

REVIEW COMMITTEE

**ANNUAL REPORT
2020/21**



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CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

The Review Committee is pleased to present our Annual Report for 2020-21, which outlines the work we have undertaken during this Municipal Year and provides information on the Overview and Scrutiny function at Rochford District Council.

We are dedicated to shaping Council policy, community wellbeing and accountability for decision making where we have the power to review Council services and policies, scrutinise key decisions and the work of the Executive and make recommendations where we feel necessary. We act as a 'critical friend' to executive policy makers and decision-makers, and aim to support robust decision making for the benefit of our local community.

When considering what topics to undertake, the Review Committee looks at areas where we are able to drive through improvement in public services, enable the voice and concerns of the public to be heard, and ensure that key decisions have been made taking account of the best interests of our residents.

Throughout the year, we have been supported by various officers, including our Leadership Team and Democratic Services Team, as well as officers from different service areas. By working together, the Review Committee and officers have supported Rochford District Council through a number of important decisions, which we hope to continue in the next Municipal Year.

I would like to thank my fellow Review Committee Members for their continued hard work and efforts. Remote meetings have been a new concept for most of us, and I am pleased that as a Committee, we have been able to adapt to these challenges and continue to serve the interests of local residents throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

CLLR JAMIE BURTON

Chairman of the Review Committee

REVIEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS



Cllr Jamie Burton
Chairman



Cllr Dave Sperring
Vice-Chairman



Cllr Craig Cannell



Cllr Robin Dray



Cllr Mrs Julie
Gooding



Cllr Brian Hazlewood



Cllr Neil Hookway



Cllr Michael Hoy



Cllr Mrs Christine
Mason



Cllr Mrs Jo
McPherson



Cllr Robert Milne



Cllr Mrs Carol
Pavelin



Cllr Mrs Laureen
Shaw



Cllr Phil Shaw



Cllr Mike Wilkinson

INTRODUCTION

The Local Government Act 2000 introduced new legislation, requiring local authorities to create a committee to carry out Overview & Scrutiny functions. These committees carry out a supportive and investigative role, overviewing and scrutinising the work of the Executive, other Committees and the Council as a whole.

Councillors appointed to the Review Committee are expected to adopt a deliberative, investigative and evidence-based approach while casting aside pre-determinations. Scrutiny should work in an open, transparent, inclusive and accountable manner, adopting an outward looking focus.



THE REVIEW COMMITTEE IN 2020/21

This Annual Report outlines the work of the Review Committee in 2020/21. It is impossible to ignore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work of the Council at all levels, with Overview and Scrutiny proving to be no different. In order to adapt and continue delivery of its function, the Review Committee switched to remote meetings. It is a testament to the work of Members and officers involved that this vital work was able to continue throughout the past year.

Rochford District Council's response to COVID-19 was scrutinised at various stages by the Review Committee, and this is highlighted within the Annual Report. However, this was not the only focus of the work plan, and this report intends to provide an overall summary of the work completed by the Review Committee in 2020/21.

Our Review Committee is made up of 15 Members of the Council from various political backgrounds, which ensures that the review process is carried out by independently minded Members with varying opinions. We are proud that our Members come together, combining different thoughts and propositions to create recommendations that have been carefully evaluated.

WORK PLAN

2020/21

7 July 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treasury Management Annual Review 2019/20• Report of Carbon Neutral by 2030 working group
1 September 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approval of Review Committee's Annual Report• COVID-19: Initial Lessons Learned
6 October 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RIPA• Waste and Recycling Review
1 December 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treasury Management 2020/21 Mid-Year Review• Waste and Recycling Strategy
5 January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic
2 February 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Annual Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement 2021/22• Emergency Planning
2 March 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Safety Partnership• Update on Animal Welfare Licensing
13 April 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approval of Review Committee's Annual Report

COVID-19: INITIAL LESSONS LEARNED

The initial report on the COVID-19 pandemic at the September 2020 meeting provided a summary of all initial feedback received regarding Rochford District Council's response to the sudden and unprecedented outbreak. Members observed that this was not as structured and responsive as they had hoped and that work needed to be done to improve this. However, it was also recognised that these were highly unusual circumstances that could not have been predicted, and several areas of the response had worked well.

