

**AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET**

<b>Report Title:</b>	Corporate Peer Challenge
<b>Name of Committee:</b>	Cabinet
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	8 January 2024
<b>Report Director:</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Not specific
<b>Ward Relevance:</b>	All
<b>Prior Consultation:</b>	All Leaders Group
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Dan.green@rugby.gov.uk
<b>Public or Private:</b>	Public
<b>Report Subject to Call-In:</b>	Yes
<b>Report En-Bloc:</b>	No
<b>Forward Plan:</b>	Yes
<b>Corporate Priorities:</b>	This report relates to the following priority(ies): <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rugby is an environmentally sustainable place, where we work together to reduce and mitigate the effects of climate change. (C) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rugby has a diverse and resilient economy that benefits and enables opportunities for all residents. (E) <input checked="" 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) <a href="#">Corporate Strategy 2021-2024</a> <input type="checkbox"/> This report does not specifically relate to any Council priorities but
<b>(C) Climate</b> <b>(E) Economy</b> <b>(HC) Health and Communities</b> <b>(O) Organisation</b>	
<b>Summary:</b>	To present the findings of the Council's Corporate Peer Challenge, which was carried out by the Local Government Association (LGA) in November 2023.  The CPC has recognised that the Council's Members and officers are passionate and dedicated to the Borough and there is an organisational focus on the importance of putting

its communities and customers first.

The recommendations are all in line with the Council's direction of travel and provide a helpful basis from which the organisation can move forward.

**Financial Implications:** There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

**Risk Management/Health and Safety Implications:** There are no risk management implications arising directly from this report.

**Environmental Implications:** There are no environmental implications arising directly from this report.

**Legal Implications:** There are no environmental implications arising directly from this report.

**Equality and Diversity:** There are no equality, diversity and inclusion implications arising directly from this report.

**Options:** To approve the recommendations and draft action plan as presented.  
To not approve the recommendations or make amendments to the draft action plan.

**Recommendation:** IT BE RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL THAT –

- (1) the final report of the Local Government Association team that undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge for the Council in late October 2023 be noted;
- (2) an action plan to address the recommendations set out in the Corporate Peer Challenge report be produced and published by 12 March 2024; and
- (3) it be noted that the Local Government Association will be undertaking a "Six Month Check-In" in 2024 to update on the Council's progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.

**Reasons for Recommendation:** To enable the Council to improve its services and the way in which it operates as a result of the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge Process.

**Cabinet- 8 January 2024**

**Corporate Peer Challenge**

**Public Report of the Chief Executive**

**Recommendation**

IT BE RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL THAT –

- (1) the final report of the Local Government Association team that undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge for the Council in late October 2023 be noted;
- (2) an action plan to address the recommendations set out in the Corporate Peer Challenge report be produced and published by 12 March 2024; and
- (3) it be noted that the Local Government Association will be undertaking a “Six Month Check-In” in 2024 to update on the Council’s progress against the action plan and discuss next steps.

**Executive Summary**

This report presents the findings of the council’s Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC), which was carried out by a team from the Local Government Association (LGA) in October 2023 and sets out the next steps in addressing the matters which it raises.

The report recognises that the Council’s Members and officers are passionate and dedicated to the Borough and there is an organisational focus on the importance of putting its communities and customers first. The report also recognises that the Council is in a good financial position and notes that further consideration on funding assumptions in the longer term would be beneficial.

The report makes 8 key recommendations to the Council, which are detailed in section 2 of this report. The recommendations are all in line with the Council’s direction of travel and provide a helpful basis from which the organisation can move forward.

The Council must now agree an action plan to address the recommendations and publish this by 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024. Following this, the LGA will organise a check-in meeting, six months after the original CPC visit.

## **1. THE CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE PROCESS**

- 1.1 Corporate Peer Challenges are designed to facilitate local government improvements. They are tailored to meet the specific priorities and needs of the participating authority and reflect local circumstances, therefore complementing and adding value to the authority's own performance and improvement work.
- 1.2 The LGA views the CPC process as one of its key tools to enhance the way councils operate nationally. The CPC process is designed to be forward-looking and problem-solving, is not a form of inspection and does not rank or score the Council.
- 1.3 Peer challenges are delivered by a team of experienced elected Member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflects the focus of the particular peer challenge and peers are selected on the basis of their relevant expertise.
- 1.4 The peers use their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information gleaned from the people they meet, what they have read in supporting paperwork and what the latest data is indicating.
- 1.5 Rugby Borough Council's CPC took place between 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023. During the three days the peers spoke to over 90 stakeholders, councillors and staff; gathered feedback from over 30 meetings and interviews; and undertook research by reviewing a wealth of council documentation.
- 1.6 Each CPC covers the five core areas listed below:
  - Local priorities and outcomes
  - Organisational and place leadership
  - Governance and culture
  - Financial planning and management
  - Capacity for improvement
- 1.7 In advance of the CPC visit, a position statement (Appendix 1) was produced to provide the necessary background information and context to enable the peers to review the five core areas.
- 1.8 Within this position statement, a number of inter-related factors that the Council is addressing to support the delivery of the Council's corporate outcomes were identified. Therefore, in addition to the five core themes, the Council invited LGA team's feedback in the following areas:
  - a) A review of how the Council is progressing as an organisation against the Rugby Blueprint principles and how, whilst noting successes to date, the Council can go further to embed these principles and progress this journey.
  - b) A review of how the Council can progress in becoming genuinely performance led – how this supports delivery of the Rugby Blueprint and

how it can be used to better empower staff in delivering corporate outcomes.

- c) Recognising that for several years the Council has continued to see a high level of sickness absence relating to mental health - what further steps can the Council undertake to support employee wellbeing?
- d) During 2022/23 delivery of planned savings was a challenge for various reasons. The Council has taken steps in the current year and steps are also planned for the forthcoming year to help strengthen this area. Is there anything further we can be doing to support this?
- e) A new All Leaders Steering Group has been established to support cross-party working within the context of 'no overall control' – what more could the Council be doing to promote effective cross collaboration between the political groups, ensuring that decisions continue to be made in the best interests of the community and the Council's corporate objectives?

1.9 An initial feedback presentation took place on 12<sup>th</sup> October which was attended by Councillors and Officers who had taken part in the process.

## **2. CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE FEEDBACK REPORT**

2.1 Following the CPC, a Feedback Report (Appendix 2) has been produced by the peers. The report highlights the council's strengths and opportunities for further development.

2.2 The report makes numerous positive observations, recognising the Council's desire to change and modernise to become a Council which is able to best serve residents now and, in the future, as detailed within the Rugby Blueprint.

2.3 It states that '*Members and officers are passionate and dedicated to the Borough and there is an organisational focus on the importance of putting its communities and customers first*'.

2.4 It recognises that the Council has already embarked on an improvement journey, with a clear focus on delivering the four Corporate Strategy outcomes and provides detail of steps which could be taken to further sharpen that focus.

2.5 The peers note that the Council has a balanced financial position, with a 4 year rolling forecast in place, which has been supported by the Council's prudent approach to business rate gains. The report recognises that the Council is in a good financial position and notes that further consideration on funding assumptions and modelling over a longer period may support with financial planning.

2.6 Peers commented on the appetite to embed the Member Officer protocol and continue to work positively for the benefit of Rugby and its communities. It was noted that staff and Members are achieving significant successes for their communities when working together and in doing so, generating a shared pride of cross-Council achievement.

2.7 The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Council:

- Recommendation 1: Consideration should be given to RBC's priorities in relation to its available resources (money and people), which would improve capacity. This would also provide clarity, internally and externally, on the Council's key areas of focus.
- Recommendation 2: Give further consideration to what success looks like for the Corporate Strategy Priority Outcomes through the development of a Performance Management Framework which reflects the 'golden thread' through to service plans and individual objectives.
- Recommendation 3: The Council should consider adopting a longer term approach to financial planning by extending the planning horizon of the MTFP and ensuring it is informed by a range of financial scenarios (best to worst) to reflect the uncertainty in local government funding. A longer term financial approach would also help with the delivery of the new Corporate Strategy.
- Recommendation 4: The Council should continue to proactively investigate innovative ways to address the significant identified funding gap. There is an opportunity to utilise the time offered by the Council's solid financial position to proactively investigate innovative ways to address the significant identified funding gap (e.g. through 'invest to save' initiatives) and protect service delivery.
- Recommendation 5: The Council should continue to invest time in developing Member/Member and Member/officer relationships, capitalising on the current appetite to 'reset' the relationships and move forward and work positively for the benefit of Rugby and its communities.
- Recommendation 6: RBC should continue to develop its HR Strategy and its approach to being a learning and development organisation, and implement some of the quick wins as soon as possible for the benefit of its staff.
- Recommendation 7: The Council should continue to proactively harness its network of partners to collectively deliver better outcomes for their communities. Partners value the role and contribution of the Council and this can be built upon for benefit of Rugby and its residents.
- Recommendation 8: The Council should continue to encourage and empower officers to identify and implement best practice through sector-led improvement as part of the Rugby Blueprint journey.

### **3. NEXT STEPS**

3.1 Following a CPC, there is an expectation that all will publish the feedback report within three months of the peer challenge. The LGA will also publish the feedback report on their website.

- 3.2 The LGA and the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DHLUC) request that the accompanying action plan is published within 5 months of the CPC, meaning a deadline of 12<sup>th</sup> March 2024 for this to take place.
- 3.3 Members will be engaged in the development of an initial action plan, which will be considered at a future Cabinet meeting and subsequently published on the Council's website.
- 3.4 The LGA will organise a check-in meeting, six months after the CPC. This will be a facilitated session for the Council to discuss progress and any challenges with peers and to agree the next steps.

