

Communities Scrutiny Group

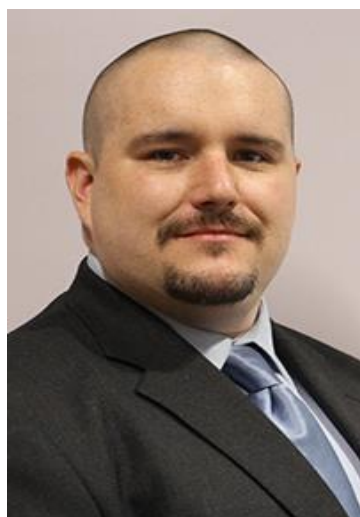
Chair's Foreword

This annual report summarises the main work undertaken by the Communities Scrutiny Group 2024/25 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



Councillor Liz Plant
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 request to outline a topic they would like to be considered for scrutiny. The request 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:

- Use of Community Facilities and Managed Spaces
- Accessible Housing (jointly with Growth and Development Scrutiny Group)
- Residents Survey
- Nottinghamshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Carbon Management Action Plan Review.

Use of Community Facilities and Managed Spaces

The Community Development Manager presented the Use of Community Facilities and Managed Spaces report to the Group which provided an update on current facilities operated by the Council, including management arrangements, their present occupancy and income generated. The report focussed on Community Venues and Playing Fields and the Group learned that bookings for the year were slightly down against target due to challenges around Covid recovery and refurbishment of some of the venues to improve their carbon emissions and AV technology provision. The Group were informed about the various ways that pitches, and open spaces could be booked and about improvements that were planned at the sites, including green technologies and a new accessible Changing Places facility.

The Group asked questions relating to:

- Fees and charges and concession rates for users
- Parking and traffic
- Information about specific venues and events
- Marketing and promotion of facilities.

The Joint Scrutiny Group agreed to:	Progress Update – June 2025:
Consider the report and presentation and provide comments on the provision of community facilities operated by the Council.	The Group noted the comprehensive review of the Council's facilities and were impressed with the Council's extensive offer of community venues and playing fields for hire and supported the introduction of the new booking system. This digital transformation of enabling

	customers to view availability, make bookings and pay online was particularly welcomed ensuring that The Council was responsive to customers changing needs and demands.
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Accessible Housing

At the joint meeting with Growth and Development Scrutiny Group on 17 October 2024, Councillor Matthews was appointed as Chair and Councillor Plant as Vice-Chair.

Councillor Thomas presented her scrutiny request on Accessible Housing and her reasons for submission:

- Adaptation of existing housing
- Adaptation of new housing being built
- Disabled Facilities Grant funding.

The joint scrutiny group received a presentation from the Strategic Housing Manager and the Planning Policy Manager which provided an overview of some of the key features around accessible housing. The Group discussion covered:

- Registered providers making a financial contribution towards adaptations in their properties and laws or regulations to make them contribute
- Viability considerations in relation to Greater Nottinghamshire Strategic Plan, land charges, the Local Plan Policy process and costs to developers in delivering adapted housing
- Nottinghamshire County Council's top up budget and the Boroughs Accessible Housing allocation being the lowest locally when the Council delivered a high number of adaptations
- The application process and delivery of work for adaptations including community awareness and understanding of the process and how this could be improved
- The national policy regarding Disabled Facility Grants (DFG) and local authority topups.

As well as the recommendations provided by Officers the Group made the following suggestions:

- Increase the supply of accessible and adapted homes, including wheelchair user dwellings
- Advocate for an increase in funding relative to local need to address the current funding disparities
- Review of the customer pathway and exploration of joined up systems to create efficiencies and risk sharing
- Cross sector investment (health & social care) to reduce demand on health care systems and enable people to remain independent at home.

The Joint Scrutiny Group agreed to:	Progress Update – June 2025:
Comment on the information provided by officers to enhance the provision of accessible housing; and	Approved the reintroduction of discretionary grants of up to £10,000 per case.