The report covered all areas of the Council's response, including communication, agile working, continued service delivery, additional service delivery and financial impact. An in-depth review of what had gone well and what could have gone better was provided, following feedback from Members and the next steps to be taken to ensure that the response from the Council was improved. In particular, the report highlighted that Members felt the Council could have reacted more quickly, without waiting for instructions from Central government, and the lack of emergency planning to prepare for a situation such as this.

Members recognised:

- Communication with the public via regular newsletters, daily briefings and information made accessible on the Council website was to be commended.
- The redeployment of officers and the continued service delivery was very successful. Members requested that future working patterns of officers would be examined.
- The response from the Community Hub was extremely important in supporting vulnerable residents. However, this could have been set up faster.

Where to improve:

- Members felt emergency planning arrangements had been inadequate. Officers advised that emergency planning was usually predicated on the basis of short-term contingency planning.
- Due to Council Receptions being closed and issues arising with telephone systems, members of the public were not able to communicate with officers as effectively as Members would have liked. Officers confirmed a new telephone contract would be starting in November.
- Members felt the provision of IT equipment with no training did not enable them to work efficiently, and was not in line with equality and diversity policies.
- There were issues with continued delivery of existing council services e.g. the inability to print documents.



COVID-19: LESSONS LEARNED

The second report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at the January 2021 meeting addressed the issues raised from the previous COVID-19 report, along with providing Members of the Review Committee with an opportunity to provide suggestions.

The report dealt with three themes:- continued delivery of existing council services, delivery of new COVID-19 initiatives, and the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and recovery.

Continued Delivery of Existing Council Services:

- While some services had to continue with a paper based approach, others had moved to a fully digital approach and a hybrid mail solution was being procured to improve working practices.
- The emergency planning issue was addressed with the Council promising to continue its process of real time learning to adopt its service delivery to meet the changing circumstances, and highlighted that a Local Outbreak Plan had been produced by Central Government which would improve response times should a similar situation be faced.
- An update was provided to Members on the new Voice Over IP system that would enable staff to make and receive calls from their laptops rather than using a mobile phone, and would greatly assist in communication issues, particularly for the Customer Services Team.
- All Members had been offered laptops, and it was noted that Member Training for the use of Office 365 would be covered at a later date and continued support would be identified.

Delivery of New COVID-19 Initiatives:

- The Rochford District Community Hub had acted as a support service, managing hundreds of volunteers. The success was evidenced by ECC with data showing that Rochford had one of the lowest referrals to the Essex Welfare Service during the pandemic.
- Since the start of the pandemic, ten rough sleepers had been housed in emergency accommodation.

Delivery of New COVID-19 Initiatives:

- Staff surveys had received very high response rates, with staff being frank in their responses and had been used to drive forward additional support in terms of mental wellbeing.
- The Council had been allocated £1,111,693 in grants to mitigate financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.



TREASURY MANAGEMENT

The Council is required to receive and approve, as a minimum, three main treasury related reports each year which incorporate a variety of policies, estimates and actuals. The reports are required to be adequately scrutinised before being recommended to the Council.

The Capital and Treasury Management Strategy:

This covers:

- the capital plans (including prudential indicators);
- a minimum revenue provision (MRP) policy, (how residual capital expenditure is charged to revenue over time);
- the treasury management strategy (how the investments and borrowings are to be organised) including treasury indicators;
- an investment strategy (the parameters on how investments are to be managed)

The Mid-Year Treasury Management Report:

This will update Members with the progress of the capital position, amending prudential indicators as necessary, and whether the Treasury Strategy is delivering its objectives or whether any policies require revision. In addition, the Executive will receive quarterly updates of the capital programme position.

The Annual Strategy:

The Annual Strategy report, which provides details of actual performance compared to the estimates.

These reports were considered at meetings of the Review Committee in July 2020, December 2020, and February 2021. Following the scrutiny process, all reports were recommended to Council.



WASTE AND RECYCLING

At its September 2019 meeting, the Review Committee resolved to form a Member Working Group to consider the requirements of the new waste and recycling contract, and to bring forward recommendations for the procurement process to the Council. The Member Working Group focused on two streams of work: the first to explore current waste collection service practices and the second to develop a draft waste and recycling strategy to shape and inform procurement of any new contract.