**Name of Meeting:** Cabinet  
**Date of Meeting:** 8 January 2024  
**Subject Matter:** Corporate Peer Challenge  
**Originating Department:** Chief Executive

**DO ANY BACKGROUND PAPERS APPLY**       YES       NO

**LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

<b>Doc No</b>	<b>Title of Document and Hyperlink</b>

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:

<b>Doc No</b>	<b>Relevant Paragraph of Schedule 12A</b>





# LGA Position Statement 2023



# Contents

**Introduction**



5- 12

**Local priorities  
and outcomes**



13 - 15

**Organisational  
and place  
leadership**



16 - 26

**Governance  
and culture**



27 - 39

**Financial  
planning and  
management**



40 - 45

**Capacity for  
improvement**



46 - 50

**Concluding  
remarks**  
and background documents



51

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction from the Leader and the Chief Executive

We would like to welcome the LGA (Local Government Association) Corporate Peer Challenge team to Rugby Borough Council to support the Council with its continuous improvement journey. The last three years have been amongst the most challenging times the Council and the wider local government sector has experienced. Adjusting to a post Covid-19 environment both within the organisation and across the Borough has been a key priority, amongst many other significant priorities.

Internally the Council has experienced notable change, not just from embracing a hybrid-working environment, but staffing changes that have resulted in a new Leadership Team, which in turn has catalysed career progression opportunities for many existing employees and enabled us to welcome new colleagues.

This change has been complemented by a culture change journey; to become performance- and data-driven so that we can ensure our resources are targeted to bring maximum benefit for our communities and businesses. This has provided opportunities to review and upgrade the Council's digital infrastructure and has triggered process reviews across significant parts of the organisation, to enable visibility of quality data and our impact.

Our employees have co-produced the Rugby Blueprint. This brings together key strands to set out who we are, what we do and where we are going. The Blueprint has provided an important platform from which service plans across the Council have been produced. Our forthcoming HR Strategy will support us to strengthen this further as we seek to develop people management and leadership skills across all levels of the Council and introduce an employee appraisal process in 2024 to enable personal objectives to be set and supported, to meet the goals of the Council.

This internal change has been progressed against a backdrop of difficulties facing the sector that have required a local and often co-ordinated partnership response, but also against a backdrop of bringing forward exciting opportunities for the Borough.

As we know, Covid-19 was an unforeseen challenge globally and has been followed by other unforeseen international and national demands that the Council has stepped up to. These include the support we have provided to new communities coming to our Borough such as Ukrainian and Afghan refugees and asylum seekers; to enable them to settle into the Borough, albeit in some cases temporarily. We have also provided support to existing communities and businesses; through the rising cost of living, advice to help meet the Borough's climate change aspirations as set out in the Climate Change Strategy, and the damp and mould challenges facing some homes, to name a few.

We have worked with the private sector to enable Rugby to become one of the most digitally connected towns in the country and our next step is to support those communities still facing digital exclusion even more, firstly by ensuring our own services are accessible to all and then working with our partners to identify barriers that limit opportunities for an improved quality of life across other service sectors.

The Council has approved the Town Centre Regeneration Strategy and will be bringing forward sites in the Council's ownership to catalyse development and inward investment, some of which can already be seen in and around the railway station. A £5m town centre regeneration reserve has also been created to support the longer-term aspirations for the town, but more importantly to facilitate more immediate uses including public realm improvements, community safety enhancements and events celebrating the diversity of our Borough.

Regeneration of the Council's high-rise social housing stock is underway, with one site already fully deconstructed to make way for 100 new EPC A-rated social homes and a second site in the process of deconstruction. Accounting for nearly 10 per cent of the Council's total housing stock, these schemes provide an exciting opportunity to create new and affordable homes our tenants can be proud of.

The financial uncertainty surrounding the future of local government funding remains a long-standing challenge and, depending on the outcome, will require some difficult decisions. The Council is progressing its plans to meet this challenge through service transformation, further development of its already strong fiscal management and by continuing to ensure that a prudent and robust risk management approach is taken.

Being the fastest growing town in the West Midlands and one of the fastest growing towns across the UK brings many opportunities for Rugby, as well as increasing demand on Council services. The Council itself has not been immune to the pressures of high inflation. However, we are proud of the way we have all stepped up to the challenges to date whilst also recognising the impact these challenges can bring to employee well-being and resilience. Through welcoming this Corporate Peer Challenge, we hope to identify further opportunities to help us and learn from good practice elsewhere.

We look forward to working with you and receiving your findings.



**Cllr Derek Poole, Leader**



**Mannie Ketley, Chief Executive**

## 1.2 Rugby Borough, the place

The Borough of Rugby covers an area of 138 square miles and is on the eastern edge of the West Midlands Region, bordering directly on to the counties of Northamptonshire and Leicestershire. It is the fastest growing Borough in the West Midlands and one of the fastest growing nationally.

The largest centre of population is the market town of Rugby with two thirds of the Borough's 114,400 residents living in the town. The Borough has 41 parishes, mainly covering the rural areas of the Borough, with villages ranging in size from 20 to 3,000 people.

It is a Borough steeped in history – following its rapid expansion in the mid-19th Century as a result of railway investment and coalescence by virtue of its central location nationally, Rugby was the birthplace of the jet engine, housed the once largest radio transmitter in the world, and of course Rugby School was famously the birthplace of the game of rugby and remains an asset to this day.

The Borough has a rich literary history too, English poet Rupert Brooke was born in Rugby, later attending Rugby School before progressing to Cambridge University. His life and literary works are commemorated in Rugby, where a statue stands in Regents Place. Similarly, authors such as Lewis Carroll, Salman Rushdie, Thomas Hughes and Anthony Horowitz have strong connections to the Borough and all attended Rugby School.

The Borough's residents live in an attractive environment with natural resources such as Caldecott Park, Coombe Abbey Country Park and Draycote Water available for social and recreational purposes. Additionally, Rugby has a variety of local wildlife sites, sites of special scientific interest, and conservation areas.



### 1.3 Rugby's residents

The Borough has grown rapidly over the last 30 years. The rise in population was largely due to people migrating into the area and more single parent families, but also as a result of increased birth rates and people living longer.

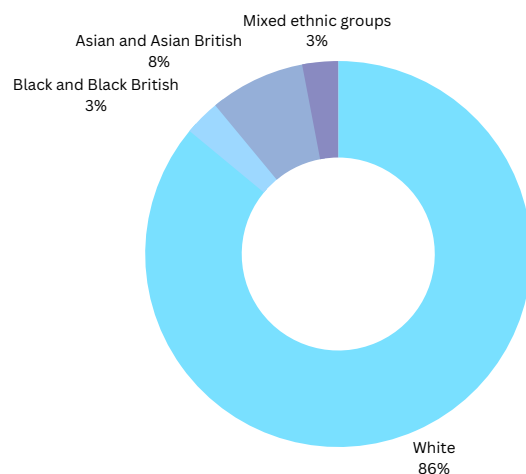
Indeed, between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of Rugby increased by 14.3 per cent, from around 100,100 in 2011 to around 114,400 in 2021. Rugby's population saw the largest percentage increase in the West Midlands, with the overall population of the West Midlands and England increasing by 6.2 per cent and 6.6 per cent respectively.



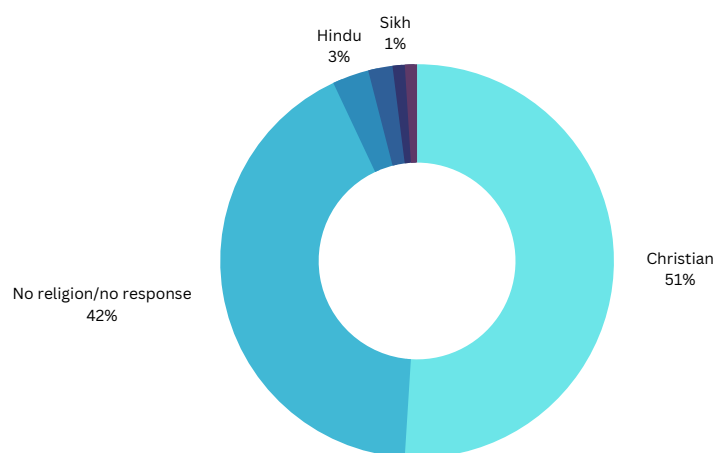
The projected population increase of the Borough between 2010 and 2035 is expected to be 30 per cent, which will bring the population to more than 130,000. The number of households has risen faster than the population, which is partly due to over a quarter (28.1 per cent) of Rugby's households being occupied by a single person.

Between the two censuses, the age profile of our residents also changed. The number of people aged 50 to 64 years rose by around 3,700 (an increase of 20 per cent), while the number of residents between 16 and 19 years fell by around 100 (2.5 per cent decrease).

The following charts illustrate the diversity of Rugby's population as recorded in the 2021 census.



Ethnic origin of Rugby's residents



Faith background of Rugby's residents

## 1.4 Rugby's economy

Rugby's location means it is well connected to all parts of the UK. The West Coast Mainline connects Rugby to Central London within an hour and Birmingham within half an hour. Rugby also sits within the inner, 'Golden Triangle', on the strategic road network (M6/ M1/M69/A5/ A14) which is considered the prime location for logistics and warehousing as it provides access to 90 per cent of the UK population within 4 hours. Immediately adjacent to Rugby's southwestern boundary is DIRFT (Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal) which provides rail goods links to the deep seaports.

In terms of the spread of employment by sector Rugby has a significant weighting towards transport and storage (16 per cent) which is significantly higher than the Coventry and Warwickshire average of 5.9 per cent. This is a reflection of the attractiveness of Rugby's location for the logistics sector. Other key sectors are retail and wholesale trade and repair of motor vehicles (14 per cent), manufacturing (10 per cent) and professional, science and technical (10 per cent).

