reducing behaviour within Rushcliffe. This will be best achieved by establishing a 'Rushcliffe Youth Council for Action on Climate Change' involving representatives of young people in Secondary Schools. This Council commits to investigating the establishment of a youth council through engagement with each of the eight local schools and YOUNG with a view to implementing this Rushcliffe initiative in early 2022. The Communities Scrutiny Group will consider progress to achieve Youth Council, its remit and the interaction with the Council and the Community”.

4.2. In presenting his motion Councillor Jones argued that young people in Rushcliffe did not currently have an opportunity to influence the decisions that may affect them in the future. He also stated that young people were very concerned about climate change and therefore the single focus of the youth council was likely to generate engagement. The ensuing debate highlighted general support for the establishment of a youth council but questioned the narrow remit of one focused entirely on climate change. Councillor J Wheeler suggested that a scrutiny matrix be brought forward, and an investigation undertaken to establish what was done elsewhere and recommend a course of action for Rushcliffe. The motion was lost.

4.3. In February 2022 the Corporate Overview Group considered a scrutiny matrix brought forward jointly by Councillors J Wheeler and Jones. It asked scrutiny to:

“consider how we can establish a Youth Council to enable the Council to engage with our young people to hear their views on key subjects such as Climate Change, our Nature Strategy and leisure provision as well as other areas we are responsible for. This Youth Council should aim to have representation from every Secondary School across year groups, as well as YOUNG and Positive Futures. Primary School aged children should also have an opportunity to contribute”.

4.4. The matrix was supported, and scrutiny scheduled for January 2023 by the Communities Scrutiny Group.

### *Initial investigations*

- 4.5. Initial investigations focused on councils in the local area that already have a youth council or similar. Following a web search, visits or phone calls were made to Blaby, Gedling, Newark and Sherwood, and Bassetlaw. These investigations highlighted a number of different models and varying levels of success.
- 4.6. In Blaby, the youth council is run by the district council, is well attended and has reached maturity (i.e. it had been running successfully for a number of years). The same is true in Gedling where the youth council is a joint venture between Gedling Borough Council and Nottinghamshire County Council. Bassetlaw District Council has a small but well developed and active youth council. Newark and Sherwood District Council are in the process of setting up their youth council but are doing so along the same lines as Gedling Borough Council in partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council.
- 4.7. In all examples outlined above, the youth council is chaired by the district's Member of the Youth Parliament. The UK Youth Parliament "enables young people to use their energy and passion to change the world for the better" by providing opportunities for 11-18 year olds to use their elected voice to bring about social change through meaningful representation and campaigning". Members of Youth Parliament are elected every two years and, once elected, they meet with MPs and local councillors, organise events, run campaigns, make speeches, hold debates, and ensure the views of young people are listened to by decision makers.
- 4.8. Rushcliffe's Member of Youth Parliament is called Oliver Keay. Oliver is in year 13 at Rushcliffe Spencer Academy and has been our MYP for the last 18 months. He is particularly interested in the environment, the protection of green spaces and charity work.
- 4.9. In some places, separate arrangements exist for a Youth Mayor who may accompany the Mayor or Chairman on engagements. This person is part of the youth council but not the Member of Youth Parliament.
- 4.10. Following discussions with a number of councils about their youth councils it became clear that the involvement of Nottinghamshire County Council Youth Services and the locally elected Member of Youth Parliament were both factors contributing to the success of the youth council.

#### *Engagement with local schools*

- 4.11. Alongside the above outlined investigations, an email was sent to all secondary schools in the Borough. It asked the following questions:
  - Does your school currently have a youth council or similar body?
  - Do pupils from your school sit on a youth council or similar body that is organised by somebody else (please give details below)?
  - Would you be happy for your students to represent the school on a youth council?

- Would the school be able to take responsibility for recruiting and selecting representatives to the youth council?
- Please provide the contact details of the best person at your school to contact regarding the youth council if one is set up?

