

Corporate Overview Group

Chairman's Foreword

This annual report summarises the main work undertaken by the Corporate Overview Group 2020/21. Following a review of the Council's scrutiny functions in 2018, it was recommended that a 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 use of fireworks at events and a review of the Council's equalities scheme. 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 and Development, 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;
- Consideration of Scrutiny Work Programmes;
- Finance and Performance Management;
- Customer Feedback Annual Report;
- Consideration of the Future of Scrutiny; and
- Diversity Annual Report.

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 due to the Covid-19 pandemic the scrutiny meetings due to take place in March 2020 had been rescheduled to July 2020 and would take place virtually via Zoom.

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. It was noted that items that were to be discussed at meetings during the 2019/20 cycle had been delayed to the summer of 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The work programmes for each of the Groups during 2020/21 were reviewed in July 2020 to ensure they reflected the current priorities of the Council especially in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, some changes to the work programmes had been made in order to respond to the ongoing pandemic and its effect on some areas of work.

During the July 2020 meeting of the Corporate Overview Group it was agreed that the Communities Scrutiny Group's work programme would include a review of the Council's use of fireworks at events in August 2020 following on from the motion considered at Council in March 2020. The Group also raised concerns that those of black and minority ethnic backgrounds had been disproportionately affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and therefore, the Council's Equality Scheme would be scrutinised by the Group in August 2020.

Councillors raised concerns that most of the items were for the Communities Scrutiny Group to be scrutinised and that meetings had been very long and items towards the end of the agendas felt rushed. The Group suggested that more meetings for the Communities Scrutiny Group be added to the timetable of meetings for 2021/22 to ensure that all items were scrutinised thoroughly. Officers explained that resources for scrutiny were finite and suggested that the scrutiny groups should consider items which were time critical and which could be scrutinised in the future. The Chairman noted that on-going issues such as dog fouling and littering were time critical for residents and should therefore also be prioritised for the scrutiny work programmes.

At the December meeting it was agreed that conservation areas would be scrutinised by the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group as there was currently a negative perception on the consistency of dealing with new planning applications. In addition, tree conservation would be scrutinised by the Communities Scrutiny Group which would include the discussion of tree preservation orders, where new trees can be planted, and the ongoing maintenance of trees required.

It was agreed that the Communities Scrutiny Group would scrutinise the Safeguarding of Adults and Children Strategy, police performance and resources for Rushcliffe, Rushcliffe's Housing Delivery Plan and the Waste Strategy. The Group agreed that the Growth and Development Group would scrutinise cycling networks in the Borough, the proposed footbridge over the River Trent and Covid-19 business recovery. The

Corporate Overview Group would also scrutinise the results of the residents' survey in March 2022.

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 meeting in September 2020, the Financial Services Manager detailed the budget position for revenue and capital as of 30 June 2020. The Group were informed that the anticipated budget of £0.442m gap caused by the pandemic was partially offset by additional government grants and in-year efficiencies. At the meeting in September the financial position to date reflected a number of positive variances totalling £0.890m, however; there were also several adverse variances totalling £2.667m. At the meeting in March 2021, the Financial Services Manager was pleased to inform the Group that the Council in conjunction with Parkwood, had recently submitted and been successful in an application to the National Leisure Recovery Fund to seek support of £0.21m toward the financial losses incurred. It was noted that data to 31 January 2021, showed collection rates for Council Tax had reduced by 0.9% equating to approximately £0.79m of cash not received which would create a deficit and a burden on future income streams albeit the County Council would take a significant proportion of the Council Tax deficit. However, recent government announcements mean this deficit can now be spread over three years and this should reduce the burden in each year.

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. It was agreed at the meeting in July 2020, that targets were being impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. 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 number of successful homelessness preventions undertaken;
- percentage of householder planning applications processed within target times; and
- number of household waste collections missed twice or more in the last three-month period

Customer Feedback Annual Report

The Service Manager – Finance and Corporate Services summarised the complaints which the Council received during 2019/20 with a comparison to previous performance. It was noted that:

- 45 complaints were received by the Council at Stage 1 of its complaints process;
- The percentage of complaints escalated past Stage 1 increased slightly from 17.6% in 2018/19 to 20.0% (9 from 45);

- Consistency in handling complaints had stayed at a high level, as had the number of complaints that are responded to within target time – 42 out of 45;
- Analysis of the 45 complaints received in 2019/20 showed that 75.6% were unjustified; and
- The Council received 132 compliments about its services in 2019/20 – 27 more than the previous year.

Consideration of the Future of Scrutiny

At the meeting in September 2020, the Service Manager – Finance and Corporate Services recommended that the Council continue using the current model of scrutiny as this model had produced high levels of satisfaction with officers and councillors. The Group were supportive of the transitional model of scrutiny which had been implemented in May 2019. However, members of the Group raised suggestions in order to make the scrutiny process more effective. Members of the Group suggested that presentations and reports be shorter and that more member briefings be organised so that Councillors would be able to digest information required before the meeting. The Group also recommended that members of the Cabinet be invited to scrutiny meetings the help inform debate. The Group also asked if scrutiny meetings could be more frequent however, it was agreed that officer resources were currently stretched due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Diversity Annual Report

In December 2020, the Strategic Human Resources Manager presented the report of the Executive Manager – Transformation which provided the Group with an update about the Council's performance against the objectives set out in the Council's Equality Scheme.

The Strategic Human Resources Manager was pleased to note that the Council broadly reflected the demographic of the Borough with 93% of Rushcliffe Borough Council employees in the white British or white other ethnic group which is the same as for the residents of the Borough (white 93%). The Strategic Human Resources Manager informed the Group that the Council was currently reviewing its Recruitment Policies and would ensure that these continue to operate fairly and encourage applications from under-represented groups. It was also noted that the Council's age profile and members of staff who had declared that they had a disability were similar to the population of Rushcliffe. The Strategic Human Resources Manager was pleased to note that since diversity was last reported to the Group in 2019, the gender pay gap had reduced from 8.9% to 1%, reflecting an increase in the proportion of women at higher levels of the organisation.

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.