Our businesses base in terms of size is focused on the small (10-49 employees) and micro business (0-9 employees). Of the 5025 businesses operating in the Borough 98 per cent fall into these two categories.

The Borough also houses significant employers including Jaguar Landrover's Specialist Vehicle Operations division at Ryton, which produces around 10,000 specialist and high performance vehicles each year. The technology centre at Ansty Park is also home major employers such as Meggitt, the London Electric Vehicle Company (which makes the iconic London Taxi), AVL, and the Advanced Manufacturing Technology Centre, making Rugby a hub for advanced manufacturing and manufacturing technologies.



## Rugby's workforce

88 per cent of our residents are economically active

3.2 per cent of our residents are unemployed, compared to an overall figure for England and Wales of 3.9 per cent.

Half (51 percent) our residents are employed in Major Group 1-3 (Managers, Directors, Professional Occupations and Associate Professionals) compared to 47 per cent for the West Midlands and 52 per cent for the UK.

25 per cent of residents are employed in Major Group 8-9 (Process, Plant and machine operatives and elementary occupations). This is higher than for the West Midlands (20 per cent) and UK (15 per cent).

GVA per head has risen over recent decades, in line with neighbouring districts and boroughs. It remains above the national average, suggesting higher productivity.

The total working age population is 71,000

Even within the context of the Borough's strong economic performance, Rugby town centre has not been immune to wider influences in recent years. The continued growth of online retailing, which was exacerbated through the COVID-19 period, has had huge impact on town centres up and down the country. Even with its relatively affluent catchment and history, Rugby town centre has been impacted. Indeed, during 2020, the Centre for Progressive Policy analysed the likely impact of Covid 19 across the country and determined that Rugby's economy could see the 12th largest decline of districts/boroughs nationally.

The [Rugby Regeneration Strategy](#) sets out a vision to realise the potential of the town centre and ensure it remains at the heart of the Borough at a time when the functionality of a town centre is shifting from predominantly retail uses to a wide range of leisure, retail and community uses. It aims to create a vibrant, resilient and community focal point that is supported by a strong day time and night time economy, a culture of entrepreneurship and a thriving hub of independent and national brand businesses. This will be achieved by addressing the climate change needs, respecting the existing heritage of the town, delivering connectivity, community uses and housing that creates a prosperous and sustainable place that we can all be proud of. The strategy sets out a strategic vision and framework for investment and change in Rugby town centre to 2035 to ensure the town centre can be transformed to achieve its full potential.





## 1.5 Rugby's growth

The Council adopted its Local Plan in June 2019, setting out the Council's policies and proposals to support the development of the Borough through to 2031. The Local Plan describes the type of place Rugby Borough was at the time of writing, the type of place we aspire to be in the future and provides a framework that will manage change and growth. The Local Plan sets out the long-term spatial vision for how the town and the villages in the Borough are planned to develop and change and how this vision will be delivered through a strategy for promoting, distributing and delivering sustainable development.

Planned housing and employment growth is focused on Houlton, South West Rugby and Coton Park East. In these locations, it is envisaged that over 11,500 homes will be delivered over the next 10-15 years, alongside the creation of significant new employment opportunities.

The 2021 census showed housing tenure in the Borough to comprise of

- 69 per cent owner or shared owner, compared with a figure for England of 62 per cent
- 13 per cent socially rented, compared with an overall figure for England of 17 per cent
- 18 per cent privately rented or lives rent free, compared to 21 per cent for England.

In December 2022, following the receipt of a jointly commissioned Housing and Employment Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) for Warwickshire, the Council resolved that a full review of the Local Plan should be undertaken to ensure that Rugby continues to plan for its employment and housing needs but also to address other issues such as climate change, gypsy and traveller housing needs, the town centre and Houses in Multiple Occupation.



In resolving to undertake a full review, there has been significant debate regarding the merits of undertaking a full review, a partial review or no review. Much of this debate considered the costs associated with a full review, the protections offered by undertaking a full review and the potential changes to the National Planning Policy Framework through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.

In the months since, and following the local elections, this debate has continued and the Planning Services Working Party has engaged with all Councillors, together with industry experts to determine the most desirable course of action.

## 1.6 Quality of life

Rugby's residents generally benefit from a good quality of life – a fact that was acknowledged in the [2020 Halifax Quality of Life rankings](#), which placed the Borough as the 15th best placed to live in England.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England. The latest version, published in [2019](#), shows that Warwickshire ranked 121 out of 151 upper tier Local Authorities in England (1 most deprived, 151 least deprived); Warwickshire is therefore one of the 20 per cent least deprived local authority areas in England using the 'rank of average score' measure.



Rugby ranked 224 least deprived out of 317 district Local Authorities in England (1 most deprived, 317 least deprived). For comparison, the neighbouring district of Stratford-on-Avon ranked 266 and Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough ranked 96.

Within Rugby in 2019, there were 61 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs). Of these, 2 were in the 20 per cent most deprived LSOAs in England – those being 'Brownsover South Lake District North' and 'Rugby Town Centre'.

Brownsover South Lake District North's overall ranking has become relatively better since 2015, where it was also in the 20 per cent most deprived LSOAs but ranked 5,627. Between 2010 and 2019, Brownsover South Lake District North has consistently been in the most deprived 10 per cent of LSOAs in England in the Education, Skills and Training domain; and in the most deprived 20 per cent in the Income and Employment domains.

Rugby Town Centre's overall ranking has become relatively worse since 2015, where it was also in the 20 per cent most deprived LSOAs but ranked 8,662. Between 2010 and 2019 Rugby Town Centre became relatively less deprived in the Employment and Health Deprivation and Disability domains moving from decile 1 to decile 2. However, it became relatively more deprived in the Education, Skills and Training domain moving from decile 4 to decile 3, and the Barriers to Housing and Services domain moving from decile 9 to decile 5.

A more detailed examination of issues within the town centre (Benn Ward) identified that there were significant disparities when compared with other areas in the borough, the key headlines being:

- There is evidence showing that residents in Benn Ward live shorter lives than residents living elsewhere in Rugby.
- During the pandemic it became evident that people in Benn Ward were less likely to be vaccinated and more likely to get Covid-19.
- It is one of the most deprived wards within Rugby, with 19.5 per cent of households experiencing fuel poverty (as opposed to 14.3 per cent in Warwickshire and 13.2 per cent in England (BEIS 2020),
- More than 28 per cent of children under 16 are living in families with low income compared to 23.7 per cent in Warwickshire.
- 1 in 5 residents in Benn Ward is in receipt of Universal Credit. 5.2 per cent of Benn residents receive out of work benefits (Warwickshire average is 2.7 per cent)

These statistics, together with insight gained through the pandemic, informed the council's prioritisation of the Town Centre through levelling up and 'Area Action', as defined in section 3.6.



## 1.7 Rugby Borough Council

Rugby Borough Council is a non-metropolitan District Council, operating within a two-tier administrative area, with Warwickshire County Council.

The Council employs more than 500 people across several locations including Rugby Town Hall, Hunters Lane Depot, Rugby Art Gallery and Museum and the Rainsbrook Crematorium. From these locations, the Council delivers a wide range of services, supporting our communities, and helping to make the Borough a place our residents can be proud to live.



Given such change, and to aid our continuous organisational development, it is the right time to assess what is working well, what we could do even better and, importantly, what we can learn from others.

## 2. Local priorities and outcomes

### 2.1 Corporate Strategy 2021-24

The Council's previous corporate strategy expired in 2020 – a time when the Borough, and indeed the country, was still responding to the Covid 19 pandemic. Councillors and officers recognised that in developing and adopting a new corporate strategy, the Council must continue its place leadership role which had played such a prominent part of the Borough's overall response to the pandemic.

Considerations regarding the health and wellbeing of our residents, the economic recovery of the Borough and reducing the inequalities which had been observed during the pandemic were brought to the fore, alongside acting on the Climate Emergency declaration (which the Council had made in 2019) and emerging national focusses, such as Levelling Up.

With this in mind, and recognising the common four pillars of recovery, the Corporate Strategy was proposed to follow the themes of Climate, Economy, Health Communities and Organisation.



### 2.2 Developing and adopting the strategy

To inform the development of the strategy, the Council carried out a 6-week public consultation, which received a total of 1080 responses.

These responses led to the development of the four corporate strategy outcomes.

Further feedback was sought, detailing what respondents thought the Council ought to consider when delivering these outcomes. The responses to these questions were then used to inform the detail within the strategy and subsequent delivery plans.

The first section of the consultation focussed on budget priorities and asked respondents how important they considered various priorities to be. The responses are shown below.



Following the consultation, in 2021, the Council adopted its new Corporate Strategy. The Corporate Strategy shapes and directs the Council's work until 2024 and focusses on the delivery of the four corporate outcomes.



## 2.3 Delivering the strategy

Each year, officers and councillors formulate an annual Corporate Strategy Delivery Plan which is thereafter agreed at Full Council. This sets out the actions that will be undertaken over the coming year to deliver against the corporate strategy outcomes. The delivery plan reflects work contained within all service plans as well as statutory responsibilities and the Council's ongoing transformation programme.

As we continue to embed our performance management framework, from 2024/25 employee appraisal forms will be introduced to enable objectives to be set for employees. This approach seeks to ensure that a "golden thread" runs through all of the Council's work and supports all employees to readily see how their work supports delivery of the corporate strategy.

The corporate strategy delivery plan is a live document, which is intended to be updated throughout the year to reflect changes such as changes in the local government landscape and areas of emerging or urgent need.

The delivery plan is monitored by the Leadership Team via a programme board and at the end of each financial year, officers produce a corporate strategy annual report, detailing progress against the delivery of the corporate strategy and key achievements during the year. The report also provides an opportunity to celebrate our successes and thank employees for their achievements.



