

Communities Scrutiny Group

Chairman's Foreword

This annual report summarises the main work undertaken by the Communities Scrutiny Group 2020/21. Following a review of the Council's scrutiny functions in 2018, it was recommended that a scrutiny group be created to oversee the Council's community partnerships, areas of community concern and the Council's responsibility to be environmentally sustainable.

The Communities Scrutiny Group have scrutinised topics such as the Council's Equality Scheme and the future of Edwalton Golf Course – both of which had recommendations approved by Cabinet.

The outbreak of Covid-19 has undoubtedly presented challenges to the communities of Rushcliffe however; the Group will continue to monitor on-going projects and government policies over the next twelve months including the Council's Waste Strategy and the Council's Housing Delivery Plan.

I would like to thank all members of the Group for their very active involvement, support and topic suggestions and particularly my Vice Chairman, Councillor Bal Bansal.



**Councillor Jonathan Wheeler
Chairman**



**Councillor Bal Bansal
Vice Chairman**

What we are responsible for?

The Communities Scrutiny Group responsibilities 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.

Our work this year

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

- Rushcliffe Equality Scheme;
- Fireworks;
- Flooding and Drainage;
- Rushcliffe Nature Strategy;
- Edwalton Golf Course Strategic Review;
- Litter and dog fouling; and
- Carbon Management Plan.

Rushcliffe Equality Scheme

The Strategic Human Resources Manager presented the report of the Executive Manager – Transformation and explained that the existing Equality Scheme expired this year and that Cabinet had resolved to support a comprehensive review of the scheme and recommended the Communities Scrutiny Group to contribute to this review. It was noted that many of the services the Council provided were there to support residents in their time of need for example, housing support and that it is extremely important that residents can access services in an equal manner. Additionally, it was explained that the non-statutory services, such as leisure provision, and parks and open spaces, should be delivered in such a way to welcome all residents.

The Group made the suggestions about what could be reviewed in the updated Rushcliffe Equality Scheme. These included:

- Stopping the use of Chairman/Madam Chairman;
- Assumptions of gender preference; and
- Input from Black and Ethnic Minority and LGBT groups.

The Group agreed that the revised Equality Scheme should be a ‘living’ document and should reflect current social change such as the black lives matter movement, health inequalities with the impact of Covid 19 on black and ethnic minority groups and a greater awareness of gender identity. However, it was also noted that the Equality Scheme should also reflect the population of Rushcliffe who were mainly elderly.

The Group requested that an updated version of the Rushcliffe Equality Scheme be brought back to the Communities Scrutiny Group before being recommended for approval by Cabinet.

At the meeting in January 2021, The Executive Manager – Transformation explained that taking into account the feedback of the Communities Scrutiny Group it was proposed to put forward an Equality Scheme that kept its focus at a strategic level, setting out the vision and aims of the Council over the next four years.

It was noted that examples of priorities for action plans for 2021-22 were:

- Health inequalities, considering an asset-based approach to health and wellbeing.
- The impact of COVID-19 on certain groups in terms of health, safety, housing and employment.
- Lessons and messages from the community regarding diversity issues.
- Recognising and respecting fluid identities.

The Group raised concerns about the content of the Equality Scheme and suggested that characteristics should be reviewed and monitored for inclusivity with performance indicators. The Group agreed that the Equalities Scheme would be reported back to the Communities Scrutiny Group within 12 – 18 months.

The views expressed by the Communities Scrutiny Group were taken into account to further inform the Equality Scheme. The Action Plan consultation document was developed following the scrutiny meetings and Cabinet approved the Council's Equality Scheme in May 2021.

Fireworks

The Community Development Manager provided the Group with information to consider the future use of fireworks at Council events. It was noted that a motion was carried by Council in March 2020, which resolved to launch a public campaign to raise awareness of these impacts in the Borough, encourage advance advertising of planned firework events and promote alternative forms of activity such as quiet fireworks or other light displays. It also agreed to look at how fireworks are used at Council events with a view to move away from loud fireworks.

The Group was asked to consider three possible options:

- a) discontinue the use of loud fireworks at Council events (partial ban);
- b) discontinue the use of all fireworks at Council events (full ban); or
- c) no change to current events arrangements (no change).

Following a presentation, some members of the Group believed that no change was required to the use of fireworks at Council events. However, other members of the Group stated that if the Council stopped using loud fireworks it would set an example for residential displays. It was noted that a ban of loud fireworks would reduce noise from 120 decibels to 90 decibels and that other alternatives could be used such as light and drone displays and silent fireworks.

It was recommended to Cabinet that the Council stops the use of loud fireworks and a public communications campaign be launched to encourage external event operators to adapt the Council's approach to the use of fireworks. These recommendations were approved by Cabinet in May 2021.

Flooding and Drainage

At the meeting in October 2020, the Group were provided with an update on the current picture of flooding events in the Borough. A presentation was delivered by three of the key organisations involved: Nottinghamshire County Council, the Trent Valley Internal Drainage Board and Rushcliffe Borough Council.

Councillors raised concerns that a lot of agencies were involved with the response to flooding and that residents would benefit from a roles and responsibilities document with contact details. Councillors suggested that in order to prevent flooding more trees should be planted in order to create more flooded areas which could hold water. The Group also suggested that the Council should make comments about smaller developments within the villages of Rushcliffe. Copies of the presentations made by all the agencies were placed on the members extranet as they contained a lot of valuable information which would be of benefit to all Councillors.