The Review Committee considered reports on these work streams during this municipal year. In October 2020, the Committee looked at the existing waste collection policy, with the future waste and recycling strategy considered by Members in December 2020.

The Member Working Group, by exploring the details of the key strategic drivers, as well as information gathered by consultants, established key principles that should be applied to the procurement of the new waste contract.

- Financial considerations
- Changing legislative/strategic requirements
- Ease of collection
- The recycling market
- Achieving carbon neutrality



WASTE AND RECYCLING

The MWG, by exploring the details of the key strategic drivers, as well as information gathered by consultants, established key principles that should be applied to the procurement of the new waste contract.

- To ensure that any future waste strategy would seek to reduce the costs of waste collection service, where-as options that increase the cost would be ruled out;
- To comply with relevant legislation and continue to collect a separate recyclable stream;
- To factor a separate food collection service into any future waste collection provision;
- To keep the kerb-side collection of waste and recyclables as simple as possible and as close to the existing system as possible;
- To ensure that any future strategy plans for improving the quality of recyclables collected and flexibility in collection systems to react to changes in market demand;
- To ensure that any new contract considers alternatives to fossil fuels for waste collection service where economically feasible.

The Member Working Group noted that promotion of the service was key and that they would like to see more communication regarding the future collection scheme, including a renewal programme for bin stickers and educational tools. The Member Working Group also asked for a more visible presence from the recycling team throughout the District to ensure residents were engaged and supportive of the new scheme.

The contribution of the Member Working Group was acknowledged by the Chairman of the Review Committee. After consideration by the Committee, it was resolved at the December 2020 meeting to recommend the adoption of the Waste and Recycling Strategy.



COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Under the Police and Justice Act 2006, every local authority is required to have a Crime and Disorder Committee with the power to scrutinise the local Community Safety Partnership (CSP) as a whole, in terms of how they are tackling crime and disorder for the benefit of the local communities. This function is undertaken by the Review Committee. Under the Act, the Committee must meet at least once a year to fulfil this function.

At the March 2021 meeting, Members were advised of the progress made on the delivery of the joint Castle Point and Rochford District Community Safety Partnership (CSP) priorities and actions.

The priorities for the CSP are:

- Protecting vulnerable people
- Anti-social behaviour
- Violence (including knife crime)

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the ability of the CP & R CSP to deliver against the CSP plan, particularly in respect of diversionary and educational activities. Several previously successful interventions have been postponed because their delivery mechanism was not consistent with restrictions imposed due to the pandemic. For example, both Crucial Crew and Walk online events were unable to take place.

In recognition of the pandemic, the OPFCC announced that arrangements were being considered to allow for all CSPs across Essex to carry forward any underspend from 2020/21.



Members explored the budget underspend and asked that it be reported how this money will be utilised in 2021/22. Members also asked for reported statistics from Essex Police to be separated between Castle Point and Rochford to provide a better understanding of crime in the district.

CARBON NEUTRAL BY 2030

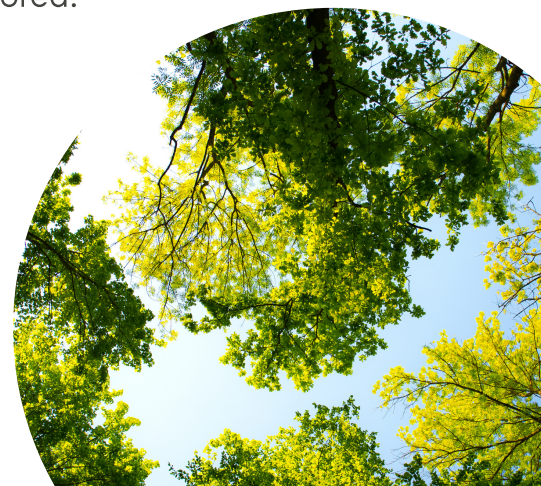
A carbon footprint is defined as: **the total amount of greenhouse gases produced to directly and indirectly support human activities, usually expressed in equivalent tons of carbon dioxide.**

On 16 July 2019, Council resolved that the Review Committee be asked to set up a cross party working group to understand the implications and recommend a policy to this Council on how it can reduce its carbon footprint and become Carbon Neutral by 2030 at the latest.