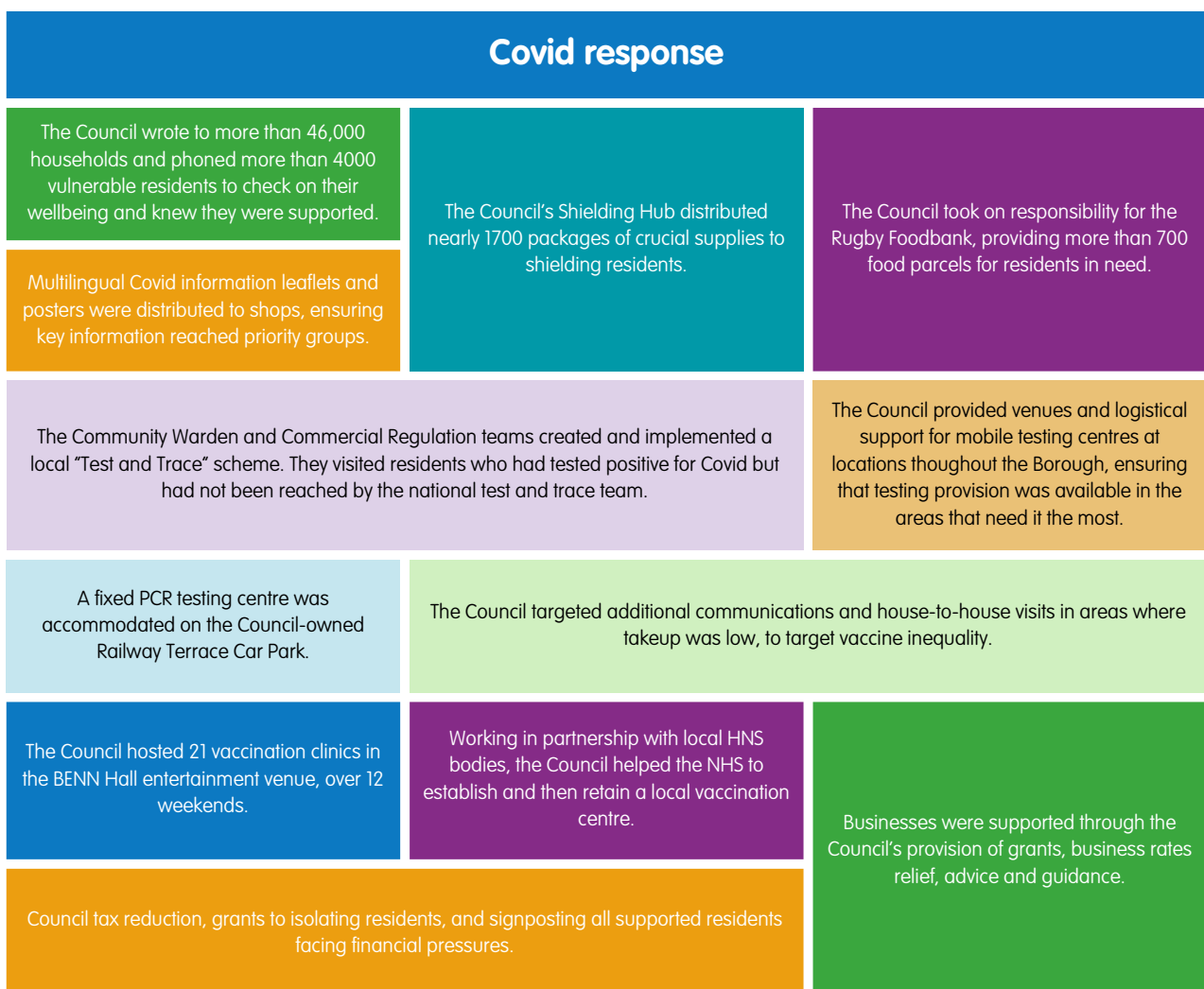
## 3. Organisational and place leadership

### 3.1 Place leadership

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council led the broader community response, becoming a trusted source of information and an organiser of local action, bringing together local partners to deliver outcomes which supported the wellbeing of our communities. During this time, the council's work was informed by an improved understanding of residents and businesses, and communities, leading to a closer relationship between the council and stakeholders.

The Council led the local response by participating in the multi partnership Incident Management Team (IMT), which was chaired by the Chief Executive, leading to the implementation of various workstreams which were outside of the normal remit of the Council.

Building upon the pandemic experience and in adopting the corporate strategy in 2021, the Council has increased its positioning as a place leader setting out ambitious plans focussing on climate change and the environment, on our economy, and on health and wellbeing, in addition to the continued delivery of high-quality services.





Of course, the Council cannot deliver against such broad priorities alone and recognises the immense value that partners within the private, public and voluntary sectors, together with the action of residents, can bring to these ambitions.

Partnership is within the Council's DNA and can be demonstrated by many formal arrangements, such as the Rugby Community Safety Partnership, the Rugby Health and Wellbeing Partnership and the Warwickshire Waste Partnership. As importantly, the Council's commitment to partnership working can be demonstrated through day to day working and the informal relationships which officers and councillors have developed with stakeholders across various sectors.



### 3.2 Responding to climate change

The Council has taken a leadership role in coordinating the Borough's response to the Climate Emergency. This has extended beyond the issues within the Council's immediate control, recognising that climate change is an issue that can only be successfully addressed by harnessing the collective knowledge, capacity and skills that exist within Rugby's communities and partner organisations.

To ensure that the Council's climate change action reflected the needs of the community, a residents survey was delivered to understand local perceptions regarding climate change; to understand where residents would like to take more action; and to identify barriers that residents felt prevented them from living more sustainably.

Building upon the findings of this survey, the Council hosted the Rugby Climate Summit, which was attended by over 70 individuals and organisations, and received presentations from the Council, from third sector organisations and from the business sector.

The summit explored some of the themes identified by residents through the Rugby climate survey which were subsequently further articulated into a draft climate change strategy.

Prior to adoption, the strategy then underwent a consultation to 'check back' with stakeholders that the Council's interpretation of local priorities and action reflected shared ambitions. Since adopting the climate change strategy, the Council has continued to lead a shared agenda to address climate change, for example through:

- developing and launching the rugby netzero website, which is envisaged will become a resource for the whole community;
- facilitating community led discussions regarding the development of a Rugby climate emergency centre;
- engaging local businesses through business breakfasts and other meetings to offer support to them in delivering their own climate ambitions;
- working with public bodies to ensure alignment of climate change ambition and action;
- adopting a Climate Change and Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), covering matters such as energy efficiency and renewable energy, flood risk and flood resilience, sustainable drainage, green infrastructure and landscaping, and broadband.

To influence and enable broader action, the Council continues to engage with local partners and organisations to deliver improvements within the Borough. An example of this is current work with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, identifying opportunities to expand the Trust's 'Dunsmore Living Legacy' project into Rugby's open spaces. The scheme is a Trust-led project working to restore wildlife habitats, including hedgerow restoration and wildflower planting, with initial seeding of open spaces in Newbold and Coton Park.

Similarly, the Council are actively engaged with Garden Organic, which is located within the Borough. Garden Organic promotes organic growing and composting whilst developing local volunteer schemes and opportunities for communities to engage. Through this partnership, the Council is developing a programme of opportunities for the continued development of the Borough's open spaces, development of volunteer opportunities and educational workshops for residents to learn how to move to more sustainable approaches to growing. This will include opportunities for those with minimal outdoor growing space, composting and community edible planting opportunities.

To further progress the climate change agenda locally, the Council is now commissioning a climate change risk assessment and adaptation plan for the Borough to ensure that the likely impacts of climate change are understood, and that action is directed towards those areas where impact is likely to be greatest. Once more, this approach not only focusses on the Council's own services and assets but takes account of the entire Borough, its residents and businesses.

### 3.3 Responding to the cost of living crisis

In the autumn of 2022, the Council recognised that cost of living pressures were having a significant impact on households, businesses and community organisations across the Borough.

Key areas of concern for households included steep rises in the cost of food, fuel, housing costs and maintaining wellbeing. Key areas of concern for businesses included inflationary pressures increasing the costs of supplies across most sectors, recruitment and retention challenges, increasing energy supply costs and decreased consumer confidence.

With such challenges in mind, the Council committed to providing support to residents, officers and businesses, whilst being mindful of the range of existing support planned or already being provided at a national and local scale.

The Council took forward support in four key areas:

- Delivering effective communications: Ensuring that the full range of support which is available to residents and businesses is understood and shared.
- Empowering staff: Ensuring that staff were able to identify financial vulnerability and signpost towards appropriate support.
- Working with partners: Ensuring a broad understanding of partner agencies' support offers, to avoid duplication and to inform signposting.
- Delivering support: Intervening with further targeted action by the Council where necessary.

The Council established a dedicated webpage detailing a range of support which was available for households. Similarly, recognising that small businesses often struggle to access advice and support an additional webpage for businesses was also created. In addition to the webpages, the Council utilised all communication channels to ensure that current and relevant information was provided to officers, councillors, residents and businesses.

The Council recognised the importance of empowering and upskilling officers to recognise households or individuals who are struggling financially and signpost or refer them towards the most appropriate sources of help. To support this, targeted training and development was provided to all customer service and housing officers to ensure that they could support those in difficulty.

In order to ensure all opportunities to provide support for residents and businesses was maximised our Councillors progressed a review via the Scrutiny Committee. It was decided to form a small cross-party sub-group for the purpose of councillor engagement and to review the work in place in respect of cost of living, identify any other actions, and for members of the sub-group to update the Committee and their own political groups so that Councillors could assist with communications to residents and businesses.

