



3 December 2024

RUGBY BOROUGH COUNCIL

A meeting of Rugby Borough Council will be held in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall, Rugby at 7.00pm on Wednesday 11 December 2024.

Members of the public may also view the meeting via the livestream available on the Council's website.

Mannie Ketley
Chief Executive

A G E N D A

PART 1 – PUBLIC BUSINESS

1. Apologies for absence.
2. Minutes.
To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2024.
3. Declaration of Interests.
To receive declarations of -
 - (a) non-pecuniary interests as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors;
 - (b) pecuniary interests as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors; and
 - (c) notice under Section 106 Local Government Finance Act 1992 - non-payment of Community Charge or Council Tax.
4. To receive the Mayor's Announcements.

5. Questions pursuant to Standing Order 10.
6. To receive the reports of Cabinet and Committees which have met since the last meeting of the Council and to pass such resolutions and to make such orders thereon as may be necessary:

(a) Cabinet – 2 December 2024

(1) South West Rugby Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document Updated Appendix K – adoption – Growth and Investment, Digital and Communications Portfolio.

(2) Statement of Community Involvement - Growth and Investment, Digital and Communications Portfolio.

(3) Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/2026 – Communities and Homes, Regulation and Safety Portfolio.

(4) Support of the Voluntary and Community Sector 2025/26 - Communities and Homes, Regulation and Safety Portfolio.

(5) Food Waste – Operations and Traded Services Portfolio.

(b) Licensing and Safety Committee – 5 November 2024

(1) Statutory Review of Gambling Policy – Statement of Principles.

(c) Audit and Ethics Committee – 25 November 2024

(1) Review of the Council's Standards processes.

7. To receive and consider the reports of officers.

(a) Expediting the stock condition survey – report of the Chief Officer – Communities and Homes.

(b) Scrutiny Review – report of the Chief Officer – Legal and Governance.

(c) St Cross Hospital update – report of the Chief Officer – Leisure and Wellbeing (report to follow).

8. Notices of Motion pursuant to Standing Order 11 - in accordance with the Council's Constitution, no motions on notice have been received for consideration.

PART 2 – EXEMPT INFORMATION

There is no business involving exempt information to be considered.

QUESTIONS AT COUNCIL

A Councillor may ask a question at the meeting by giving notice in writing of the question to the Chief Executive no later than midday on Thursday 14 November 2024. The rules relating to Questions are set out in Part 3a of the Council's Constitution.

REPORT OF CABINET

2 December 2024

PRESENT:

Councillors Moran (Chair), Brown, C Edwards, Livesey, Mistry, O'Rourke and Robinson.

Councillors Lewis, McKenzie, Picker, Poole and Roodhouse were also in attendance.

1. SOUTH WEST RUGBY MASTERPLAN SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT UPDATED APPENDIX K – ADOPTION

Cabinet considered a report concerning proposed updates to Appendix K of the South West Rugby Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document. The report is available here:

[Cabinet 2 December 2024 report - South West Rugby SPD Appendix K adoption](#)

Recommendation of Cabinet

Cabinet decided to recommended to Council that –

- (1) the South West Rugby Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document is adopted;
- (2) delegated authority be given to the Chief Officer for Growth and Investment to make minor amendments as necessary to that document prior to adoption; and
- (3) the superseded version of the South West Rugby masterplan SPD adopted on 17 June 2021 be revoked and a statement publicised on the Council's website confirming this.

Recommended that – the recommendation of Cabinet be approved.

2. STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Cabinet considered a report concerning the proposed adoption of a new Statement of Community Involvement. The report is available here:

[Cabinet 2 December 2024 report - Statement of Community Involvement](#)

Recommendation of Cabinet

Cabinet decided to recommend to Council that the Statement of Community Involvement, attached in Appendix 1 to the report, be adopted.

3. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2025/26

Cabinet considered a report concerning the Council's proposed Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2025/26. The report is available here:

[Cabinet 2 December 2024 report - Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025-26](#)

Recommendation of Cabinet

Cabinet decided to recommend to Council that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2024/2025 be adopted as the Council's Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2025/2026.

Recommended that – the recommendation of Cabinet be approved.

4. SUPPORT OF THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR 2025/26

Cabinet considered a report concerning the Council's support of the voluntary and community sector for 2025/26. The report is available here:

[Cabinet 2 December 2024 report - Support of the VCS 2025-26](#)

Recommendation of Cabinet

Cabinet decided to recommend to Council that –

- (1) the £84,250 grant funding of the community associations, community partnerships and Foodbank, as detailed in table 1.0, be considered as part of budget setting for 2025/26;
- (2) each of the community associations and community partnerships be allocated £1,000 to administer, in consultation with local Ward Members, as micro grants (£300 or less) to small grassroots organisations developing initiatives within their ward. Any unspent allocation will be repayable to the council at the end of the 2025/26 financial year;
- (3) delegated authority be given to the Chief Officer of Communities and Homes and the Chief Officer of Legal and Governance to determine the final grant terms;
- (4) a ringfenced reserve of £10,000 be set aside in 2025/26 for funding projects, which are in the interests of the Council to see delivered, that are unable to attract funding from another source;

- (5) £10,000 be set aside in 2025/26 for supporting research and development of a Community Supermarket in Rugby; and
- (6) further work be undertaken in 2025/26 to develop proposals for how the Council commissions the support of the voluntary and community sector.

Recommended that – the recommendation of Cabinet be approved.

5. FOOD WASTE

Cabinet considered a report concerning the proposed approval of capital funding grant from the Department for Environmental, Food and Rural Affairs and begin procuring food waste collection vehicles and caddies. The report is available here:

[Cabinet 2 December 2024 report - Food Waste](#)

Recommendation of Cabinet

Cabinet decided to recommend to Council that –

- (1) a General Fund capital budget of £1.265m for the purchase of food waste vehicles be approved and added to the capital programme for 2025/26 to be financed by capital grants and internal borrowing as detailed in section 3 of the report; and
- (2) a General Fund capital budget of £0.419m for the purchase of food waste caddies be approved and added to the capital programme for 2025/26 to be financed by capital grants and internal borrowing as detailed in section 3 of the report.

Recommended that – the recommendation of Cabinet be approved.

**COUNCILLOR M MORAN
CHAIR**

REPORT OF LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

5 November 2024

PRESENT:

Councillors Garcia (Chair), Barnett, Henderson, D Keeling, J Keeling, Lewis, O'Rourke, Parker, Sayani, Srivastava and Trimble.

1. STATUTORY REVIEW OF GAMBLING POLICY - STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

Licensing and Safety Committee considered a report concerning the responses to a statutory consultation exercise carried out on the Gambling Policy – Statement of Principles. The review and approval of the Gambling Policy is a statutory requirement, and it must be approved and published by 31 January 2025. A copy of the report is available via the link below:

[Licensing and Safety Committee 5 November 2024](#)

Recommendation of Licensing and Safety Committee

The Committee decided to recommend to Council that the draft Gambling Policy be approved and effective from 31 January 2025 for three years.

Recommended that – the recommendation of Licensing and Safety Committee be approved.

**COUNCILLOR GARCIA
CHAIR**

REPORT OF AUDIT AND ETHICS COMMITTEE

25 November 2024

PRESENT:

Membership of the Committee:

Mr J Eves (Vice-Chair), Howling, Karadiar and Roodhouse.

Also in attendance:

Aftab Razzaq, Chief Officer – Legal and Governance

1. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S STANDARDS PROCESSES

The Committee considered a report concerning the Council's Standards Processes and the recommended updates to them.

