

## **Corporate Overview Group**

### **Chairman's Foreword**

This annual report summarises the main work undertaken by the Corporate Overview Group 2019/20. Following a review of the Council's scrutiny functions in 2018, it was recommended that a large Corporate Overview Group be created to oversee the Council's other scrutiny group work programmes based on concerns highlighted by quarterly financial and performance monitoring reports, as well as items on the Cabinet Forward Plan and priorities within the Corporate Strategy.

The Corporate Overview Group have ensured that the executive be held to account by approving topics to be discussed at scrutiny groups such as the Council's carbon management plan and the implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy. Additionally, the Group have scrutinised financial and performance management reports on a quarterly basis to ensure the smooth running of the Council.

The outbreak of Covid 19 has undoubtedly presented challenges to the running of the Council's business and the Group will continue to evaluate the Council's performance over the next twelve months. On behalf of the rest of the Corporate Overview Group, I would like to thank the Council's resilient officers who ensured that services continued during the lockdown period and to the numerous volunteers and community groups who have provided assistance to residents during this difficult time.



**Councillor Tina Combellack**  
**Chairman**

## **What we are responsible for?**

The Corporate Overview Group responsibilities include:

Implementing identified improvements to scrutiny throughout the transitional period including training of scrutiny members, construction of new work programmes and reporting methods.

Creating and receiving feedback on work programmes for the Growth, Communities and Governance Scrutiny Groups based on the Cabinet Forward Plan, Corporate Strategy, Medium Term Financial Strategy, Investment Strategy and Transformation Plan.

Scrutinising financial and performance management reports on a quarterly basis to ensure the smooth running of the Council and delegate any necessary investigations into concerning elements of these reports to the most appropriate scrutiny group via their work programme.

Reviewing reports in respect of health and safety, diversity and customer feedback to ensure the Council is meeting its statutory duties.

## **Our work this year**

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

- Implementation of Change;
- Feedback from Scrutiny Chairmen and Consideration of Scrutiny Work Programmes;
- Finance and Performance Management;
- Health and Safety Annual Report;
- Corporate Strategy 2020 – 2023;
- Customer Feedback Annual Report;
- Diversity Annual Report; and
- Options for Public Engagement in Scrutiny.

## **Implementation of Change**

During each meeting the Chairman and the Service Manager – Finance and Corporate Services provided the Group with a verbal update on the progress of the scrutiny review at the Council. It was noted that the Council was working with Charnwood Borough Council to provide mutual support throughout the scrutiny transition of both authorities. Councillors also took part in training from East Midlands Councils and attended the East Midlands Scrutiny Conference, which was held at Rushcliffe Arena.

## **Feedback from Scrutiny Chairmen and Consideration of Scrutiny Work Programmes**

At each meeting, the Group discussed suggestions of topics for scrutiny which were submitted either by Councillors or by officers. At the meeting in June 2019, the Chairman of the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group suggested that the proposed development on the depot site at Abbey Road, West Bridgford be scrutinised as it was key to ensure that the Council's aspirations and conditions for the development of the site were being met. The Chairman of the Governance Scrutiny Group noted that treasury management, investments and commercialism would be topics that would be scrutinised throughout 2019/20. The Chairman of the Communities Scrutiny Group suggested that the Council's carbon management plan be scrutinised in October following the motion proposed and adopted by Council in March 2019.

Following the updates from the Scrutiny Group Chairmen and after discussing the scrutiny matrix forms received from councillors, it was suggested that topics which could be discussed by the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group included the negotiation and delivery of Section 106 agreements, the development of Fairham and the Bingham Growth Programmes; and Planning Enforcement. Topics which were suggested for the Communities Scrutiny Group included a review of community facilities in West Bridgford, an update on the Council's waste and resources strategy and fly tipping. The governance scrutiny group decided to scrutinise amendments to the constitution, as well as internal and external audit reports and the Council's treasury management strategy.

## **Finance and Performance Management**

The Group scrutinised financial and performance management reports on a quarterly basis to ensure the smooth running of the Council.

At the Group's first meeting a report was delivered by the Financial Services Manager which detailed both the year-end financial outturn and performance position for 2018/19. The Financial Services Manager informed the Group that there were requests for the use of reserves in 2019/20 (from 2018/19) efficiencies for both expected and new revenue incomes totalling £228,000. At the Group's meeting in September, the Group were informed that the Council had a net efficiency position of £15.326 million was primarily due to significant sums of the Fairham development and the redevelopment of the depot. In November, it was reported that the financial position for the year was positive with overall service revenue efficiencies of £390k and business rates providing an additional income of £68k with an overall revenue efficiency position of

£454k. The Financial Services Manager was also pleased to note during the meeting in February that there was overall service revenue efficiencies of £525,000 and business were providing an additional income of £354k. It was stated that despite there being sufficient revenue efficiencies, such funding would be required given the significant risks in relation to future business income streams and ensuring the delivery of the carbon management action plan. At the meeting in July it was explained that due to the additional work pressures as a result of Covid-19, the approval of the draft statement of accounts was only nine days later than planned and within statutory deadlines.