The Council worked with partner organisations to establish a network of 'warm hubs' together with supporting initiatives that helped residents to keep warm and access food.

Work has continued in this area of support, recognising that many of the challenges remain, and officers and services are ready to step up and take further action should the need arise.

Rugby's voluntary and community sector is highly valued by our residents and the Council. Therefore the Council is committed to supporting the sector with their efforts to support our residents. This commitment has been demonstrated in a variety of ways including:

- Provision of temporary premises as well as ongoing financial support for the Rugby Foodbank.
- Funding of a number of community associations in Rugby to deliver services and projects to tackle issues of financial hardship within their local communities.
- Work with the Citizens Advice Bureau, with whom the Council has a two plus two-year contract for the provision of advice services. Their performance reporting includes mapping our presentations for issues at a distinct ward level so that we can identify the prevalence of issues by wards and focus our support of communities, in partnership with the community associations, in tackling these issues.
- The Council also has a contract with Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action (WCAVA) to provide support to the community groups in the Borough, with a particular focus on fund-raising and volunteer capacity.
- The Council acts as enabler for the Rugby Lotto which provides the sector with an opportunity to raise revenue for either projects or day-to-day running costs. To date £147,000 has been raised in support of local good causes.



Taking a more strategic and long term view of affordability pressures, the Council has larger capital projects in place to support current and future tenants, who are potentially going to struggle to keep their homes warm. Recent projects and initiatives include:

- In February 2022, a Housing Climate Change Reserve of £1m was created, from HRA balances to support project delivery for decarbonising Council homes. This was matched by a further £1m allocation agreed in February 2023. One of the objectives of establishing the reserve was to ensure that the Council could be agile in its response to new opportunities to obtain grant funding, particularly where a match funding element would be required.

- This approach enabled plans to progress for improving the thermal performance of 112 of our hardest to heat Council homes. They are to benefit from external wall insulation via the Local Authority Delivery Scheme. The council has utilised the reserve to match funded 50 per cent of the cost of this project, with both partners committing £1.1m each.
- Planning permission has just been secured for 100 new homes on the former Biart Place high rise site. All of these homes will be EPC A rated and have been built for social rent (as opposed to affordable or private rent). Similar plans are progressing for our other former high-rise site at Rounds Gardens, a larger scheme with the potential to deliver more than 240 social and affordable homes.

Beyond the Council's own housing stock, the Council works proactively with all of the local authorities in the county to share best practice and develop a consistent approach to support vulnerable residents with the rising cost of living.



### 3.4 Town centre regeneration

In 2019 the Council began the production of the Rugby Regeneration Strategy to help realise the potential of the town centre, ensuring it remains at the heart of the Borough at a time when the functionality of town centres is shifting from predominantly retail uses to a wider range of leisure, retail and community uses. The strategy was developed to align with and deliver the Council's corporate strategy outcomes.

Extensive consultation with local businesses, landowners, stakeholders and residents was undertaken which demonstrated positive support for the ideas and aspirations of the strategy.

The resultant strategy is highly ambitious with significant interventions proposed. It is however also pragmatic, recognising that for real change to occur a series of steps will need to take place to shift the perceptions of the town centre and build confidence for investors and consumers.

The principal objectives of the strategy are to put people first, create a resilient town centre, invest in the physical environment and ensure a delivery focus.

The strategy intends to form the foundation block for the delivery of these objectives and in doing so a number of character areas have been identified as well as a list of physical and non-physical interventions, in addition to specific catalytic projects to instigate change.

The Council adopted the Rugby regeneration strategy in December 2022 and has already begun to implement the 'meanwhile use' elements of the strategy, including the changes proposed to the markets in Rugby, public realm improvements and planned events in the town which are being supported by UK Shared Prosperity funding.

Since adopting the strategy, the Council has in place a cross-party 'Town Centre Regeneration Working Group' comprising councillors and officers to continue stakeholder engagement and progress key actions towards delivering the strategy.

A significant proportion of the proposed regeneration area overlaps with the 'Town Centre Area' mentioned in 1.5, which is amongst the top 20 per cent nationally most deprived lower super output areas. Therefore, the added benefit of the regeneration strategy is that it will also support the Council's levelling-up aspirations for the Benn ward. Four key workstreams of the regeneration strategy include:

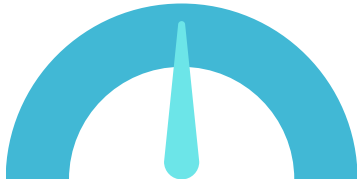
- improving access to health services;
- supporting sustainability across the voluntary and community sector by facilitating co-location opportunities and estate rationalisation;
- enhancing further education and higher education opportunities to complement the existing Warwickshire College offer in Rugby;
- improving air-quality, in this declared air quality management area, via transport and road infrastructure projects.

All four of these workstreams have been highlighted as areas of concern during the Covid-19 Pandemic and also due to the rising cost of living. Therefore the regeneration of the town centre provides a golden opportunity to deliver multiple benefits for Rugby's residents and businesses.

It is hoped in demonstrating the additional challenges in the town centre area, and how the regeneration can support the Government's levelling up aspirations, the Council can access grant funding to support key projects. At present this is a challenge to Rugby, having been designated as a low priority area for levelling up funding due to the borough's overall levels of affluence.

### 3.5 Community safety – unwanted attention

In 2021, the council conducted a survey that identified that three in five women and girls in Rugby had been harassed in the preceding 12 months. More than 700 girls and women aged 11 and older responded to the survey, which was supported by Warwickshire College in Rugby, with 3 out of 5 respondents saying that they had experienced unwanted attention or harassment in a public place.



Half of respondents felt safe on their own in the town centre



85 per cent felt safe in the town centre with their female friends



57 per cent felt safe walking to or from their local shops, school, college or place of work

Respondents gave, in some cases, detailed accounts of harassment, unwanted attention and sexual advances. Incidents took place at all times of day, with the most incidents reported between 2 and 4 pm. Incidents also commonly occurred at lunchtime and teatime.

In response to this survey, the Council made this matter a community safety priority and successfully applied for government funding to support awareness, education, and safety interventions.

Officers have also engaged with high profile retailers (the survey showed a significant risk of being followed in well used retailers) and have been successful in obtaining Safer Street government funding (twice with a further bid made) which has been used for improved lighting and improved CCTV in areas identified in the survey as high risk for women and girls, and the general community.

Partnership working is key to success, allowing the combining and coordinating of resources and specialist skills. The Council's Community Wardens, Warwickshire Police and Rugby First Bid Rangers have increased patrols in the areas where women and girls feel unsafe, 7 days per week, while the Rugby Street Pastors play a key role protecting vulnerable people enjoying the late-night economy.

The community safety team have worked with pubs, restaurants and clubs on introducing the national "Ask for Angela" scheme, where customers can ask for assistance if they feel threatened or unsafe.

Officers continue to provide pubs, restaurants and clubs with lids for drinks and bottle stoppers to help prevent drink spiking and are working with the local taxi companies to educate drivers to look for the signs of distress and how they can offer help if necessary. The Council supports the Government's 'Enough' campaign with social media and posters which encourage everyone to do their bit to keep women and girls safe.

### 3.6 Levelling up - area action

As set out in section 1, the Borough performs very well as a place to live, work and do business. It is however recognised that for some residents of the Borough, there are significant disparities which limit opportunities, aspiration and quality of life as highlighted in 1.5.

Indices of multiple deprivation clearly demonstrate that specific wards experience greater disadvantage than others. This data has been amplified though the councils work with communities - for example, during the pandemic the Council witnessed high levels of Covid-19 positivity and low levels of vaccine uptake in certain parts of the borough, particularly the Benn and New Bilton wards.

With this in mind, and even before 'levelling up' was an initiative, the Council had already started developing area actions plans in support of the corporate strategy.

At the same time local residents and community groups from these areas reached out to the Council with their concerns but also to share the role which some of them are playing at a hyper-local level in making a difference to their place.



Through Levelling Up, the Council is keen to nurture this and support the building of community capacity and resilience. Building on existing strengths, the Council's approach to levelling up is to target 'Area Action' towards those wards where residents experience the greatest disadvantage.

The Council has initiated engagement with various stakeholders including health colleagues, the County Council, the Police, Warwickshire College and the Voluntary and Community Sector to develop a holistic and coordinated approach.

Improving access to health services, improving public realm and increasing community safety are amongst the key emerging priorities. Strengthening community engagement is key to success and the Council is currently working on a public realm focussed action plan, recognising that when a place starts looking better it enhances community pride.



Ward Councillors have been closely involved in engaging with residents and undertaking visual audits, with wider stakeholders such as the Police to identify early action points. Of particular concern to some residents is the concentration of Houses in Multiple Occupation in these wards and the perceived challenges this presents, such as car parking, littering and lack of community spirit stemming from highly transient communities. Officers have been keen to ensure councillors understand that these properties provide a valuable supply of affordable homes, particularly for single people, who are otherwise unable to access self-contained accommodation due to the difference between the buoyant rental costs and the Local Housing Allowance rates.

Officers are preparing a short-/medium- and longer-term area action plan (which will overlap with the town centre regeneration action plan). Further detail of the proposed approach is due to be explored at a councillor and stakeholder workshop and eventually considered by Council this autumn. One of the key challenges will be understanding what success looks like, as whilst there are some relatively simple and visible gains to be achieved quite quickly, the more complex and embedded issues of poverty and deprivation are going to take several years to be impactful.

It is envisaged that this approach can be replicated across additional wards, with potentially different disadvantages, to further the Council's levelling up work.



### **3.7 Customer access and engagement**

Place leadership also encompasses ensuring our residents and businesses are engaged with the council in how the organisation develops and is shaped. This engagement is crucial to placing the council as a trusted authority, empowering communities to achieve their ambitions with our support.