The report is available here:

<https://www.rugby.gov.uk/documents/20124/45549874/Item+4+-+Review+of+the+Council%27s+Standards+Processes.pdf/c7758147-d88d-8c2f-e5b9-e304cafdde3b?version=1.0&t=1732616598087>

Recommendation of Audit and Ethics Committee

The Committee decided to recommend to Council that –

- (1) the adoption of the revised Code of Conduct (following the LGA Model Code) as set out in Appendix 2 of this report;
- (2) the adoption of the revised complaints handling process, and consequential constitutional amendments as set out in Appendix 3;
- (3) the Constitution of the Council be amended to incorporate the changes set out in Appendix 2 and 3 and the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make such typographical amendments as required to facilitate this; and
- (4) the Member Champion for Standards role profile be adopted and that the Council appoint a Member(s) to fulfil this role. It be recommended that the Member Champion is not a member of either the Executive or the Audit and Ethics Committee.

Recommended that – the recommendation of the Audit and Ethics Committee be approved.

**MR J EVES
VICE-CHAIR**

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Report Title: Expediting the stock condition survey

Name of Committee: Council

Date of Meeting: 11 December 2024

Report Director: Chief Officer - Communities and Homes

Portfolio: Communities and Homes, Regulation and Safety

Ward Relevance: All

Prior Consultation: Cabinet and Leadership Team

Contact Officer: Jason Husain - Property Specialist
(jason.husain@rugby.gov.uk)

Public or Private: Public

Report Subject to Call-In: Yes

Report En-Bloc: No

Forward Plan: Yes

Corporate Priorities: This report relates to the following priority(ies):
 Rugby is an environmentally sustainable place, where we work together to reduce and mitigate the effects of climate change. (C)
 Rugby has a diverse and resilient economy that benefits and enables opportunities for all residents. (E)
 Residents live healthy, independent lives, with the most vulnerable protected. (HC)
 Rugby Borough Council is a responsible, effective and efficient organisation. (O)
[Corporate Strategy 2021-2024](#)
 This report does not specifically relate to any Council priorities but

(C) Climate
(E) Economy
(HC) Health and Communities
(O) Organisation

Summary: In December 2023, Council agreed that a stock condition survey of 60% of the Council's homes be undertaken during 2024/25 and a 20% per annum thereafter, as a continuous rolling programme.

The proposal is to expedite the works so that the outstanding 40% of the stock be surveyed within 2024/25, to give an effective 100% baseline of the

complete Council's housing stock, which will be used to inform future investment requirements.

That 20% of the housing stock is then reassessed each year thereafter, with effect from 2026/27

The current works in progress include the completion of 700 Energy Performance Certificates (EPC's), with plans for 350 each year thereafter. However, whilst this work is in progress, there are imminent changes proposed to the methodology for calculating energy performance in homes. Whilst it would make sense to also speed up the collection of EPC data, now that a new government commitment has been made that Social housing should meet EPC - C by 2030 it would be prudent to assess the required changes to the EPC methodology ahead of accelerating this programme of works.

Financial Implications:

A supplementary budget of £135,000 from Housing Revenue Account Reserves be established to expedite the remaining stock condition surveys within the 2024/25 financial year.

The budget requirements for additional EPC work will be revisited when there is more clarity on the proposed new methodology for calculation.

The work will be carried out by the current appointed contractor under the existing contract. The procurement route for their engagement was via a framework whereby both their competency and value for money has already been established.

Risk Management/Health and Safety Implications:

The proposed approach enables the council to have an informed view of the condition of the housing stock.

The resulting evidence-base will determine the future investment requirements to ensure that the council's homes are, at a minimum, compliant with the decent homes' standard and benefit from improved energy performance.

A clear understanding of stock condition also reduces the likelihood of future shock events arising that could adversely impact on the robustness of the Housing Revenue Account.

This action demonstrates the Council's commitment to providing high quality and safe homes for its tenants.

Environmental Implications:

An environmental impact assessment form for phase 1 was completed. This has been updated and attached as appendix 1.

Legal Implications:

The Social Housing Regulation Act (2023) sets out the regulatory regime for social housing.

The Regulator for Social Housing has a specific expectation that social landlords will have an accurate record at an individual property level on the condition of their stock, based on a physical inspection of all homes and that this is kept up to date.

Ensuring compliance with the Decent Homes Guidance is a requirement of all social housing providers. The proposed approach ensures that the Council will have a detailed understanding of the quality and safety of the entirety of its housing stock so that it is best placed to take any remedial actions that may be required.

Equality and Diversity:

An equality and diversity impact assessment was carried for phase 1 of the stock condition survey. This remains relevant and has been attached as appendix 2.

Options:

1. To expedite the remainder of the stock condition survey work to inform a complete understanding of stock condition by end of March 2025.
2. To carry on as previously planned and undertake 20% in 2025/26 and the remaining 20% in 2026/27

Recommendation:

1. The remainder of the stock condition survey works be carried out to achieve a comprehensive understanding of stock condition by 31 March 2025

2. A supplementary budget of £135,000 from Housing Revenue Account reserves be established for this
3. Provision be made at Housing Revenue Account budget setting for 2026/27 onwards for a rolling programme of 20% stock condition surveys annually, to ensure that data is updated at regular intervals
4. The approach to collecting EPC data be reviewed when the new methodology has been confirmed

**Reasons for
Recommendation:**

By having a complete understanding of the condition of its stock the council is better placed to model its plans for future investment.

This data will also support the development of a new Corporate Asset Management Strategy.

Council - 11 December 2024

Expediting the stock conditions survey

Public Report of the Chief Officer - Communities and Homes

Recommendation

1. The remainder of the stock condition survey works be carried out to achieve a comprehensive understanding of stock condition by 31 March 2025;
2. a supplementary budget of £135,000 from Housing Revenue Account reserves be established for this;
3. provision be made at Housing Revenue Account budget setting for 2026/27 onwards for a rolling programme of 20% stock condition surveys annually to ensure that data is updated at regular intervals; and
4. the approach to collecting PC data be reviewed when the new methodology has been confirmed.

1.0 Executive summary

- 1.1 This report sets out recommendations to expedite the remainder of the stock condition survey work so that it is completed, in full, during the 2024/25 financial year. The current programme is based on 60% completion during 2024/25, followed by a rolling programme of 20% per annum.
- 1.2 The cost of this will be £135,000 and will be met from Housing Revenue Account Reserves.
- 1.3 The understanding derived will provide assurance as to the quality of the condition of the whole stock base, which is an important determinant of wellbeing for our tenants.
- 1.4 This understanding will in turn provide a comprehensive evidence base to inform future investment decisions and contribute more broadly to the development of the corporate asset management strategy.

2.0 Overview

- 2.1 The business case for conducting the stock condition survey was agreed by Council in December 2023.
- 2.2 The recommendations seek to expedite the agreed works to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the condition of the council's housing stock within the 2024/25 financial year

2.3 This is a demonstration of the Council's commitment to securing assurance that the quality of the housing stock contributes positively to the health and well being of tenants.

3.0 Route to completion of works

3.1 This work is permissible under the current delivery contract and the works will be carried out by the current contractor.

3.2 The contractor has advised that they have sufficient capacity to carry out the required additional works within the proposed shorter timeframe.

3.3 These considerations mean that the required works can be commissioned at pace.

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 The commitment to carry out the full stock condition survey was made in December 2023.

4.2 However, this proposal seeks to accelerate the progress of this work to being completed with the financial year.

4.3 The completion of the survey work will ensure an accurate baseline of the condition of the housing stock and the Council's adherence to the Requirements of the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023.

Name of Meeting: Council

Date of Meeting: 11 December 2024

Subject Matter: Expediting the stock condition survey

Originating Department: Communities and Homes

DO ANY BACKGROUND PAPERS APPLY YES NO

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Doc No	Title of Document and Hyperlink

The background papers relating to reports on planning applications and which are open to public inspection under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972, consist of the planning applications, referred to in the reports, and all written responses to consultations made by the Local Planning Authority, in connection with those applications.