4.12. No responses were received to this initial email, or the follow-up email that was sent after the summer break. Anecdotal evidence suggests that schools are currently focused on assisting students to catch-up as a result of the impact of repeated Covid lockdowns over the last few years. In addition, evidence from other areas suggests that whilst many schools have a school council or equivalent these tend to be focused internally within the school rather than on broader topics or campaigns.

4.13. It was clear from the outset that if the Council were to set up a youth council then recruitment via schools would be difficult if not impossible without assistance from other parties.

#### *Nottinghamshire County Council*

4.14. Nottinghamshire County Council has an active Youth Services department who support Young People's Centres across the county, deliver the 4Uth Awards, provide support to young people in a variety of situations, and act as the administrative link between the county's seven Members of Youth Parliament. They are also very involved with the youth councils in Gedling and Newark and Sherwood, and keen to help establish more formal arrangements in other district areas across the county. They have recently developed draft terms of reference for the joint support of a youth council in a district area and these are included at Appendix One for information. The County Council's Youth Services Officer was able to tell us about the Rushcliffe Youth Forum that the County Council already supports.

#### *Rushcliffe Youth Forum*

4.15. Rushcliffe's Member of Youth Parliament, Oliver Keay, is the chair of Rushcliffe Youth Forum. The Forum meets six times a year either online or at the Young People's Centre in West Bridgford. The Forum is supported by Amy Beckworth from Nottinghamshire County Council Youth Services. Attendees at Forum meetings vary in number and recent activities have focused on the protection of green spaces, the environment, and charity events.

4.16. Officers were invited to attend a Youth Forum meeting in October 2022 to find out more about the work and aspirations of the Youth Forum and its members. The existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum is keen to build relationships with Rushcliffe's Leader and Mayor. They would like to increase the profile of the Youth Forum and represent the views of young people within the Borough so that these are more visibly taken into account by the Council. At the current time all active members of the Youth Forum are from one school and the Member of Youth Parliament would welcome support to increase the membership and diversity of Forum members across the Borough.

### *Investigation Findings*

4.17. In examining whether a youth council should be established for the Borough of Rushcliffe the following findings have been made:

- Rushcliffe has a Youth Forum which operates as a youth council
- It is chaired by the Member of Youth Parliament for Rushcliffe
- It is supported by Nottinghamshire County Council Youth Services
- Numbers are low and it has been difficult to engage young people and schools following the pandemic
- It is difficult for the Borough Council to engage with schools – because of their remit, the County Council is better placed to do this and has had more success in the past
- Many schools both primary and secondary have a school council – most are self-sufficient and inwardly focused on school life but there is scope to attract more members to the Youth Forum with adequate publicity and opportunity
- Introducing a separate and additional youth council for Rushcliffe does not seem to be a good idea – it would be in competition with the Youth Forum for members and lack the support of the County Council and leadership of the Member of Youth Parliament for Rushcliffe
- The Borough Council has no remit or resources to set up a youth council – this would be a discretionary activity and would need funding out of already stretched budgets.

4.18. As a result of these findings, it is suggested that the Council considers supporting the existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum rather than establishing a youth council from scratch.

### *Potential Support*

4.19. The following areas of potential support were discussed with the existing members of the Rushcliffe Youth Forum and their support officer, Amy Beckworth from Nottinghamshire County Council Youth Services:

- Venue – offering free of charge room hire at Rushcliffe Arena for half of the Youth Forum meetings each year
- Attendance – offering an officer to attend all Youth Forum meetings to observe, answer questions and provide insight when invited to do so
- Attendance – offering a portfolio holder (or other senior, relevant councillor) to attend dependent on the focus of discussion to observe, answer questions and provide insight when invited to do so
- Consultation – actively seeking the views of young people as represented by members of the Youth Forum on key decisions
- Projects – actively involving members of the Youth Forum in Council projects where priorities overlap or are complimentary

- Publicity – assisting the Youth Forum to create an online presence and amplifying their messages where appropriate on the Council’s social media channels and in Rushcliffe Reports
- Membership – hosting a Young People’s Summit at the Council Offices with the Youth Forum and Nottinghamshire County Council Youth Services; targeted at members of school councils but open to all; discussing topics of importance to young people and promoting involvement in the Youth Forum moving forward to increase membership and awareness.