Developed and adopted in 2022, the council's customer access strategy themes were identified through a 2021 public consultation "access to Council services" and analysis of analytics relating to customer access requests.

The strategy was developed against an understanding of the needs and challenges that are faced by those who access Council services, and the significant shift in recent years to higher expectations from Rugby residents, businesses, and stakeholders.

The strategy sets out strong principles which guide action plans across the Council whilst retaining the ability to remain agile in the face of ever developing local and global challenges, and emerging technologies. The strategy was developed to directly support the corporate strategy priority outcomes, ensuring our corporate approach to customer access supports the ability for the Council to achieve their ambitious commitments.

Since the adoption of the customer access strategy, a variety of key actions have been undertaken to meet the needs of residents and businesses, crucially incorporating a circular feedback loop to drive continuous improvement within Council services and giving the Council the ability to react intelligently to customer needs. Examples of these actions include additional forms made available within the Rugby Waste App "Report It" function, a complete review of council tax demand letter communication to be clearer and make paying the Council far easier, and additional requirements for the new telephony system being guided by customer feedback; all in response to evaluation of customer needs.

There is now a reflective culture of listening and adapting to customer needs, using live metrics and business intelligence reporting to not only respond, but to proactively forecast the requirements of customers.

Our emerging communications and engagement strategy recognises that our residents and businesses are at the heart of what we do. Through this strategy and associated action plan we will demonstrate that we listen to our residents and businesses and understand their needs. Our communications will demonstrate empathy and humility and that, above all, we care. Officers and Councillors are currently working together to finalise this strategy with a view to adopting it in the coming months.



## 4. Governance and culture

### 4.1 Democratic structure

Rugby Borough Council has 42 Councillors – 21 Conservative, 12 Labour and 9 Liberal Democrat. This means that the Council is in no overall control. Our Councillors represent 16 wards.

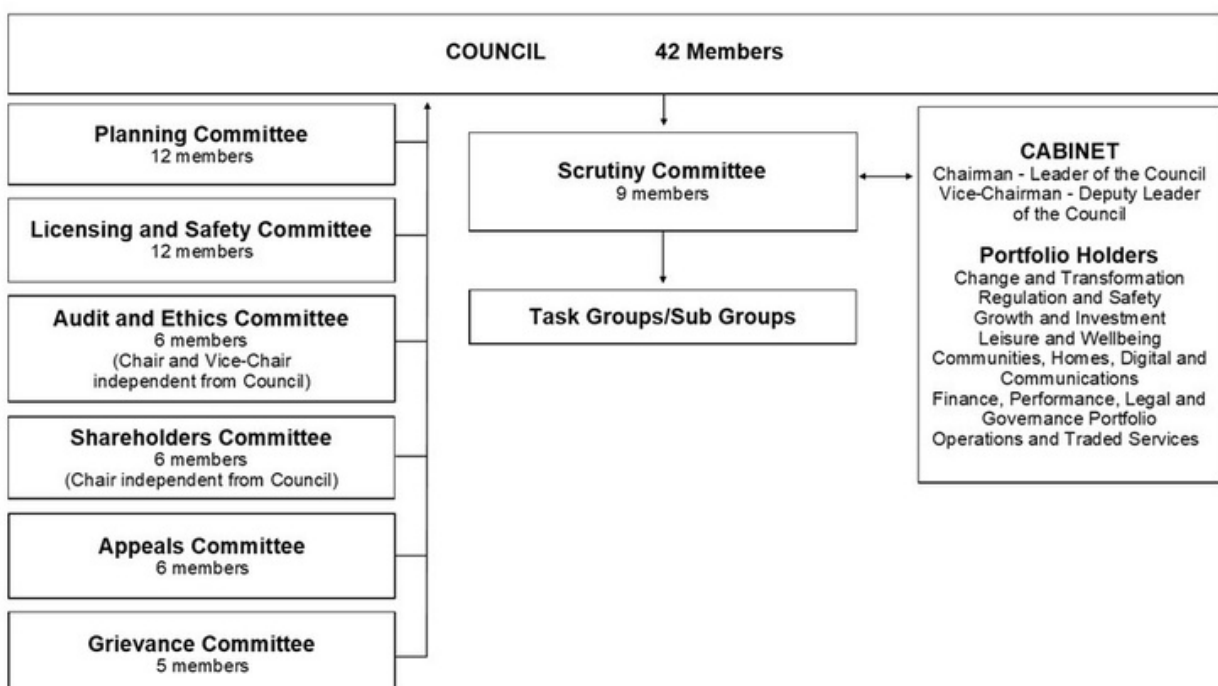
The Council's decision-making arrangements are split into two elements – the executive and the non-executive – as established by the Local Government Act 2000. The executive role includes responsibility for budget and policy development and the subsequent operational implementation of those budgets and policies.

The Council's determined executive arrangements are those of the Leader and the Cabinet model as prescribed in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 whereby the Leader of the Council is appointed for a four-year term and who then determines the executive arrangements of the Council, including delegation to members of Cabinet.

The non-executive roles are, in summary, regulatory, constitutional and personnel-related matters. This role is undertaken by various committees appointed by the Council and by officers in accordance with terms of reference and delegations set by the Council.

A diagram of the democratic structure of the Council is set out below.

### DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE OF THE COUNCIL



## Cabinet

The Cabinet develops the council's budget and certain policy items for recommendation to the Council for approval or adoption. The process entails initial proposals being prepared by portfolio holders in liaison with the appropriate supporting council officer(s). These proposals are submitted to the Cabinet for approval as the basis for consultation, and where appropriate further consultation will be undertaken. Having received the feedback for the consultation process, the Cabinet finalises proposals and presents them to the Council for approval and adoption.

The Cabinet meets in public approximately every month. The Cabinet consists of:

- Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Change and Transformation and Portfolio Holder for Regulation and Safety – Cllr Derek Poole
- Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Growth and Investment – Cllr Ian Picker
- Portfolio Holder for Communities, Homes, Digital and Communications – Cllr Tim Willis
- Portfolio Holder for Operations and Traded Services – Cllr Carolyn Watson-Merret
- Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Wellbeing – Cllr Adam Daly
- Portfolio Holder for Finance, Performance, Legal and Governance – Cllr Carolyn Robbins



## Scrutiny Committee

The Council operates a single Scrutiny Committee, who maintain responsibility for holding Executive/Cabinet decision-makers to account. The Scrutiny Committee also play a key role in the Council's policy and budget development process.

The Scrutiny Committee must be made up of councillors who are not members of the Cabinet and reflect the political balance of the Council.

Details of current membership of the Scrutiny Committee can be found [here](#).

## Planning Committee

The Planning Committee is responsible for determining those planning applications and related matters which can not be approved by officers as identified within the approved delegations.

Details of current membership of the Planning Committee can be found [here](#).

## Licensing and Safety Committee

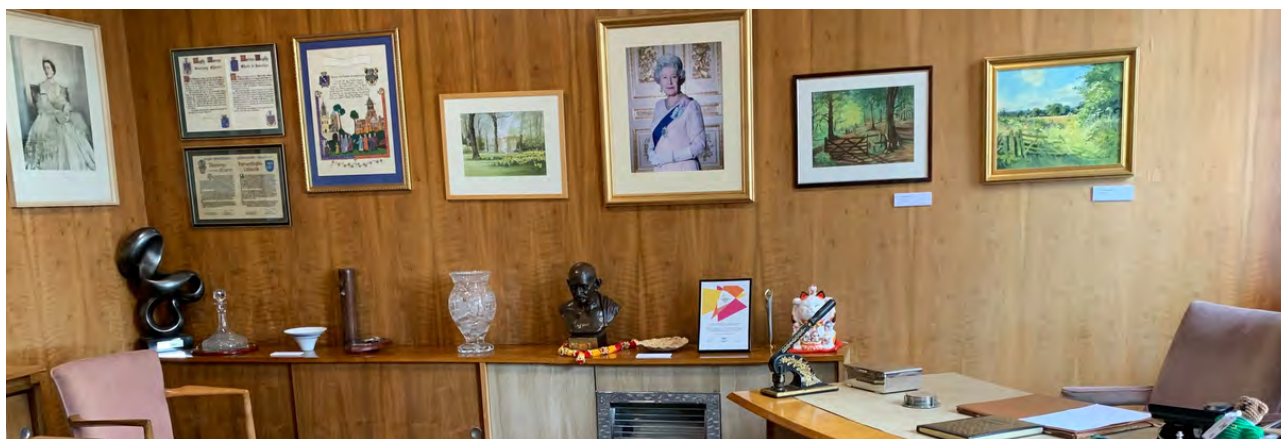
The Council's Licensing and Safety Committee maintains responsibility for numerous functions including the licensing and regulation of taxis, taxi drivers, taxi operators, gambling premises, food premises, markets and street trading.

Details of current membership of the Licensing and Safety Committee can be found [here](#).

## Audit and Ethics Committee

The Council's Audit and Ethics Committee provides oversight of internal and external audit matters, independent scrutiny of the council's financial and non-financial performance, review and approval of the council's Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement and the continuation of high standards of conduct by councillors.

Details of current membership of the Audit and Ethics Committee can be found [here](#).



## 4.2 Officer structure

### Leadership Team

The Council's Leadership Team are responsible for the strategic direction of the Council and this includes the delivery of the Council's Corporate Strategy and a wide range of organisational functions such as, workforce development and culture, financial planning and compliance with statutory requirements.