Exempt information is contained in the following documents:

Doc No	Relevant Paragraph of Schedule 12A

Appendix 1 - Rugby Borough Council

Climate Change and Environmental Impact Assessment

CONTEXT

In 2019 the UK Parliament set a commitment in law to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Achieving this target will require considerable effort with public bodies, private sector organisations, the third sector and individuals working together to take action. Rugby Borough Council declared a climate emergency in 2019, in doing so committed to:

- To move the Council's operations towards Carbon Neutrality by 2030.
- To establish action to tackle climate change as a key driver of all decision-making.
- To provide community leadership in reducing the impact of Climate Change.
- To take action to mitigate the impact of climate change on a Borough wide basis and beyond, through adaptation.

The Council's Corporate Strategy (2021-2024) [link](#) sets ambitious outcomes in relation to Climate Change. These ambitions must now be progressed through the decisions which the Council makes.

It is therefore important that Rugby Borough Council gives due regard to climate change when making decisions. In the context of the Council's business, Climate Change includes carbon emissions, biodiversity, habitat loss and environmental destruction. When putting forward recommendations for decision, officers must assess how these recommendations are likely to influence our climate change commitments by completing the following Climate Change and Environmental Impact Assessment.

A copy of this Climate Change and Environmental Impact Assessment, including relevant data and information should be forwarded to the Deputy Chief Executive.

If you require help, advice and support to complete the form, please contact Dan Green, Deputy Chief Executive.

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW

Portfolio and Service Area	Communities and Homes
Policy/Service/Change being assessed	Expediting the stock condition survey
Is this a new or existing Policy/Service/Change?	60% of the council's housing stock is in the process of being surveyed. The report seeks to expedite to reach 100% within the 2024/25 financial year.
If existing policy/service please state date of last assessment	A Environmental Impact Assessment was completed when seeking approval for the 60% phase 1 of the stock condition survey in December 2023
Ward Specific Impacts	All Wards
Summary of assessment Briefly summarise the policy/service/change and potential impacts	<p>The benefits to RBC will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to date knowledge of the condition of HRA stock. • Comply with the Housing Regulators stipulations regarding stock condition. • Assist with mitigation in disrepair claims and complaints relating to damp and mould. • Target investment in the HRA stock. • EPC data will allow targeting of properties to deliver warm, energy efficient homes whilst reducing carbon emissions and fuel poverty. • Allow RBC to produce long term planned maintenance strategies over 5,10- and 30-year cycles. • Allow RBC to make informed decisions on acquisitions and disposals of the HRA stock. • Assist in the Councils ambition to reach net zero.
Completed By	Jason Husain
Authorised By	Michelle Dickson
Date of Assessment	11 November 2024

SECTION 2: IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Climate Change and Environmental Impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner	Timescales
Energy usage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>The Housing regulator requires all providers to have up to date knowledge of their housing stock. Surveys are required to access this data and populate the new Asset Management system. The surveys will also allow RBC to mitigate possible disrepair claims as the data will advise which properties require attention.</p> <p>The government currently have several grant funding schemes relating to de-carbonisation. All are subject to competitive bid, subject to match funding, and they are generally dependent on EPC rating. This information will allow RBC to target bids and strategize match funding. The data will also guide which properties are worth investing in, and which may be disposed of and</p>			

Climate Change and Environmental Impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner	Timescales
				replaced by newer more efficient homes. Planned programmes can be developed to ensure all properties meet the current Decent Homes standard, and its successor when the current consultation has finished. Many properties will require large investment in the next 10-20 years as major elements reach the end of their life cycle.			
Fleet usage	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sustainable Transport/Travel (customers and staff)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sustainable procurement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Community leadership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Biodiversity and habitats	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Climate Change and Environmental Impacts	No Impact	Positive	Negative	Description of impact	Any actions or mitigation to reduce negative impacts	Action owner	Timescales
Adaptation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Impact on other providers/partners	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

SECTION 3: REVIEW

Where a negative impact is identified, the proposal and/or implementation can be adapted or changed; meaning there is a need for regular review. This review may also be needed to reflect additional data and evidence for a fuller assessment (proportionate to the decision in question). Please state the agreed review timescale for the identified impacts of the policy implementation or service change.

Review date	N/A-One off project
Key points to be considered through review	N/A
Person responsible for review	N/A
Authorised by	Michelle Dickson

APPENDIX 2 - EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EqIA)

Context

1. The Public Sector Equality Duty as set out under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires Rugby Borough Council when making decisions to have due regard to the following:
 - eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct prohibited by the Act,
 - advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not,
 - fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
2. The characteristics protected by the Equality Act are:
 - age
 - disability
 - gender reassignment
 - marriage/civil partnership
 - pregnancy/maternity
 - race
 - religion/belief
 - sex/gender
 - sexual orientation
3. In addition to the above-protected characteristics, you should consider the crosscutting elements of the proposed policy, such as impact on social inequalities and impact on carers who look after older people or people with disabilities as part of this assessment.
4. The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) document is a tool that enables RBC to test and analyse the nature and impact of what it is currently doing or is planning to do in the future. It can be used flexibly for reviewing existing arrangements but in particular should enable identification where further consultation, engagement and data is required.
5. The questions will enable you to record your findings.
6. Where the EqIA relates to a continuing project, it must be reviewed and updated at each stage of the decision.
7. Once completed and signed off the EqIA will be published online.
8. An EqIA must accompany all **Key Decisions** and **Cabinet Reports**.
9. For further information, refer to the EqIA guidance for staff.
10. For advice and support, contact:

Corporate Equality & Diversity Team

Equality Impact Assessment

Service Area	Communities & Homes
Policy/Service being assessed	Expediting the current stock condition survey to achieve 100% during 2024/25 financial year.
Is this a new or existing policy/service? If existing policy/service, please state date of last assessment	Work is already in progress to do 60% within year. This report seeks to accelerate the pace.
EqlA Review team – List of members	Jason Husain Michelle Dickson
Date of this assessment	11 November 2024
Signature of responsible officer (to be signed after the EqlA has been completed)	Michelle Dickson

A copy of this Equality Impact Assessment report, including relevant data and information to be forwarded to the Corporate Equality & Diversity Team.

Details of Strategy/ Service/ Policy to be analysed

Stage 1 – Scoping and Defining	
(1) Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the Strategy/Service/Policy (or decision)?	<p>The safety and welfare of our tenants is paramount in exercising our duties as a responsible landlord.</p> <p>Conducting a stock condition survey (SCS), accompanied by collection of up-to-date Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) Data will create visibility of the condition of the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) asset base and in doing so be a robust evidence base for future investment and HRA business planning.</p>
(2) How does it fit with Rugby Borough Council's Corporate priorities and your service area priorities?	<p>The Stock Condition Survey</p> <p>Residents live healthy, independent lives with the most vulnerable protected.</p> <p>The SCS will support future investment planning in helping the Council to achieve its Net Zero ambitions and support the decarbonisation of the council's housing stock.</p> <p>The data will provide an evidence base upon which to inform future investment decisions, in keeping with our objective of being a responsible, effective and efficient organisation.</p> <p>The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) expects social landlords to have an accurate record at an individual property level on the condition of their stock, based on a physical inspection of all homes and that this is kept up to date.</p>
(3) What are the expected outcomes you are hoping to achieve?	<p>Broad understanding of the condition of the council's housing stock</p>

