

Communities Scrutiny Group

Chair's Foreword

This annual report summarises the main work undertaken by the Communities Scrutiny Group 2022/23 focusing on the impact of scrutiny. This Group specifically focuses upon the Council's community partnerships, areas of community concern and the Council's responsibility to be environmentally sustainable.

The Group has explored the Council's Communities responsibilities in line with the Council's priorities within the Corporate Strategy, which 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.

Councillor Gareth Williams
Chair Communities Scrutiny Group



Councillor Gareth Williams
Chair



Councillor Jenny Murray
Vice-Chair

What are we responsible for?

The Communities Scrutiny Group's remit is to consider relevant topics, in line with the Council's priorities, taking into account the Corporate Strategy and those of officers and councillors for inclusion in a work programme agreed by the Corporate Overview Group.

Both Councillors and officers are required to complete a scrutiny matrix to outline a topic they would like to be considered for scrutiny. The matrix summarises the issue of concern as well as the key lines of enquiry for review.

Our work this year:

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

- Access Agreement – Canals and Rivers Trust
- Sports Development in Rushcliffe
- External Communications Strategy
- Customer Access Strategy
- Establishment of a Youth Council
- Corporate Enforcement
- Carbon Management Plan
- Environment Policy.

Access Agreement – Canals and River Trust

The Group received a presentation from the Canal and Rivers Trust which highlighted the extent of the waterways within the Borough, the funding streams available to the Trust and the rolling programme of towpath works carried out by the Trust, including vegetation management, tree works and clearance, aquatic weed and invasive plant removal. The Group learned about the health and wellbeing benefits that canals provide to their communities.

The Communities Manager provided an update to the Group about the Council's Access Agreement with the Trust for the Grantham Canal which was due to expire in March 2024.

The Group asked about loss of water and thought it important for work to be carried out to address leaks and blocked culverts to maintain the flow of water and suggested that the Trust look to increase its profile and encourage voluntary support.

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – September 2023:
Approve the work undertaken by the partnership with the Canal and River Trust and the work undertaken by the current access agreement	The Canal and rivers trust continue to deliver the service level agreement and has worked with the authority to deliver a weed clearance project using UKSPF funding

Comment on future arrangements for when the current agreement expires in 2024	The Canal and rivers Trust has developed a menu of options to be considered and commented on at the scrutiny on October so further recommendations of future SLA can be made to Cabinet and factored into the budget setting process for future years
Requested that a further report be brought to Communities Scrutiny Group before the current agreement expires in 2024	The proposal on future arrangements will be brought back to Communities Scrutiny on the 05/10/2023 and is included on the forward plan

Sports Development in Rushcliffe

The Group received a presentation from the Communities Manager about the Council's delivery of its Sports and Development programme which was underpinned by both the Rushcliffe Leisure Strategy and the Rushcliffe Playing Pitch Strategy. The Group noted that Rushcliffe has higher than average activity levels compared to Nottinghamshire and England and learned about barriers to residents taking part in sport and physical activities and how the Council sought to target these through the Reach Rushcliffe Fund and working with local partners and sports clubs.

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – September 2023:
Receive a presentation about work undertaken by officers in delivering the Sport Development function and discuss future activity in promoting sport and wellbeing to our residents	<p>Since presenting at Scrutiny in June 2022, the following programmes, initiatives, and achievements have been implemented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36 international athletes supported by the Rushcliffe Elite Sports Grant • 77 National standard athletes are on the Rushcliffe FANS membership (free access to gym and swim at Council owned leisure facilities) • 27 coaches supported financially to complete a coaching qualification through the Coach Scholarship Scheme • Worked with Rushcliffe Athletics Club to see the return of the Rushcliffe 10k after a 3-year absence • Mid-Point Review of the Playing Pitch Strategy • Mid-Point Review of the Leisure Strategy • Worked with British Cycling to train 5 Guided Ride Leaders who will deliver a programme of guided rides across Rushcliffe

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered a free cycling event at Rushcliffe Country Park • Developed a new 2-year SLA with Nottingham Rugby Club • Safe Hearts in Sport project – funding from UKSPF to provide defibrillators and external units at sports venues across the borough. The project will also provide training for venue staff, coaches and volunteers at sports clubs and improved signage at venues (in progress)
--	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

External Communication Strategy

The Group received a presentation about the Council’s External Communications Strategy, including the important role external communication play in strengthening the Council’s relationship with residents and in communicating the Council’s priorities and activities designed to meet the needs of the community. The Group also received an update about the Council’s internal communications strategy which focussed on internal stakeholders such as Councillors and staff.

Group discussion included resident’s survey findings, the use of social media, email subscriptions, the use of local government acronyms and ‘speak’ and providing a range of different types of communications targeted to the demographic and needs of the community.

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – September 2023:
Review the action plan for the External and Internal Communications Strategy 2022-2025	The Group reviewed the action plan and provided feedback. Plans are now in place to tailor content and reach out to the younger audience with the possible launch of a TikTok social media channel being explored. Information is ever more inclusive in line with the launch of the Council’s new website www.rushcliffe.gov.uk in April 2023 and audio versions of its Rushcliffe Reports magazine continue to be available. Residents’ comments are ever more listened to in helping shape communications content and further balanced output focuses on where the Council can improve its services, as well as celebrate its successes.

Customer Access Strategy

The Group received a presentation about the Council's Customer Access Strategy which highlighted the key themes of:

- Building on and exploring innovation
- Embedding further self-service
- Reviewing and building on partnerships
- Listening and responding.