The Leadership Team consists of:

- Chief Executive – Mannie Ketley
- Deputy Chief Executive – Dan Green
- Chief Officer for Finance and Performance – Jon Illingworth
- Chief Officer for Legal and Governance – Aftab Razzaq
- Chief Officer for Digital and Communications – Mike Connell
- Chief Officer for Leisure and Wellbeing – Tom Kittendorf
- Chief Officer for Homes and Communities – Michelle Dickson
- Chief Officer for Operations and Traded Services – Claire Preston
- Chief Officer for Growth and Investment – Nicola Smith
- Chief Officer for Regulation and Safety – David Burrows

## **Management Team**

The Management Team was created following the successes achieved by the Council's Covid-19 'Tactical Group'. The Tactical Group had consisted of service managers and led the Council's operational response to the pandemic, including initiatives such as establishing testing centres, standing up vaccination centres and implementing local test and trace arrangements.

The Management Team consists of all service managers across the council, who are collectively responsible for the operational direction of the council and supporting the delivery of the corporate strategy. This includes key responsibilities towards financial management and the culture of performance management, including customer satisfaction/complaints.

[Link to Organisation chart](#)

## **Strategic Risk Management Group**

The Strategic Risk Management Group comprises of members of the Leadership Team, the relevant portfolio holder and members from the Corporate Assurance Team. The Group meets quarterly to review the Council's strategic risk register consider and receive updates from the Risk Management and Insurance Officer and other corporate risk owners on outstanding risk related actions. Also, the group annually reviews the Risk Management Strategy.

## **Health and Safety Committee**

The Health and Safety Committee was recently introduced and comprises of members of the Leadership Team and relevant health and safety officers. The Committee is responsible for the monitoring and overall discharging of the council's health and safety obligations.

This includes monitoring and occurrence of health and safety related incidents; review and approval of the health and safety policy; and arrangements and overall assurance for appropriate workplace health, safety and welfare standards.

## **Programme Board**

The Programme Board supports the Council's project management culture in the delivery of the Council's corporate strategy delivery plan and overall way of working.

The membership of the Programme Board is the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Chief Officer Finance and Performance and the Programme Manager. In addition, the Chief Officer Legal and Governance maintains independent oversight of the Board's activities. This was first introduced during 2021/22 in a different format and learning from that has informed a new approach for 2022/23, where each Chief Officer meets with the Board on a bi-monthly cycle. In addition, for significant projects with multiple cross cutting workstreams, such as the town centre regeneration, specific programme board meetings take place.

### **4.3 Councillor and officer working**

In July 2022, the Council approved a new councillor and officer protocol. The protocol was formulated through engagement of both officers and councillors, which included joint workshops. The workshops formed the basis of a scrutiny task and finish group and the finalising of the protocol which was recommended and approved by Full Council.

This protocol provides a framework for the respective roles of both councillors and officers and how they are able to communicate and collaborate effectively.

The protocol recognises that the councillor/officer relationship is based upon the pillars of mutual respect; collaboration; trust and informality; and communication.

To support councillor/officer relationships, a number of informal meetings take place. These include:

#### **Cabinet/Leadership Team**

Each month the Cabinet and the Leadership team meet to discuss strategic and operational matters.

#### **All Leaders Steering Group**

Each month, the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer for Legal and Governance meet with the leaders and deputy leaders of all three political groups. These meetings are used to discuss forthcoming committee meeting agendas and to consider strategic and operational matters. These meetings can be extended to specific Chief Officers to provide additional detail relating to services within their portfolio.

#### **Leader fortnightly meetings**

The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council meet with the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive to discuss various matters.

#### **Opposition group leaders meetings**

Each month the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive meet with the opposition leaders and deputy leaders of the individual political groups. These meetings are to discuss issues raised by the groups and brief the group leaders on forthcoming matters.

#### **Portfolio holder briefings**

Chief Officers and their respective Portfolio Holders meet on a regular basis to discuss strategic and operational matters within their individual portfolios. These meetings are often extended to service managers to provide additional detail relating to the services within the portfolio.

## Working parties and groups

The Council also has in place various working parties and groups. These are cross party and are also supported by relevant key officers. This ensures a forum to provide engagement with members upon matters that will be brought forward via the formal decision-making process. Example of such parties and groups includes the Planning Services Working Party which is a key group on matters relating to the Council's Local Plan, the Climate Emergency Working Group, Asset Management Members Working Group and the Town Centre Regeneration Working Group

## Member conversations

These discussions provide an opportunity for officers and councillors to work collaboratively on hot topics and significant projects. Recent examples include the Local Plan, the High Rise Redevelopment projects and the Town Centre Regeneration.



## 4.4 Maintaining good governance

In 2023, the Council's Audit and Ethics Committee considered the annual governance statement (AGS).

The AGS sets out the council's governance framework and provides an assessment of effectiveness for the previous year. The statement concludes that the overall governance framework continues to provide a substantial level of assurance of effectiveness.

Further enhancements were made to the Council's governance arrangements during 2022/23 including:

- The Internal Constitution – This complements the constitution and will help to improve officers' understanding of delegated decision making and increases awareness of and compliance with policies and procedures. See section 4.7.
- An independent external review of the Council's arrangements for managing fraud, bribery and corruption has been completed and provided a substantial level of assurance. An updated strategy and response plan was approved by the Audit and Ethics Committee in June 2023.



- The Council has adopted and implemented a new member and officer protocol which establishes key pillars in how members and officers can work together effectively.
- During summer 2022 officers developed a new suite of KPIs, key statistics and performance measures which went live during Quarter 2. The measures were then presented to Cabinet as part of the Finance and Performance report for Quarter 3. In addition, the Council has subscribed to CFO Insights which enables the Council to compare its performance across a whole range of areas to other local authorities.

The Council is committed to ensuring continuous improvement in our governance year-on-year and an action plan has been developed for 2023/24, which includes:

- implementing a new anti-fraud, bribery and corruption action plan.
- implementing the action plan arising from the internal audit review of data protection and records management.
- Embedding the performance management methodology across the Council. The next evolution is to establish a PowerBI dashboard, which will make information more accessible and easier to understand and interpret, develop benchmarking across all services and further review existing measures to identify enhancements.

## 4.5 Corporate values

The council recognises the crucial role that each and every employee plays in helping the council to achieve its Corporate Priorities. The council's CAN DO values assist with this.



Together, they summarise the council's "can do" approach to getting things done and are used on a daily basis in everything that the council does, for example in:

- Recruitment: applicants are interviewed and selected following competency-based interviewing for values-fit as well as job-fit.
- Performance Management: employees are managed, supervised and appraised for their work performance (task delivery) and values (the approach taken to work).
- Learning and development: personal development planning takes place as part of the process and corporate learning materials and training is available to support employees to deliver our values and behaviours as required.
- Policy: The values and behaviours are fully supported by council policies, processes and guidance designed to support the workforce.
- Well-being Initiatives: The council recognises that an individual's well-being can be affected by negative behaviour and will ensure that appropriate support is available and easy to access.

These values have been in place for some time and were introduced following a series of staff workshops and engagement sessions in 2016, during which approximately 250 employees contributed.

## 4.6 Organisational culture

The Council strives for a culture where people are empowered to make a difference; where they are passionate about innovation and collaboration; and a culture where staff take care of each other, our customers, our communities, and our partners.

Emerging from the pandemic, the Leadership Team engaged with all employees to determine what actions needed to be taken to support everyone and ensure that the organisation focussed on becoming the best it could be.

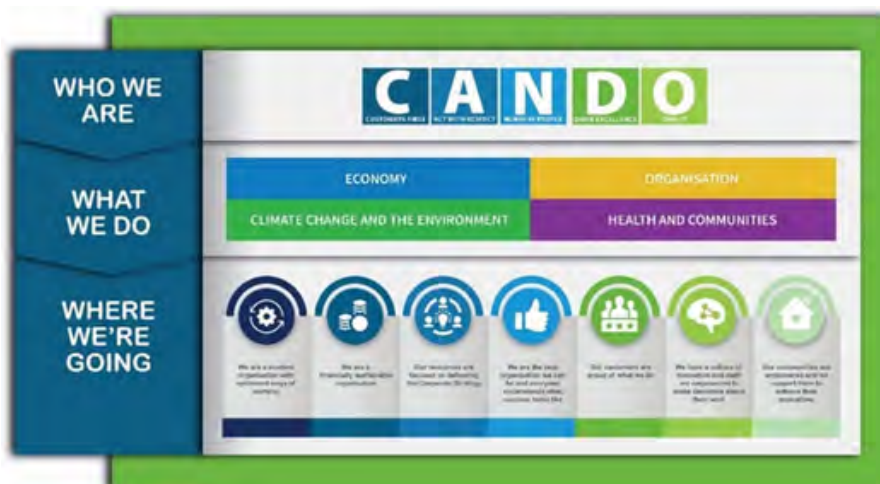
At the time, there was recognition that the ways in which the Council had previously operated and its future challenges created a genuine case for change.

Wellness concerns within the human resources analytics alongside the significant change to hybrid working led to an even greater need to focus on employee wellness and organisational culture to ensure that all operations were effective and efficient.

Starting in late 2021, over a nine-month period, employees were consulted and involved throughout the organisation to ensure ownership of the culture change.

Beginning with a staff survey launched at one of the regular employee briefings, employees were asked a variety of questions regarding the culture, outcomes and working environment at the Council. These responses and results were collated and presented to the Leadership Team for consideration, resulting in a series of high level statements which collectively represented where the council wanted to be in the future.

The next stage was to consider what employees thought about the current culture and workings of the council; what the council should aspire to in the future; what they would like to change to achieve those aspirations; and what might be the barriers for this change. A focus group was trialled within the customer service centre to demonstrate success for the delivery method, and then rolled out to a further six focus groups using appreciative inquiry techniques. The outcome of these focus groups was then presented to the Leadership Team and developed into the Rugby Blueprint.