The Working Group looked at the measurement of the Council's Green House Gas (GHG) emissions, the areas of the Council that had an effect on the GHG (assets, procurement and the purchase of vehicles), what was already being planned in respect of the Asset Delivery Programme, the use of single use plastic and future planning.

The Review Committee received an update at the July 2020 meeting, and noted the following:

- Specific targets could be put into place as time progressed, and when considering the Asset Development Programme, there would be an opportunity to look into carbon neutrality of new buildings during the tender process.
- The Local Plan would need to be mindful of national housing and growth targets, and that national planning policy would take precedence over local policy. The report confirmed that the Portfolio Holder for Environment would have political responsibility for overseeing the Carbon Neutral by 2030 process, which improved upon the Government's target of 2050.
- The Chairman of the Working Group invited Members of all political groups to join and contribute to its work, and affirmed that the opportunities for working in partnership with Southend Borough Council and other Essex Authorities would be explored.
- It was concluded that the Working Group would remain in existence and the Portfolio Holder for Environment would raise this with the Executive to ensure that the Working Group remained independent of the Review Committee and reported back on an annual basis.



EMERGENCY PLANNING

The Review Committee received a report on Emergency Planning specifically responding to questions raised by Members of the Review Committee at a previous meeting.

Members requested further information on:

- The provision of training for Members as Emergency Rest Centre Volunteers.
- Information about the Communications Protocol and a relaunch of the Communications Protocol.
- More prominent placing of the out of hours number on the Council's website.
- Introduction of a testing regime for the Out of Hours service.
- A flow chart showing how Members are informed during an emergency.

Members were advised that following their questions, the following information was provided and actions had been proposed:

- Training had been prepared and submitted to the Standards Committee Working Group for inclusion in the programme of Member Training for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.
- The Protocol for Member Communications in an Emergency had been attached to the report, and a suggestion of training was passed to the Standards Committee Working Group to explain how Members would be informed in an emergency.
- The out of hours number was displayed on the 'Contact Us' page of the Council's website. Members' attention was drawn to the fact that users of the website are directed to the main number first before using the out of hours contact number.
- As part of the contract monitoring process, the Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Officer makes monthly calls to the out of hours number and records the outcomes. To date, all calls had been answered satisfactorily in line with the requirements of the service.

Officers further confirmed that audits of the Emergency Plan were conducted by the Council's Internal Audit team and reported to the Audit Committee.

Members were also advised that in the past, the Emergency Planning & Business Continuity officer had offered to work with Parish Councils to support them with their emergency plans.



ANIMAL WELFARE

On 1 October 2018, the Regulations came into force, which changed the licensing regime for businesses involved in dog breeding, dog and cat boarding including home boarding, dog day care, the selling of pet animals and the exhibiting of animals.

The Regulations set out the duties of local authorities in England to licence activities involving animals and the relevant establishments relating to this. The Regulations are intended to be a risk-based, robust framework based on full cost-recovery that will safeguard the health and welfare of the animals involved.

The following changes were introduced under the Regulations:

- Mandatory Inspector Qualifications
- New General Conditions for all licence holders
- Specific conditions relating to the relevant activity
- Risk Scoring Matrix
- New review, revocation and appeal process

COVID-19 has impacted greatly on licence holders under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, especially as the majority of licence holders offer home boarding/dog daycare. These services are usually provided to those that are travelling on holiday, and do not wish to place their dogs within a kennel environment. The team continues to advise those businesses, including identifying grant streams and supporting their operations.

Members scrutinised the representation of these changes on the Rochford District Council website, specifically around the use of star ratings for businesses in the District. Attention was drawn to some inconsistencies which were to be remedied by the Principal Licensing Officer to ensure transparency for members of the public

Officers are in the process of concluding training to complete assessments under the new legislation. The use of an external officer was reported to the Committee and the reasons for this were considered. It was concluded that the requirement for an external officer was to assist with clearing a backlog caused by the pandemic and would not be an ongoing cost.





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