<p>(4) Does or will the policy or decision affect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers • Employees • Wider community or groups 	<p>RBC Tenants RBC Employees</p>
<p><u>Stage 2 - Information Gathering</u></p>	<p>As a minimum you must consider what is known about the population likely to be affected which will support your understanding of the impact of the policy, eg service uptake/usage, customer satisfaction surveys, staffing data, performance data, research information (national, regional and local data sources).</p>
<p>(1) What does the information tell you about those groups identified?</p>	<p>The population affected are RBC tenants and we have good quality data available on this population available through our CX system.</p>
<p>(2) Have you consulted or involved those groups that are likely to be affected by the strategy/ service/policy you want to implement? If yes, what were their views and how have their views influenced your decision?</p>	<p>We consult with tenants on a regular basis in a variety of forums both informal and more formal such as our Tenants Panel and we are aware that the condition of their homes.</p> <p>We do not need to specifically consult with tenants to undertake this work, as it is a requirement of the regulator to demonstrate compliance.</p>
<p>(3) If you have not consulted or engaged with communities that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision, give details about when you intend to carry out consultation or provide reasons for why you feel this is not necessary.</p>	<p>In April 2023 the RSH introduced the Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard. The Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard requires us to undertake a comprehensive Tenant Satisfaction Survey using standardised questions formulated by the RSH in consultation with providers of social housing.</p> <p>RBC is in the process of conducting the 2nd year of tenant satisfaction surveys to inform the mandatory data requirements of the regulator. This will give us a powerful opportunity to understand our tenants views on the housing service we provide including how satisfied tenants are that their homes are well maintained and safe.</p> <p>Our survey results will support other initiatives such as the SCS in making future decisions in respect of investment requirements and will underpin our ability to develop service improvement plans using a robust evidence base.</p>

Stage 3 – Analysis of impact			
<p>(1) Protected Characteristics From your data and consultations is there any positive, adverse, or negative impact identified for any particular group, which could amount to discrimination?</p> <p>If yes, identify the groups and how they are affected.</p>	<p>RACE No adverse impact</p>	<p>DISABILITY Positive impact – We will be better able to understand how our properties may be suitable for aids and adaptations.</p>	<p>GENDER No adverse impact</p>
	<p>MARRIAGE/CIVIL PARTNERSHIP No adverse impact</p>	<p>AGE Positive impact – We will be better able to understand how our properties may be suitable for aids and adaptations.</p>	<p>GENDER REASSIGNMENT No adverse impact</p>
	<p>RELIGION/BELIEF No adverse impact</p>	<p>PREGNANCY MATERNITY No adverse impact</p>	<p>SEXUAL ORIENTATION No adverse impact</p>
<p>(2) Cross cutting themes (a) Are your proposals likely to impact on social inequalities e.g., child poverty, geographically disadvantaged communities? If yes, please explain how? (b) Are your proposals likely to impact on a carer who looks after older people or people with disabilities? If yes, please explain how?</p>	<p>Our proposals will help us improve our homes including their energy efficiency, this will have a direct positive impact on those in poverty including children in poverty who live in our homes.</p>		
<p>(3) If there is an adverse impact, can this be justified?</p>	<p>No adverse impacts have been identified.</p>		

(4) What actions are going to be taken to reduce or eliminate negative or adverse impact? (This should form part of your action plan under Stage 4.)	N/A
(5) How does the strategy/service/policy contribute to the promotion of equality? If not, what can be done?	This initiative promotes equality of opportunity to good quality housing by giving us a robust tool for making future decisions in respect of investment requirements.
(6) How does the strategy/service/policy promote good relations between groups? If not, what can be done?	N/A
(7) Are there any obvious barriers to accessing the service? If yes, how can they be overcome?	<p>We know that there is a risk that some tenants will not permit access for surveyors to conduct inspections. This is evident from our experience in gaining safe access to tenants' homes in respect of gas servicing.</p> <p>In order to overcome this, the appointed contractor will develop and implement a tenant communication plan to ensure effective and timely communication with our tenants, this will be run in tandem with RBC's own communication and engagement channels.</p> <p>We will take account of tenant feedback and their experiences to adjust processes as required in order to meet the required contractual outcomes.</p>

<u>Stage 4 – Action Planning, Review & Monitoring</u>	
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<p>If No Further Action is required, then go to – Review & Monitoring</p> <p>(1) Action Planning – Specify any changes or improvements that can be made to the service or policy to mitigate or eradicate negative or adverse impact on specific groups, including resource implications.</p>	<p>No further action is required.</p> <p>EqlA Action Plan</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="875 352 2112 579"> <thead> <tr> <th>Action</th> <th>Lead Officer</th> <th>Date for completion</th> <th>Resource requirements</th> <th>Comments</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Action	Lead Officer	Date for completion	Resource requirements	Comments																				
Action	Lead Officer	Date for completion	Resource requirements	Comments																						
<p>(2) Review and Monitoring State how and when you will monitor policy and Action Plan</p>	<p>This EqlA will be reviewed in November 2025</p>																									

Please annotate your policy with the following statement:

An Equality Impact Assessment on this policy was undertaken on 11 November 2024 and will be reviewed on 11 November 2025

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Report Title:	Scrutiny Review
Name of Committee:	Council
Date of Meeting:	11 December 2024
Report Director:	Chief Officer - Legal and Governance
Portfolio:	Finance and Performance, Legal and Governance
Ward Relevance:	None
Prior Consultation:	None
Contact Officer:	Aftab Razzaq Chief Officer Legal & Governance
Public or Private:	Public
Report Subject to Call-In:	No
Report En-Bloc:	No
Forward Plan:	No
Corporate Priorities:	This report relates to the following priority(ies): <input type="checkbox"/> Rugby is an environmentally sustainable place, where we work together to reduce and mitigate the effects of climate change. (C) <input type="checkbox"/> Rugby has a diverse and resilient economy that benefits and enables opportunities for all residents. (E) <input type="checkbox"/> Residents live healthy, independent lives, with the most vulnerable protected. (HC) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rugby Borough Council is a responsible, effective and efficient organisation. (O) Corporate Strategy 2021-2024 <input type="checkbox"/> This report does not specifically relate to any Council priorities but
(C) Climate (E) Economy (HC) Health and Communities (O) Organisation	
Summary:	This report follows the decision from the Council's Scrutiny Committee to approve the formal action plan following the review of the Council's Scrutiny function. The review has been carried out by CFGS and the findings are set out within Appendix 2.
Financial Implications:	None arising directly from this report.

Risk Management/Health and Safety Implications:	None arising directly from this report.
Environmental Implications:	None arising directly from this report.
Legal Implications:	None arising directly from this report.
Equality and Diversity:	None arising directly from this report.
Options:	Approve or reject the proposed recommendation.
Recommendation:	<p>(1) The Action Plan relating to the implementation of the CFGS Review, as attached at Appendix 1, be approved; and</p> <p>(2) delegated authority be given to the Chief Officer - Legal & Governance to make such amendments as necessary in consultation with the Chair of Scrutiny Committee.</p>
Reasons for Recommendation:	To ensure the Council can implement the recommendations as set out within the CFGS and embed strong scrutiny within the Council.

Council - 11 December 2024

Scrutiny Review

Public Report of the Chief Officer - Legal and Governance

Recommendation

- (1) The Action Plan relating to the implementation of the CFGS Review, as attached at Appendix 1, be approved; and
- (2) delegated authority be given to the Chief Officer - Legal & Governance to make such amendments as necessary in consultation with the Chair of Scrutiny Committee.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Scrutiny function within local authorities was introduced via the Local Government Act 2000. It forms a key part of the Council and is at the very heart of strong governance and importantly ensures that the executive is being held to account.
- 1.2. In March 2024 it was agreed that a review of the Council's Scrutiny would be undertaken. This was carried out by the Centre for Governance Scrutiny and the findings are set out within Appendix 2.
- 1.3. Following the resolution at July Full Council it was agreed that a formal action plan would be formulated by the Council's Scrutiny Committee. A copy of the agreed action plan is set out within Appendix 1.
- 1.4. The proposed recommendation seeks to approve the action plan as recommended from the Council's Scrutiny Committee.

