



**Cabinet**

**Tuesday, 14 March 2023**

**Support to the Rushcliffe Youth Forum**

## **Report of the Director – Neighbourhoods**

### **Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Communities and Climate Change, Councillor A Brennan**

#### **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. The Communities Scrutiny Group considered a report on 19 January 2023 and received representations both from officers and the Youth Services Officer from Nottinghamshire County Council currently supporting the Rushcliffe Youth Forum. The Group considered the information presented and agreed to recommend to Cabinet that the existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum is supported for the next two years to help expand membership, increase awareness and increase opportunities for collaboration.

#### **2. Recommendation**

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet agrees to support 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 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.
- 4.7. 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.
- 4.8. 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.

### *Rushcliffe Youth Forum*

- 4.9. Rushcliffe's Member of Youth Parliament, Oliver Keay, is the chair of Rushcliffe Youth Forum. Oliver is in year 13 at Rushcliffe Spencer Academy and has been our Member of Youth Parliament for the last 18 months. The Rushcliffe Youth 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.

### *Investigation Findings*

- 4.10. In examining whether a youth council should be established for the Borough of Rushcliffe the following findings were made and were discussed at scrutiny:
  - 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.

4.11. As a result of these findings from the scrutiny process, it is recommended that the Council supports the existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum rather than establishing a separate youth council.

#### *Potential Support*

- 4.12. The following areas of potential support were discussed at scrutiny as well as 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.

## *Conclusions*

- 4.13. Approval is sought from Cabinet to support the existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum with the above activities designed to expand membership, increase awareness and increase opportunities for collaboration.

## **5. Alternative options considered and reasons for rejection**

- 5.1. The Cabinet could decide not to support the Rushcliffe Youth Forum as this is a discretionary area of service and budgets could be more appropriately focused on statutory services and areas of priority need.

## **6. Risks and Uncertainties**

- 6.1. 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.
- 6.2. 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.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1. 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.

### **7.2. 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.

### **7.3. Equalities Implications**

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

#### 7.4. 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.

#### 8. 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.

#### 9. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that Cabinet agrees to support the existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum for the next two years to help expand membership, increase awareness and increase opportunities for collaboration.

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<b>Background papers available for Inspection:</b>	Communities Scrutiny Group – 19 January 2023
<b>List of appendices:</b>	