The Group were informed that the Council's aim was to deliver contemporary, efficient and easy to use contact channels to enable customers to access the Council's services where and when they needed them. As part of that, the Strategy sought to identify and explore innovative digital options and to ensure that it was adapting to new technologies, whilst balancing this with traditional face to face and over the phone services.

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – September 2023:
Review the action plan for the Customer Access Strategy 2022-2025	The Group's review has seen a call waiting number for calls to Customer Services now available when waiting for a query to be answered. All face to face services including at three contact points have been retained to maximise convenience to the customer, whilst plans to improve self-service could see the introduction of a chat option on the website during late 2023 or early 2024.

Establishment of a Youth Council

In January 2023, the Communities Scrutiny Group considered whether to establish a Youth Council in Rushcliffe, a topic that was triggered by a motion and debate at Council in December 2021. The Service Manager – Corporate Services presented the findings of the investigation and introduced the Group to Amy Beckworth from Nottinghamshire County Council. The Group were informed that Rushcliffe has a Youth Forum which is supported by Amy. It is in a fledgling state and would benefit from additional support from the Borough Council. The Group discussed:

- The current membership of the Youth Forum and involvement of the Youth Member of Parliament
- The disappointing lack of engagement from schools within the Borough and the potential to raise awareness through a Head Teacher's meeting if such a thing exists
- The support the Borough Council could offer and how this might help the Youth Forum grow its membership
- The hosting of a Youth Summit to raise the profile of the Youth Forum and highlight those topics of most concern to young people in the Borough.

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – September 2023:
<p>Recommend to Cabinet that the Borough Council support the existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum for the next two years to help expand membership, increase awareness and increase opportunities for collaboration.</p>	<p>In March 2023, Cabinet agreed to support the existing Rushcliffe Youth Forum for a two year period. Unfortunately, the Youth Member of Parliament came to the end of their term around the same time leading to a slight delay in engagement. Work has now commenced internally to host a Youth Summit in 2024 and the Chair of the Youth Forum and Nottinghamshire County Council Youth Services Officer are both involved in the planning of this event.</p>

Enforcement Policy

The Monitoring Officer updated the Group about the Council’s Corporate Enforcement Policy, including about information that had been added to clarify the stages of enforcement undertaken by the Council and the types of factors that would be taken into account when assessing non-compliance. The Group noted that further information was contained within the policies themselves which sat below this policy and that enforcement was very much a collaborative process between teams working together across the Council.

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – September 2023:
<p>Review the Corporate Enforcement Policy and put forward any further suggestions, including adding wording to paragraph 3.7 that the Council ‘consider the impact on the character and way of life of an area’.</p>	<p>The Group discussed whether subsections of the policies could give an indication of the levels of seriousness, perhaps with a RAG rating. As agreed by the Group, wording was included in paragraph 3.7 to say that the Council ‘would also consider the impact on the character and way of life of an area’</p>

Carbon Management Plan

The Communities Manager updated the Group about the Council’s Carbon Management Action and Carbon Management Plan 2022, which highlighted the eight main themes of:

- Property Assets
- Fleet and Transport
- Contracts and Procurement
- Policy and Regulation
- Waste and Recycling
- Operational Activities

- Community and Business
- Offsetting.

The Group received a presentation about projects recently completed by the Council, including, Rushcliffe Country Park Net 0 Visitor Centre and Conference Suite, Bingham Arena and Bingham Enterprise Centre. The Group were informed that Cabinet had agreed a target to become carbon neutral by 2030 and future areas of work being considered included:

- A Borough wide energy, fuel, water and transport data mapping
- Develop and retrofit decarbonisation for Rushcliffe Arena
- Work with social housing providers to maximise national grant schemes under the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF)
- Identify devolution opportunities and work with regional partners
- Continue to enhance biodiversity and ecology.

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – September 2023:
Considered and endorsed the progress to date of the adopted carbon management action plan	Mapping of carbon has been completed across estate and HDP for all non leisure stock underway for shelf ready grant bids to decarbonisation schemes. Live carbon management plan under review in order to make it relevant to date and easy to amend by Service Leads
Provided comment and contribution towards the emerging carbon management actions for 2023/24	SALIX decarbonisation project underway at Cotgrave with £47,000 of the £1.2M already drawn down. Fleet review has been drafted and findings being deliberated. Rushcliffe Arena is undertaking CHP efficiency works to ensure it is running to optimum standard and PV modelling in order to greatly reduce running costs.

Environment Policy

The Group received an update on the Council's Environment Policy for the period 2023-2028 from the Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer. The Group were informed that the Environment was one of the Council's strategic priorities to ensure that its activities did not harm and positively enhanced the environment, including a commitment to increase hedgerows across the Borough by 40%.

The Group noted the Council's commitments, as being:

- Environmental Improvement
- Legislation
- Energy and Water
- Waste Management and Recycling
- Environment Protection
- Use of Materials

- Planning and Transportation
- Natural Environment
- Climate Change.

The Group agreed to:	Progress Update – September 2023:
Review the updated draft Environment Policy	The Environment Policy was updated with the recommendations of the Community Scrutiny Group and has been published on the Council's website at: https://www.rushcliffe.gov.uk/about-us/about-the-council/policies-strategies-and-other-documents/accessible-documents/environment-policy-2023/ as an adopted policy. The Policy will need to be reviewed and amended in order to recognise Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) to meet the biodiversity enhancement and carbon sequestration outcomes.
Make suggestions about where the draft Policy does not yet meet the needs of the Council	
Recommend that Council adopt the updated Environment Policy	

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.