2. Background

- 2.1 As set out within the Executive Summary, Scrutiny is at the heart of strong governance. A strong functioning Scrutiny Committee will act as a 'critical friend' towards the Executive.
- 2.2 The assessment of Scrutiny formed part of the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge. The assessors were provided information relating to the changes undertaken at the Council which included the move to a single committee. There was also the clear aspiration of embedding a culture of strong Scrutiny throughout the Council. This is in accordance with the Council's strategic objectives of embedding strong governance within the Council.

- 2.3 The subsequent Action Plan to the LGA Peer Challenge was approved at Full Council and included the following;
'5.6 Seek support from external stakeholders such as the LGA and the CFGS to ensure the Council is undertaking effective scrutiny. This shall also include bi-annual survey of Councillors in respect of feedback on Scrutiny'
- 2.4 The discussions with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CFGS) commenced early in 2024 with a clear directive for a Scrutiny review to be undertaken. This was subsequently approved at Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.5 The CFGS is a national body that support various organisations in achieving strong governance and scrutiny. Further information can be found at the following link;
- <https://www.cfgs.org.uk/about-centre-for-public-scrutiny/>
- 2.6 The Council is in a position of having both recommendations from the CFGS and an accompanying Action Plan. Both sets of documents provide a clear roadmap to ensure the Council can embed a culture of strong scrutiny throughout the Council.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 It is important that the Council's Scrutiny Committee is responsible and has ownership of the Action Plan. There is also the requirement that all members continue to be engaged with the journey of embedding strong scrutiny throughout the Council. This will be achieved through the implementation of the Action Plan.

Name of Meeting: Council
Date of Meeting: 11 December 2024
Subject Matter: Scrutiny Review
Originating Department: Legal and Governance

DO ANY BACKGROUND PAPERS APPLY YES NO

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Doc No	Title of Document and Hyperlink

The background papers relating to reports on planning applications and which are open to public inspection under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972, consist of the planning applications, referred to in the reports, and all written responses to consultations made by the Local Planning Authority, in connection with those applications.

Exempt information is contained in the following documents:

Doc No	Relevant Paragraph of Schedule 12A

CFGS Action Plan

Recommendation 1: Develop a council vision for overview and scrutiny. Use this to underpin scrutiny processes, relationships, and work programming.

A Scrutiny Protocol to be drafted and developed. This will align with best practices from key institutions such as CFGS and effectively provide a single source of information for all Scrutiny members and officers.

Target Date: April 2025

Recommendation 2: Strengthen finance scrutiny through member development and through rigorous and early involvement of scrutiny in the budget planning and building process and ensure that scrutiny is embedded and aligned with the budget-setting timetable.

Finance Training to be put in place for all Scrutiny Members.

Scrutiny to be engaged during the Autumn in respect of planning in respect of the annual budget. Important that Scrutiny have a clear voice within the 'planning stage' and are not engaged once the budget has been agreed.

Target Date: Ongoing/January 2025

Recommendation 3: That the use of Council motions to direct scrutiny activity through task and finish requests is reviewed.

The constitution will be reviewed in respect of the mechanism by which Council refers motions to scrutiny. At present such referral takes place without debate and as per the CFGS report this provides the potential for an influx of motion and task and finish groups which may not align with the work programme for Scrutiny.

The review of this process will seek a mechanism whereby the Chair of Scrutiny Committee is engaged prior to any consideration at Full Council and importantly the ability for such a motion to be debated.

Target date: March 2025

Recommendation 4: Provide development support and training for Officers across the Council to build, refresh and enhance their knowledge and understanding of the role, purpose, and powers of scrutiny.

An appropriate training programme will be put in place to ensure there is the required understanding of Scrutiny within the organisation.

Target date: March 2025

Recommendation 5: A programme of development support for the scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair to support them in their scrutiny leadership roles.

This will form part of the training programme for Scrutiny in respect of officers and members. A separate session will take place to support both the Chair and Vice Chair.

Target date: Ongoing/April 2025

Recommendation 6: Skills development sessions for scrutiny members to focus on questioning skills, work programming and scoping reviews, financial and performance management scrutiny skills.

This will form part of the overall training session for scrutiny members. This will align with the overall recommendations of the CFGS report.

Target date: Ongoing/April 2025

Recommendation 7: Strengthen the Member led work programme with a refreshed process that uses systematic scrutiny tools to identify and prioritise agenda items, key lines of enquiry and potential impact.

This will form part of the training sessions with Members. It will also be addressed within the Scrutiny handbook as highlighted within recommendation 1.

Target date: Ongoing/April 2025

Recommendation 8: Strengthen existing collaborative relationships between scrutiny, Cabinet and Directors whilst maintaining the independence of scrutiny. Early and systematic involvement of portfolio holders and Directors would enable scrutiny to identify issues, trends, and topics where it can focus for accountability and impact.

As per the recommendation report appropriate meetings will be put in place between scrutiny, Cabinet and members of the Leadership Team. Again, this will form part of the overall Scrutiny handbook.

Target date: Completed and provisional dates have been put in the diary.

Recommendation 9: Ensure cross-party pre-meetings are held (ideally) a few days before the meeting and led in a way that helps committee members prepare for scrutiny sessions by reviewing the key lines of enquiry and coordinating approaches.

This will form part of the overall programme of meetings. Each meeting will have agendas formulated with a view to having clarity in respect of objectives.

Target date: Ongoing throughout the municipal year.

Recommendation 10: Develop a protocol between Cabinet and Scrutiny around the role of Scrutiny in pre-scrutiny and policy development.

- a) identify how and when policy development items come to scrutiny and how recommendations are embedded in Council processes and timelines.
- b) Ensure scrutiny's input into policy development can be early and constructive. This will require scrutiny being given early access, information, and clear line of sight to new policy areas are in open discussion stage.

This will form part of the Scrutiny protocol and incorporate the required clarity as detailed above.

Target date: April 2025

Recommendation 11: Enhance the system for tracking recommendations over time – identify the impact and learning from specific recommendations as well as factors that produce effective recommendations.

This will form part of the annual scrutiny report. Consideration can also be given as to whether Scrutiny has a quarterly or biannual performance report. This will include the number of recommendations that have been approved by Cabinet, the number of task and finish groups and the period it has taken them to convene and formulate recommendations. This will require further detailed analysis of best practice and engagement with the CFGS.

Target date: Ongoing/April 2025

Aftab Razzaq
Chief Officer - Legal and Governance
Rugby Borough Council

May 2024

Dear Aftab,

Scrutiny Improvement Review – CfGS consultancy support

I am writing to thank you for inviting the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to carry out an evaluation of Rugby Borough Council's scrutiny arrangements and effectiveness, with the intention of developing and improving. This letter provides feedback on our review findings and offers suggestions on how the Council could develop its scrutiny process.

As part of this feedback stage, we would like to facilitate a workshop with Members and Officers to reflect on this review and to discuss options for improvement.

Background and Context

Rugby Council has experienced some changes prior to this review. It appointed a new Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team in 2020 and there has been change in political leadership. Following the local government elections in 2024, the council continues to have no single party in overall control but has a conservative-led minority administration. [Note: This reflects the situation at the time of the review. We recognise that there have been further changes].

The Council's scrutiny function has also been restructured and given a fresh purpose. Two previous scrutiny committees have been condensed into a single committee, which is designed to work as a board or 'select committee' to constructively hold the council's Cabinet and Corporate leadership to account and to bring into scrutiny focus issues of borough-wide concern. The Council Leader, Cabinet Members and Directors and other designated Officers regularly attend scrutiny.