4.20. Current members of the Youth Forum were very grateful for the input of the Borough Council Officers and the ideas put forward.

#### *Suggested Discussion Points*

4.21. To assist the Group in their debate, the following questions have been posed as a starting point:

- Does the Group feel that there is a need or desire to establish a youth council or equivalent in the Borough?
- Does the Group have questions about the existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum and Nottinghamshire County Council Youth Services that have not been answered in this report?
- Does the Group believe that working with the existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum and Nottinghamshire County Council Youth Services is a suitable option?
- Does the Group believe that the potential ways in which the Borough Council can work with and support the existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum outlined in paragraph 4.19 will enhance and develop the existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum and meet the aspirations outlined in the original motion and scrutiny matrix?
- Does the Group have additional ideas that would contribute towards the development of the Rushcliffe Youth Forum?

#### *Conclusions*

4.22. Following discussion, the Group is asked to consider the recommendation put forward.

### **5. Risks and Uncertainties**

5.1. There is a risk that despite the involvement of the Borough Council it continues to be difficult to engage young people in the work of the Youth Forum. This would result in Borough Council resources being wasted. Without new members the current Youth Forum is likely to become untenable as all members are currently in their final year at school.

5.2. Additionally, the Youth Forum is an independent body and will consider those issues that it considers to be important. At times these may be different to, or in conflict with, the Council’s priorities. The Council will not be able to control

the Youth Forum but should seek a positive and supportive working relationship.

## **6. Implications**

### **6.1. Financial Implications**

By offering free of charge room hire there could be a potential loss of income assuming the demand is at capacity. The costs associated with staff attending the Youth Forum and liaison with Member of Youth Parliament and Nottinghamshire County Council Youth Services would be minimal and contained within existing budgets.

### **6.2. Legal Implications**

DBS checks would be needed if officers were working alone with the young people on the Youth Forum. However, the NCC Youth Services Officer is DBS checked and as long as they are present no one else needs to be checked.

### **6.3. Equalities Implications**

Encouraging engagement with young people in democracy and making sure their voices are heard.

### **6.4. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications**

The Youth Forum presents a safe and effective way of young people bringing the issues that are important to them to the attention of decision makers.

## **7. Link to Corporate Priorities**

Quality of Life	Young people are an important group of residents, and it is important that the Council does what it can to ensure they are engaged and have a say in the issues that affect them and their future. The Youth Forum would provide a clear link between young people and the Council.
Efficient Services	Young people are Council service users of the future and may have very interesting ideas about how services should be delivered. The Council is always interesting in hearing from users about how services could be improved.
Sustainable Growth	Young people wanting to stay local to their families will have a view on growth within the Borough and may have a different perspective about how and where that growth should be. The Council is open to the views of residents as they understand how emotive this issue can be.
The Environment	Young people are very concerned about the Environment and feel very passionately about the future of the planet. On a local

level this passion can lead to change within the Borough if heard and resourced. The Youth Forum would facilitate that process.

## 8. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that Communities Scrutiny Group:

- a) Consider the information about youth councils in the report and provided by officers at the meeting
- b) Recommend to Cabinet that the Borough Council supports the existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum for the next two years to help expand membership, increase awareness and increase opportunities for collaboration.

<b>For more information contact:</b>	Charlotte Caven-Atack Service Manager - Corporate Services Tel: 0115 9148278 ccaven-atack@rushcliffe.gov.uk
<b>Background papers available for Inspection:</b>	
<b>List of appendices:</b>	Appendix One: NCC Draft Terms of Reference for the Youth Forum