An important aspect of the Group's work is to monitor the Council's performance against its key performance indicators and strategic tasks. As part of the Council's performance management framework, the Group scrutinises performance every quarter. Exceptions and highlights are identified along with what appropriate action is being taken to bring under-performing tasks and indicators back on track. Some of the issues arising from performance reports discussed this year included:

- the percentage of investment strategy committed;
- operational planning performance;
- number of affordable homes delivered;
- number of calls answered in less than 40 seconds;
- percentage of planning enforcement inspections carried out in target time; and
- the number of pavilion, community hall and playing field users.

### **Health and Safety Annual Report**

The Safety and Risk Management Advisor delivered a presentation to the Group in June 2019. Following the presentation, the Group were also pleased that mental health first aid training had been delivered to the Council's 'work place health champions.' The Group were also informed was working with the Health and Safety Team at Nottingham City Council due to refuse staff moving from the depot site at Abbey Road West Bridgford to the Eastcroft depot in Nottingham.

### **Corporate Strategy 2019 – 2023**

In June 2020, the Group were asked to comment on the draft Corporate Strategy 2020 – 2023. The Corporate Strategy is one of the key documents in setting the direction of travel for the Council, highlighting its key priorities and the tasks it is going to undertake over the next four years to deliver upon these priorities. In considering the document, the Chairman noted that the 'our journey since 2016' section in the strategy was not accurate and asked for this to be amended. It was also suggested that the relocation of the Rushcliffe Community Contact Centre had an overly optimistic timescale for completion. In a response to this observation the Executive Manager – Transformation and Operations stated that a report would be presented to Cabinet in July 2019, which would recommend new premises for the Rushcliffe Community Contact Centre. The Group requested that a revised version of the Corporate Strategy be reported back to the Corporate Overview Group at their next meeting before being recommended to be approved by Council in September 2019.

At the meeting in September 2019, the Service Manager – Finance and Corporate Services noted that amendments had been made as requested including the

implementation of a new priority 'the environment' and changes to the 'our journey so far' timeline. The Group were also informed that the Corporate Strategy would be a 'living document' which could be amended overtime.

Following the amendments, revised Corporate Strategy 2019 – 2023 was recommended for endorsement by Cabinet and was approved by Council later that month.

### **Customer Feedback Annual Report**

The Group were informed that 51 complaints were received by the Council during 2018/19 at Stage 1 of its complaints process and that the percentage of complaints escalated to Stage 2 had decreased from 32.5% in 2017/18 to 17.6%. The Group praised the officers for dealing with complaints efficiently. It was explained that complaints raised on social media were often short-term issues such as a missed bin and were dealt through a direct conversation with the resident. The Group suggested that the Council should reply to a resident directly on Twitter to let them know that their complaint would be dealt with over private message so that other followers of the Council on social media would be able to see that the Council responds to its complaints timely.

### **Diversity Annual Report**

The Human Resources Manager presented the report of the Executive Manager – Transformation which set out the Council's performance against the objectives set out in the Single Equality Scheme during 2018/19. Members of the Group asked questions regarding the recording of equality data for Councillors. The Human Resources Manager noted that equality data of Councillors was not required and that Councillors were selected firstly by political parties and electors. It was noted however that the Local Government Association encouraged political parties to select a diverse range of candidates. It was suggested that this issue could be discussed at Member Development Group about how the Council could encourage more women and residents from different ethnicities to stand for election. It was noted that the Council encouraged the promotion of women in the Council's senior leadership team.

### **Options for Public Engagement in Scrutiny**

The Service Manager – Finance and Corporate Services delivered a presentation to the Group which provided options into what methods could be introduced to incorporate public engagement in scrutiny meetings.

The Group were informed that ways in which other Council's involved public engagement in scrutiny were:

- Asking the public to suggest topics for the scrutiny work programme;
- Informal meetings where members of the scrutiny group would meet with members of the community and talk directly to residents which would enable Councillors to formulate evidence for scrutiny topics;
- Feedback surveys on scrutiny topics;
- Public speaking which would bring the topic alive during the meeting; and

- Co-opt members of the public onto the scrutiny group so that they can have an input in the decision making process.

It was suggested that the scrutiny groups could meet with members of the community such as small business owners and employees or ask tenants of community halls to answer surveys.

Following the presentation the Executive Manager – Finance and Corporate Services suggested that the Group should consider these methods to increase public engagement in scrutiny when suggesting topics to be discussed by scrutiny groups.

### **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**

Following the review of the Council's scrutiny functions in 2019/20 all members of Corporate Overview Group are looking forward to developing comprehensive work programmes for the scrutiny groups, which will hold the executive to account. The Group will also be considering the future model of scrutiny at the Council.