At the time of the review the scrutiny committee was chaired by a member of the council's main opposition group, (the Labour Group Leader), together with a vice-chair from the minority opposition group.

Whilst the new structure has overall been well received and is seen as positive and forward thinking, it is generally believed to be finding its feet and has not reached its potential or having sufficient impact. We were advised that there is an ambition among scrutiny members to achieve more and to grow in their role, but may need some help and advice to achieve this.

This short review of the scrutiny function as it currently stands involved a collaborative process with Members and Officers to explore strengths and weaknesses and provide clarity around what actions, improvements and development steps could be taken to support Members to achieve their goals in having greater impact.

Review objectives

- Deliver appropriate advice and support to the Council in a review of its scrutiny function to ensure it is effective in providing a quality contribution in accountability, policy and decision making, delivery of council plans and overall improvement.
- Checking and testing that scrutiny arrangements and effectiveness meet the council's high expectations of democratic accountability and that decision-making and overview and scrutiny is transparent, effective, and impactful. It is determined to make its ongoing approach to scrutiny fresh, innovative, and bold.
- Testing that the scrutiny structure is providing the right framework to maximise its impact within the council's governance arrangements.

In addressing these objectives, the review explored;

- **Operating Culture.** The behaviours, relationships and mindsets underpinning the operation of the overview and scrutiny process. This includes key areas of inclusion, diversity, and equality within scrutiny. The focus on the Council's corporate approach and level of support for scrutiny is also included;
- **Information.** How information is prepared, shared, accessed, and used in the service of the scrutiny function. To what extent is scrutiny supported and given adequate 'tools' to effectively scrutinise;
- **Impact.** Ways to ensure that scrutiny is effective, that it makes a tangible difference to the lives of local people.

Evidence Base

Our evidence is based on what the review team observed, were told, and later validated, obtained from council documents, compared to good practice elsewhere and contained in latest guidance.

Conversations

In gathering evidence for the review, we arranged exploratory conversations with members and officers in person and online.

Members included:

- Chairs and Vice Chair of Scrutiny,
- Cabinet members,
- Leader and Deputy Leader
- Members of Scrutiny Committee (discussion group)
- Members of Task & Finish Groups (discussion group)

Officers included:

- The Chief Executive
- Directors
- Democratic Services Team

Meeting observations

We observed remotely meetings of the Scrutiny Committee.

Document research

Our desk research considered:

- Minutes of meetings, reports and documents considered at meetings.
- Elements of the Constitution specifically, the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules
- Scrutiny Work Programmes
- LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Report

The review was conducted by:

Ian Parry – Director of Consultancy, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

The Review Period was March-April 2024

Summary of findings

1. Scrutiny has the conditions to improve and succeed

There is a collective ambition to improve scrutiny.

1.1 Overall, scrutiny at Rugby is structurally or operationally in reasonable shape, but could be more effective and stronger. The essential elements for this to happen – Member and Officer ambition - are clearly visible. Scrutiny is valued and encouraged and there is a total-council understanding of its value and role in democratic accountability and governance.

1.2 Changes to the scrutiny structure has provided the dual advantage of clarity and focus, both in terms of council resources and support and importantly the potential for scrutiny to concentrate on strategic and vital issues. The advantages presented by the new structure have not been realised and this report will zoom in on some areas that could unlock more.

1.3 In the scrutiny sessions we observed we witnessed Members being concerned and curious, especially about some of the areas they were keen to see the council make progress. This is positive and encouraging, but this currently seems to lack sufficient weight to have real influence. Strong and compelling recommendations to Cabinet would give scrutiny a sharper edge.

1.4 There is a tendency by some to view scrutiny as a function of 'Opposition', rather than an all-member and all-party endeavour. It is a common misconception that only Scrutiny Committee members who are not part of the administration can effectively participate in robust and meaningful scrutiny. This can have the effect of overly politicising scrutiny, and dilute its collective power and influence.

We do not however suggest that this is a significant problem, just an area which we would like to point out as a possible future weakness if it becomes embedded in scrutiny's operational culture

1.5 Scrutiny's scope, authority and independence is affected by the use of Council motions which direct that scrutiny respond to certain issues, which may include establishing a task and finish group. This takes up scrutiny capacity and limits its ability to set its own work programme. Scrutiny's work can become detached from its core work and purpose. However, task and finish groups can add significant value to the work of scrutiny, especially by highlighting specific issues or through developing new insight. They are most effective when properly scoped with a clear and precise brief and timescale. Some of the work of T&Fs were over extended in their activities and too long in their delivery and need either to deliver their findings or to be concluded. There are lessons here in how to ensure that T&F work is well scoped and have short time-scales.

1.6 Scrutiny work is having less impact than it should and at times it lacks sufficient focus on strategic issues. There is open recognition that work programming across the scrutiny committees needs to be focussed and aligned to the council's priorities with flexibility to consider emerging areas of concern. Political and Corporate leaders are keen to support scrutiny so that it can address challenges and priorities, as well as influence and shape policies during their development, through alignment of the scrutiny work programme and Cabinet forward plan. However, working groups, which appear to have a policy advisory role would seem to dilute this aspect of scrutiny, which is clearly included in its responsibilities. It should be noted that working groups are informal meetings, not publicly accessible and may therefore limit public accountability. Greater clarity around the purpose and accessibility and visibility of both working groups and scrutiny, their respect roles in policy shaping and their overall relationship should be considered.

1.7 Scrutiny members wish to see their efforts result in improvement and change. However, we detected a concern that scrutiny is unable to adequately track their efforts. Meetings often lack objectivity or goals and outcomes, such as clear recommendations. Meetings can become simply forums for discussion and information exchange, without an outcome or product. Making recommendations to Cabinet as part of scrutiny's output could be improved. We have seen little evidence of sufficiently compelling recommendations arising from scrutiny discussions. Scrutiny work must ensure that its recommendations will improve policies and services for residents and the community.

1.8 Follow up, monitoring and tracking of accepted recommendations against outcomes also needs to be strengthened. This is a development area for both the scrutiny chair and officers.

1.9 Some scrutiny members do try to be strategic and focus on the areas of importance, although in practice this sometimes falls short. Scrutiny can very often become a conversation, an information exchange or become too operational. Questioning fails to probe and is often simply a discussion or opinion sharing. The session with the Leader and Chief Executive was an example of undemanding questioning and unclear objectives and purpose.

Appendix 2

1.10 There is a tendency for scrutiny meetings to become over reliant on officer updates and presentations, again reducing the focus and capacity for challenging scrutiny of decision-makers (Cabinet), future policy development and accountability. Members must have greater control over agendas and work programmes.

1.11 There are missed opportunities for scrutiny to add value and to be an integral part of the Council's corporate plans and overall improvement. For scrutiny to be more strategic, there needs to be change from both scrutiny and the Cabinet(s), to draw closer together to create a purposeful role and agenda without compromising scrutiny independence. If the council wants scrutiny to place more emphasis on shaping, challenging, and holding to account, then scrutiny will need the support and early access to information, resources and operate as an integral, constructive part of policy and decision-making activities of the Leader and Cabinet.

1.12 The Leader and Cabinet Members do not attend scrutiny meetings as regular contributors and therefore are not sufficiently held to account and constructively challenged. Cabinet members and the Leader have expressed support for scrutiny and welcome challenge and accountable scrutiny, ways to put this into practice would require an understanding of the role of each (Scrutiny – Cabinet), establishing a collaborative and constructive, but also robustly challenging relationship.