	<p>Amend existing policies to support Exceptional & Compelling Cases.</p> <p>Phased RBC efficiency savings funding of £200,000 over four years to support ongoing initiatives.</p> <p>Initiate a pilot programme using uncommitted in-year funds across 7 District/Borough Councils to assist councils facing local needs shortfalls (subject to each LA's governance).</p> <p>Countywide Housing Subgroup to engage with all Registered Providers to address DFG funding challenges and consider financial contributions towards property adaptations.</p> <p>Publication of the final draft Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan including new policy standards for accessible housing. The draft plan and its policies are due to be considered by planning inspector before it can be finalised and implemented.</p> <p>Overall, progress aligns with scrutiny recommendations to enhance accessible housing and optimise resource use.</p>
Explore actions that the Council could take to meet the housing needs of residents with disabilities	<p>Use of the Council's Capital Grant to increase accessible and adapted housing, aiming for higher standards in S106 affordable housing schemes.</p> <p>Ongoing lobbying of central Government for increased funding, resulting in additional DFG funding for 2024-25 and 2025-26.</p> <p>Focus on improving customer pathways and community awareness to streamline adaptations and reduce delays; RBC waiting list decreased from 11 to 6 months during 2024-25.</p>

Residents Survey

The Communications and Customer Services Manager presented the Residents Survey Report and a presentation to the Group which highlighted the key outcomes, including, response rate and trends compared with 2021, headline results, national versus local indicators, open text comments, responding to communities' needs and aspirations and how the Council currently engaged and listened.

The Group commented and raised questions in relation to:

- Providing clarification about which functions and services were provided by the Borough Council
- Possible location information gathering for survey respondents
- Use of social media and the local press to engage with different resident demographics and with harder to reach members of the community
- Use of different media such as video and QR codes to gather feedback

The Joint Scrutiny Group agreed to:	Progress Update – June 2025:
Discuss the results and identify if any further actions should be taken as a result of the survey findings	The Group reviewed the results and made suggestions for possible additional and alternative ways of collecting feedback.
For the Council to include relevant follow up actions in its Communications and Engagement and Customer Access Strategies 2025-2028 relating to ways in which residents can contact engage and feedback on services.	The Group agreed the tasks in the Communications and Engagement Strategy action plan increasing the ways residents can engage and feedback including using surveys on frontline services, events and legislation changes such as Simpler Recycling.

Nottinghamshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

The Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer presented the Nottinghamshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) report and provided a presentation and shared a video with the Group which highlighted the various habitats and wildlife in the local area and which encouraged participation in the survey to help shape nature recovery in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire. The Group learned that the LNRS was a new statutory system for spatial strategies for nature's recovery, which was being locally led and which following a public consultation and notification to the Secretary of State, could potentially be adopted and published in summer / autumn 2025. A review of the Strategy would be completed by DEFRA at some point between 3 –10 years after publication.

The Group asked questions including in relation to:

- Landowner involvement
- Linking up pieces of land across the County
- Tree planting
- Water courses
- The review and governance framework

- Public submission of possible sites

The Joint Scrutiny Group agreed to:	Progress Update – June 2025:
Support the draft LNRS, and support Nottinghamshire County Council going out to public consultation on the draft LNRS	The Group reviewed the draft LNRS and commented on and supported it going out for public consultation. The Group was keen for the consultation to be communicated and promoted widely and noted that the County Council Officer's role would end in August and expressed concern about potential impact on resourcing – an advert for a senior Ecologist has since been issued. An update report on LNRS is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet in autumn 2025.
Make recommendations for any additions or alterations that they consider should be made to the draft LNRS (if required)	
Support the Council responding to the Supporting Authorities consultation by Nottinghamshire County Council with the decisions given at 2a and 2b.	

Carbon Management Action Plan Review

The Communities Manager introduced the Carbon Management Action Plan Review report and provided an overview of how the Council measured emissions, including direct and indirect emissions and carbon offsetting, and how it recorded information to capture its progress towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030. The Team Manager for Environment presented an overview of specific information to the Group, including for Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions, property and assets, fleet and transport, contracts and procurement, waste and recycling, business and the community and carbon sequestration.

The Group asked questions including in relation to:

- Hydrogenated vegetable oil
- Solar canopies on carparks
- Tree planting
- Parish council energy audits and funding grants
- Air quality
- Recycling
- EV charging points

The Joint Scrutiny Group agreed to:	Progress Update – June 2025:
Consider the progress to date of the adopted carbon management action plan; and	The Group reviewed the information presented and asked a variety of questions about aspects of the Plan and the activities and actions undertaken by the Council and noted the progress made. An update report is scheduled to be presented to the Group in April 2026.
Contribute towards the emerging carbon management actions for 2025/26.	

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.