Rushcliffe Nature Strategy

At the meeting in October 2020, the Group scrutinised the draft Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy aims and objectives, developed by the Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy Implementation Group (RNCSIG) in which the Council were represented.

The Group asked numerous questions regarding planning applications and biodiversity net gain. The Environmental Sustainability Officer explained that developments would now have to prove that bio-diversity would increase. The Environmental Sustainability Officer was pleased to note that the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust promoted developments of high bio-diversity value. Councillors also raised concerns about the fences installed in new developments which did not allow wildlife to move around freely. The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing suggested that Councillors should raise their views regarding the planning for the future consultation which closed on 29 October.

It was suggested that the Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy needed to provide robust support to the Grantham Canal in order for the rural asset to be preserved. It was agreed that the Council would write to the Canal and Rivers Trust and the Grantham Canal Society to explain their concerns. The Environment Sustainability Officer also agreed to circulate a position statement from the Canal and Rivers Trust which would inform the Group of their future actions. The Chairman suggested that it be recommended to Cabinet that the funding allocated for the free tree scheme be extended in the hope that the number of trees allocated would increase now that some restrictions due to Covid-19 had eased.

The Rushcliffe Nature Conservation Strategy 2021 - 2025 was adopted by Cabinet in February 2021, taking into account the suggestions made by the Communities Scrutiny Group.

Edwalton Golf Course Strategic Review

At the meeting in January 2021, the Group were informed of the position statement on Edwalton Golf Courses (EGC) and were recommended alternative provisions for the asset of the Council. The Group were informed that Knight, Kavanagh and Page (KKP) (which provides specialist services in sport, leisure, culture, regeneration and green spaces) was appointed to undertake a two-stage study in respect Edwalton Golf Course;

It was explained that there was a requirement for a golf course in the area and that the development of driving range bays would enhance income potential. The development of a driving range would allow residents to practice golf, enable schools to visit and decrease the barriers often associated with taking part in golf.

Members of the group raised concerns regarding the recommendation that some of the site could be developed for housing. It was debated that the site should be used to maximise sport participation and that bodies such as Sport England could object if it is perceived there is detriment to the leisure provision. It was also noted that there

was no need for new housing in the area due to the Sharphill development nearby and that the Council should instead invest in community facilities for residents.

Following a discussion, it was agreed that recommendation d would be changed to:

‘Golfing and/or other sporting and community use should be retained on the site. This could be achieved by developing and investing in the main golf course, a driving range and community facility and, if viable, other sporting activities, as part of the master plan work.’

Feedback from the Communities Scrutiny Group was incorporated into a report on the same topic to Cabinet in March 2021.

Fly tipping, dog fouling and littering (part two – dog fouling and littering)

The Executive Manager – Neighbourhoods presented their report which detailed an update on the Council’s approach to litter and dog fouling in the Borough. At the July 2020 meeting of this Group, Councillors acknowledged the very limited resources available to undertake enforcement of environmental crimes and requested that officers investigated the need for additional resources. In response to the investigation the Council commenced a 12-month trial with a private sector partner “WISE” which provided dedicated resources to investigate all fly tipping reports and also undertook routine patrols at litter and dog fouling hot spots at zero cost to the Council. It was noted that “WISE” staff had delegated authority to issue fixed penalty notices (FPNs) where offences had been found.

It was suggested that a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) could be introduced in new estates within the Borough as a deterrent for dog fouling. However, this would require extensive consultation with partners such as Nottinghamshire County Council and require sufficient evidence for its implementation such as the number of service requests for the Council to pick up dog fouling. It was also suggested that communications be posted on social media to inform residents that they could contact the Council to report dog fouling.

Carbon Management Plan Development and Review

At the meeting in April 2021, the Group received an update which summarised the work previously undertaken to bring the Carbon Management Plan forward, including the annual scrutiny of the Plan by this Group.

The Team Manager - Environment delivered a presentation on the Carbon Management Plan Progress Update. The Group in particular welcomed the introduction of the Carbon Clever Progress Dashboard.

In answer to a question regarding the importance of ensuring that residents continued to be made aware of the important role that everyone needed to play to reduce carbon emissions, the Team Manager Environment advised that a comprehensive Communications Plan was in place, which would highlight both the Council’s carbon management activities and the progress being made, together with an emphasis on

promoting behavioural change and ensuring that residents understood the important role that they must also take.

A member of the Group raised a concern and questioned the viability of the use of air source heat pumps and suggested that it was essential that the Council took a balanced approach, looked at all the available options and undertook a cost benefit analysis before committing to any scheme. The Team Manager Environment confirmed that Rushcliffe Country Park was the Council's exemplar site, where all the Council's testing and evaluations would take place and the Group was advised that a complete business case would be undertaken to identify the best options going forward for buildings across the Council's estate.

In respect of Streetwise, the Group was advised that officers were looking at its Environment Policy, and ways in which it could also align to the Council's carbon neutral target. The Team Manager Environment advised that Metropolitan Housing were referred to in the Carbon Management Plan, the organisation had been contacted regarding the LAD2 funding, and officers would work with them to ensure that properties were as energy efficient as possible.

The Group raised the importance that new homes be fit for purpose and as energy efficient as possible and suggested that the Council should encourage the Government to make the long awaited changes to building regulations to facilitate that. It would also be helpful if the Council could produce a document to assist potential homeowners, when choosing a property, to allow them to question developers regarding the environmental and ecological measures they used.

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 are looking forward to developing a comprehensive work programme for the year ahead.