1.13 Scrutiny leadership could be stronger through exercising the 'critical friend' role. The committee chair is an experienced councillor who has clear expectations of how scrutiny should operate and also recognises some of its current weaknesses. However, there seems to be a tendency for the Chair to take on much of the responsibility for the committee and its workload. We would encourage greater inclusion of the whole committee, including the vice chair to ensure that the work and planning of scrutiny is a collective endeavour.

1.14 Scrutiny's work programme appears stale and repetitive, which is unlikely to excite and interest members or deliver any significant value for the council. There is no real thread between the work programme and the council's corporate plan, future objectives or the cabinets forward plan, it is largely populated with portfolio holder check-ins, up-dates and motions from council, There is a golden opportunity to improve this as a cornerstone of scrutiny improvement.

1.15 Budget scrutiny is generally too late and superficial. Scrutiny has a crucial role to play in supporting the development of the council's budget and medium-term financial plan through constructive scrutiny throughout the process. It is vital that scrutiny to develop its role and impact in budget preparation scrutiny and budget overview. There are now many instances where absence of scrutiny has been a contributory factor in governance weaknesses. Members may also need to update their own skills in this area.

1.16 Scrutiny has full access to information through the introduction of Power Bi, although in practice there is regular use verbal updates in scrutiny rather than formal reports which have the advantage of being a clear record.

1.17 Meetings are held bi-monthly and are very clearly accessible on the council's website. We commend this as a good public service.

1.18 From its current base, in terms of political support, member engagement, resources, council support and ambition, there is a platform upon which scrutiny could successfully develop.

2. Developing a clear vision for scrutiny

2.1 The following key themes emerged from our review which will support the Council in its development of scrutiny:

- There is value in setting out a vision, refreshing and asserting the principles and purpose of scrutiny for Members and Officers.
- Making the best use of scrutiny and corporate resource. To consider the scope and remit for scrutiny committees and flexibility to schedule meetings to get the most from scrutiny activities.
- Focusing on the impact and outcomes of good scrutiny that adds value and supports effective services for the benefit of residents.
- Testing through scrutiny the impact of new policies or key decisions on residents.
- Embedding new forms of public engagement to increase the voice and participation of local groups and residents in agendas and evidence gathering.
- Earlier engagement by scrutiny in the budget-building and MTFP process and the important foundations such as: budget outlook and assumptions, risks, pressures, reserves, and alignment with corporate plan. We strongly encourage the council to make this a priority for the 25/26 budget and MTFP process. Scrutiny could add real value in this key area of council governance. It is also been regularly found to be a weakness in poor performing councils elsewhere.

2.2 Several of the issues highlighted in this report are rooted in the need to develop a vision of scrutiny at the council and being clear about the purpose of scrutiny itself.

Commissioning this review offers a good starting point to examine the principles and purpose of scrutiny. This would help build a shared understanding of scrutiny across the Councils, its position in the wider local democratic process and governance system and, its role in improving performance of services to residents and the wider community.

Recommendation 1: Develop a council vision for overview and scrutiny. Use this to underpin scrutiny processes, relationships, and work programming.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen finance scrutiny through member development and through rigorous and early involvement of scrutiny in the budget planning and building process and ensure that scrutiny is embedded and aligned with the budget-setting timetable.

Recommendation 3: That the use of Council motions to direct scrutiny activity through task and finish requests is reviewed.

3. Culture, Leadership, Values

3.1 Having a culture of trust, transparency and mutual respect between scrutiny and the Cabinet cannot be understated. This ensures that open and candid exchanges take place as well as a flow of information and communication. Positive engagement between the Cabinet and scrutiny both formal and informal is vital to the success of the scrutiny process and overall governance of the council.

Political behaviours

3.2 We did not observe or hear of any significant behaviour or relationship issues, beyond what might be considered normal in a democratically elected body. It is therefore commendable that scrutiny can be regarded as a 'safe space' for members to challenge and speak freely. The Scrutiny Chair is appointed from opposition Members, which may also add to the generally co-operative environment.

Officer Relationships with Scrutiny

3.3 Officers were consistent in their belief that scrutiny could and should do more. Officers can help here. There is sometimes a mis-match between what scrutiny needs in terms of information and advice and what it receives. This results in frustration from both Officers and the Scrutiny Committee. A stronger collaborative arrangement that ensure that Scrutiny has the information in the correct format, and any necessary core knowledge briefings in a timely way for it to be effective in its work, would help.

Recommendation 4: Provide development support and training for Officers across the Council to build, refresh and enhance their knowledge and understanding of the role, purpose, and powers of scrutiny.

Role of Leader and Cabinet Members

3.4 We have been impressed with the commitment that cabinet members have shown towards the scrutiny function in our review.

3.5 There is a collective acceptance that scrutiny should hold the Leader and Cabinet to account and, through the influence of constructive challenge, make a difference to policy and decisions. However currently we have observed cabinet members attending scrutiny meetings but not particularly playing an active role in answering questions and actively showing a willingness to provide additional information and support. Cabinet Members are not routinely part of Scrutiny meetings to present reports or policies. They attend as part of update and progress reporting sessions.

3.7 There is a preference for Committee Members to scrutinise officers, believing that this is where the answers are found and performance managed, which can leave Cabinet members sidelined. Scrutiny may overlook the important fact that its role is to hold decision-makers to account. And since the only key decision-makers are Cabinet Members, who are democratically accountable for decisions and service delivery and council performance, scrutiny should focus its attention more, but not exclusively, in the

accountability of the Cabinet. This could easily be rectified and would potentially help scrutiny to become more strategic.

3.8 The overall relationship between Cabinet and Scrutiny is good but there is insufficient collaboration to have a constructively challenging dialogue and for Scrutiny to have a central role in shaping and improving. The Scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair and Cabinet Members could meet formally more frequently to share information and plans and to allow scrutiny to be 'let in' to the work of Cabinet. There is an important role for the Chair/Vice in this regard also.

3.9 Scrutiny outputs – recommendations to Cabinet – should be considered in advance of decisions and feedback given to scrutiny. This ensures the positive productivity of Scrutiny as a useful aid policy and decision-making.

4. Impact advice

Chairing and leading scrutiny, member development and meeting preparation

4.1 Scrutiny's success is dependent on the right Members, with the right capabilities and attributes, leading and managing the scrutiny function. The Chair and Vice Chair have an important responsibility to lead the Committee and Task Groups, and ensure that they build and maintain a strong relationship with the Cabinet, Officers and relevant external partners.

4.2 The Chair can also lead on setting the working culture of scrutiny, helping it to set and uphold high standards of behaviour, engagement, and debate, and ensure good cross-party working. Given the dynamics within any committee, Chairs will need the skills to navigate differences and to build consensus.

4.3 The Committee Vice chair also has an important role in supporting the Chair to uphold and deliver the principles of scrutiny they are an essential component of ensuring that scrutiny standards and performance is achieved. When required and expected they can lead and provide direction on the Chair's behalf during meetings and outside of meetings.

4.4 In addition to the areas highlighted above, the Chair and Vice Chair working together well and recognise that they are tasked to

- be accountable for delivering the work programme
- meet regularly to monitor the work programme
- contribute to and develop 'team culture' amongst scrutiny members
- work closely with scrutiny officers
- develop a constructive 'critical friend' relationship with the Cabinet and chief officers
- liaise with others to monitor the work programme and problem solve any issues, and
- actively look to improve scrutiny ways of working through considering best practice elsewhere.

4.5 There is a recognition that members of the Scrutiny Committee need to support the Chair and share responsibility for the success of the process. Several themes were identified for supporting the chairing function:

- Setting the culture and expectations prior to each meeting.
- Instilling scrutiny principles
- Developing a robust approach to summarising the outcomes of agenda items from the committee meetings and overall discussion.
- Ensuring clarity of recommendations and actions from each discussion.
- Managing the time and focus for each agenda item including the focus of questions and the amount of time given to each item.
- Ensuring committee members share a group working agreement for managing their contributions and supporting the meetings.

4.6 A number of these themes can be supported by recommendations elsewhere in this report related to work planning, group working agreements and tracking recommendations.

Recommendation 5: A programme of development support for the scrutiny Chair and Vice Chair to support them in their scrutiny leadership roles.

Recommendation 6: Skills development sessions for scrutiny members to focus on questioning skills, work programming and scoping reviews, financial and performance management scrutiny skills.

Work programming and focus

4.7 The Committee has its own work programme. There is a planning process but this tends to be strongly officer advised and is not adequately aligned to the council's corporate plans or the Cabinet's forward plans and the strategic plans.

4.8 We observed that work programmes are over-reliant on officer input with too much activity based on up-dates, progress reports and presentations. It is not always clear where impact and value is being added. Scrutiny cannot scrutinise everything, nor is it necessary to do so, therefore establishing realistic priorities based on clear objectives is essential.

4.9 Work programmes contain significant repetition, such as Cabinet up-date sessions and are overly trapped in the task and finish demands driven by full council motions.

4.10 Work programming is key to ensuring scrutiny stays focussed on strategic issues where it can make an impact, whilst making the best use of time and resources. Prioritisation is essential and helps to avoid duplication and repetition. The aim should be value-adding and impact, clearly helping to drive improvement through robust questioning of council plans.

4.11 Members can find it hard to lead and contribute to the work programme. Without active Member engagement and clear objectives, the agendas can result in adding

additional items simply to receive reports to note rather than aligning to Committee priorities and key lines of enquiry with the practice of Cabinet update briefings dominating.

4.12 On a strategic level there needs to be more of an emphasis on seeing scrutiny as a vital part of council business and governance with clear ownership regarding its important role in improving policy and holding to account. It should be an integral part of the key decision and policy making pathway, but not used as a rubber stamp or approval process.

4.13 Consideration of pre-decision scrutiny activity would be useful as this has a crucial role in shaping, improving, and influencing future Council plans. This would require collaboration with and a commitment from the Leader and Cabinet to ensure earlier and timely access to information.

4.14 Clear opportunities to strengthen the planning process for Scrutiny are available:

- Using a consistent work planning tool to support each to create a balanced work plan that is manageable and relevant.
- Focusing on key issues where scrutiny can make a significant impact. Working closely with senior Officers, Cabinet Members, and strategic partners to understand the most challenging issues around Council delivery and outcomes.
- Identifying the areas where there are already robust forms of accountability and scrutiny in the Council and wider system – where possible avoid replication or where added-value is minimal.
- Highlighting the issues that are high priorities for residents and that reflect their concerns.
- Focusing on a maximum two or three substantive issues in a meeting to ensure impact.
- Linking the work planning to the scoping process for specific review topics.
- Embedding public engagement activities more centrally to the planning process.
- Task and finish groups.

Recommendation 7: Strengthen the Member led work programme with a refreshed process that uses systematic scrutiny tools to identify and prioritise agenda items, key lines of enquiry and potential impact.

Recommendation 8: Strengthen existing collaborative relationships between scrutiny, Cabinet and Directors whilst maintaining the independence of scrutiny. Early and systematic involvement of portfolio holders and Directors would enable scrutiny to identify issues, trends, and topics where it can focus for accountability and impact.

Pre-meetings

4.15 Currently there are currently no regular all-member pre-meetings prior to the main Scrutiny Committee. Some concerns were raised about additional time pressures that pre meetings can place on members already busy diaries. Some saw little value in pre meetings as they didn't have a clear aim or purpose. Others saw the benefits as sharing and developing questions as well as helping to build relationships.

4.16 This could be a missed opportunity for Members to collaborate and to develop strong questioning strategies or key lines of enquiry. Pre-meetings also offer a space to raise any concerns or relationship issues before these are taken into the public forum. These sessions also offer an opportunity for Members to be given extra briefings by officers on the more technical aspects they are planning to scrutinise.

Recommendation 9: Ensure cross-party pre-meetings are held (ideally) a few days before the meeting and led in a way that helps committee members prepare for scrutiny sessions by reviewing the key lines of enquiry and coordinating approaches.

Pre and post decision scrutiny

4.17 We could not observe or were told how Members are involved in influencing policy development and key decisions through pre-scrutiny. Pre-decision scrutiny enables Members to engage with topics proactively. Recommendations can have impact when they influence and enhance decision making. Pre- decision scrutiny can contribute to longer-term policy development, overview, consultation design and forward planning.

4.18 There is potential for advisory groups to dilute pre-scrutiny as an open and transparent process of supporting policy development. There may be space for both but some clarity would be useful and an appreciation of how much value pre-scrutiny could offer

4.19 As pre-decision scrutiny can usefully be planned during the work programme phase, developing a pre-scrutiny protocol with Cabinet is an effective way to identify these areas and agree a process for how these are brought to scrutiny. Scrutiny carried out well in advance of the decision will allow more time to delve into and explore the issues and likely impact of the decision taking into consideration any risks and measures of success.

Post-decision scrutiny is also essential, holding the Council to account for the implementation of decisions and assessing the impact on peoples' lives. This then feeds into learning and can be applied to future decisions. A work programme that balances scrutiny across all points in the organisational cycle is likely to be most effective – with Members able to scope the key points at which scrutiny can make a positive contribution.

Recommendation 10: Develop a protocol between Cabinet and Scrutiny around the role of Scrutiny in pre-scrutiny and policy development.

- a) **identify how and when policy development items come to scrutiny and how recommendations are embedded in Council processes and timelines.**
- b) **Ensure scrutiny's input into policy development can be early and constructive. This will require scrutiny being given early access, information, and clear line of sight to new policy areas are in open discussion stage.**

Impact through recommendations

5.20 There is a strong desire to enhance the impact of scrutiny. Demonstrating that scrutiny can make a difference in measurable ways for local people. To achieve this, it is important to develop effective recommendations and track their impact. Committee outputs should not consist of noting reports etc.

5.21 Recommendations are the 'product' or 'output' of scrutiny :

- Focus recommendations on a small set of priorities - this is more effective than having a long list that is not prioritised.
- Ensuring recommendations are clearly articulated and are focused;
- Testing draft recommendations with Officers to ensure issues are understood and are factually correct.
- Reviewing the impact and learning from recommendations over set time periods through regular agenda items.
- Ensuring a clear protocol with Cabinet to agree the process for considering and responding to scrutiny recommendations.
- Where applicable, to share recommendations with external partners.
- Collecting additional evidence and feedback to identify the impact of recommendations.

5.22 There is concern that responses to scrutiny recommendations, when these are provided, are not actively monitored. Coupled with the uncertainty about whose responsibility it is to monitor and track the implementation of agreed scrutiny recommendations makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of scrutiny efforts. This offers the basis for more in-depth dialogue as recommendations evolve into more substantive proposals and challenges.

5.23 It is important that scrutiny can hold itself to account for its work and impact. Modelling good practice can set expectations for ways of working to promote a culture of accountability for the function itself and the council. Applying the principles of challenge to how it uses its time and resources most effectively.

5.24 The Annual Scrutiny report should include any learning from the scrutiny activities.

- **Recommendation 11: Enhance the system for tracking recommendations over time – identify the impact and learning from specific recommendations as well as factors that produce effective recommendations.**

Thank you and acknowledgements.

We would like to thank the Chair, Vice Chair and Members of the Scrutiny Committee, the Council Leader, Cabinet Members, Chief Executive and Officers who took part in interviews for their time, insights, and open views.

Yours sincerely,

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