The resultant Rugby Blueprint was launched in 2022 and is now the Council's model for developing the organisational culture. It is referred to by our employees and noted in our public and private reports. It seeks to support the evolution of the Council and provide a framework supporting officers to be more innovative, with empowered decision-making at all levels.

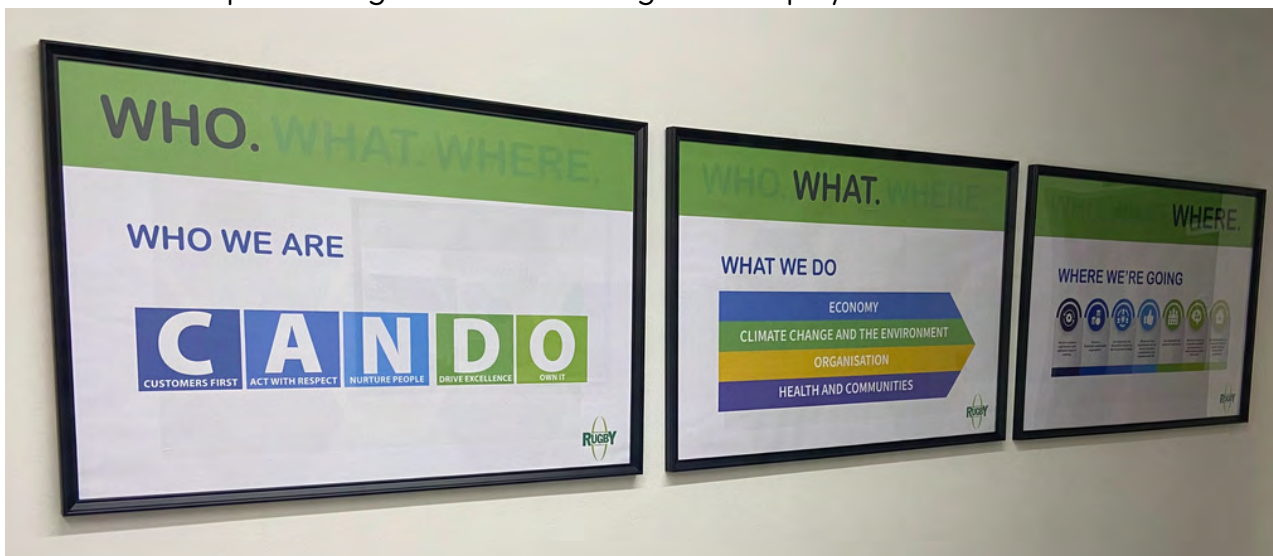
In delivering the Rugby Blueprint, the council will:

- become more agile;
- make best use of technology to optimise ways of working and improve processes, while delivering high quality services to residents;
- continue to recognise the importance of effective working between councillors and officers and strengthen that relationship;
- become more commercially focused, maximising income to help to protect services and deliver financial sustainability;
- ensure that we remain as efficient as we can be, and that best value is achieved wherever we spend public funds.

To support the blueprint journey, the Council has worked with West Midlands Employers whose learning and development coach worked with all services, starting with the Leadership Team, to explore purpose, team aspirations, working methodologies and areas for development.

Following the Leadership Team, development sessions were held with the Management Team and Leadership Team jointly in December 2022. This has been followed by a rollout programme to other senior officers and team leaders across the Council and during the summer of 2023 these have been further progressed at portfolio or service level.

The Blueprint is now discussed at each quarterly staff briefing session with new initiatives related back to the principles which it sets out. Service managers are also encouraged to discuss the Blueprint during their team meetings and employee 1-1s.



## 4.7 Internal constitution

During 2023, the Council launched an ‘internal constitution’. It was recognised that it would be beneficial for officers to have a single document detailing how the council operates and importantly responsibilities and requirements within key areas.

The purpose of the Internal Constitution is to provide detailed guidance to officers on all matters relating to the functioning of the Council.

The Internal Constitution was formulated over a number of months by employees across the organisation and within the Employee Briefings. Feedback was sought from officers across the Council.

The Internal Constitution supports the council’s Blueprint journey, creating a single source of information to increase understanding of how our teams work together and empower our staff to collaborate, innovate and make effective decisions.

The Internal Constitution details matters such as the council’s democratic structure; decision-making processes; project management; performance management; HR, learning and development policies; financial arrangements; health and safety; and equality, diversity and inclusion.

It also sets out the policies and procedures that the Council has in place to support the Council’s work and support our staff – from training and development to health and wellbeing.

It is expected to be updated twice yearly to reflect changes in working practices and is a key source of information for all employees and thus is highlighted to all new starters as part of the employee induction and welcome process.



## 4.8 Internal communications

The council’s draft communications and engagement strategy sets out key outcomes and communications principles as we communicate and engage with different audiences – be those residents, staff, councillors or partners. It identifies the need for internal communications principles that set out how we will engage with our staff.

Current internal communications outlets are:

- In Touch – a regular internal information staff bulletin. This is available digitally via SharePoint as well as in print through business services to mitigate for digital exclusion and accessibility challenges.
- Councillors Briefing – a regular internal information councillor’s bulletin. This is available digitally via SharePoint as well as in print through business services to mitigate for digital exclusion and accessibility challenges.
- SharePoint – a digital information source directory
- Employee Briefings – regular face to face updates from the Leadership Team on major projects, progress and an opportunity to raise queries
- Chief Executive updates – fortnightly updates from the Chief Executive. This is available digitally via SharePoint as well as in print through business services to mitigate for digital exclusion and accessibility challenges.
- Dedicated engagement pieces such as staff surveys, targeted engagement pieces such as the Owning and Driving development training and feedback.
- Partnership engagement – such as Joint Union Consultative Forum and Employee Network.
- Print media – noticeboards and frames throughout the corporate buildings.

The Council’s internal communications give the Council the means and tools to drive organisational leadership, embed the organisational culture and share best practice.

#### **4.9 Agile working**

The Council recognises the need to ensure robust hybrid working practices that enable employees to maximise their performance while maintaining a good work life balance. It also recognises that to remain competitive in relation to recruitment and retention, a clear agile working offer is required.

Following the pandemic, the council has significantly moved forward in its approach to agile working and has developed an Agile Working Policy to support remote and office working into the future.

It provides a framework for consistent and fair practice, to support managers when implementing agile working agreements and to enable employees to gain a better understanding of agile working and how it is applied to varying types of roles.

In supporting the implementation of this policy, the council has established that all employees should attend their workplace for at least 40 per cent of their working week and that entire teams should attend the workplace together for at least one day per week.

## 4.10 Staff wellbeing/HR strategy

The Council's HR Manager is leading work to develop and implement a new HR strategy, through which the Council will be better able to support and develop its workforce.

In developing the HR strategy, recognition is given to the strengths which exist within the workforce - with staff showing a keen desire to improve operations, regularly 'going the extra mile', increasing awareness of the organisation's CAN DO values, supporting the development of organisational culture through the Rugby Blueprint and continuing to ensure that the Council remains a welcoming place to work.

There are several existing initiatives that support the wellbeing of the workforce, including an established mental health first aid scheme; a highly effective and valued occupational health service; wellbeing focussed discussions; wellbeing action plans; and financial support for accessing/fast-tracking medical appointments. Seasonal campaigns to support staff wellbeing include mental health wellbeing week, cost of living support and support when working from home.

Known areas for improvement have been identified and acknowledged - including recognising the absence of a formal performance management process; developing people management and leadership skills at all levels; challenges with recruitment and retention; high levels of absence, with stress/mental health being the number one reason.

To support the HR Strategy, work is also underway to refresh all HR policies; to implement a new learning and development programme; to deliver sessions focussed on owning and delivering performance management and improved workforce planning.



## 4.11 Equality, diversity and inclusion

The Council has a longstanding track record of working to ensure equality, diversity, and inclusion, in relation to both service delivery and employment, ensuring it is fully integrated into everything the Council does.

In recognition of this, in February 2014 and May 2017 the Council was externally assessed as having achieved the 'Excellent' level of the Equality Framework for Local Government. The Council is keen to take a more proactive external focus to support communities with challenges they may be facing with accessing services beyond the Council's own services and also accessing opportunities to improve their quality of life.

The Council recognises that it serves a diverse community with differing needs and acknowledge that for a variety of reasons there are some groups of people who are prevented from taking part fully in their community.

It is the responsibility of all councillors and staff to be aware of and to apply the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy. The councillors and Leadership Team are fully committed to the policy and endeavour to ensure its full implementation by ensuring internal processes and ways of working promote equality and ensure that no one is disadvantaged by how the council operates.

All Council report authors must consider Equality, Diversity and Inclusion by producing an Equalities Impact Assessment which is then considered by councillors during decision-making.

The Council has an employee network which seeks to:

- provide a support network for all employees, advising and consulting on equality issues such as age, gender, race etc;
- enable employees to suggest improvements of services provided by the Council;
- create a safe place for employees to discuss and share concerns.

The Council also has in place an Equality and Diversity Steering Group. This is councillor-led and includes representatives from each of the political parties. This group meets on a quarterly basis to review all matters relating to equality and diversity and where necessary invites key stakeholders to attend so it can better understand issues and identify actions.

During the Covid-19 pandemic the Council observed greater inequity and impact amongst the Borough's more ethnically diverse wards and therefore as mentioned in section 3.6 these wards are a key focus area for the area action approach and levelling up. Future priorities include the development of an equality, diversity and inclusion strategy for the Borough. Whilst as a Council we continually keep regard of our communities in relation to our services, we want to understand better the challenges our communities face across the borough and therefore work with our partners to identify and remove any barriers. The Council is a member of the Equality Network which comprises of various public bodies and organisations that collaborate to develop and deliver outcomes through action plans based upon three key themes; engagement, marketing and communications and capacity development and training.

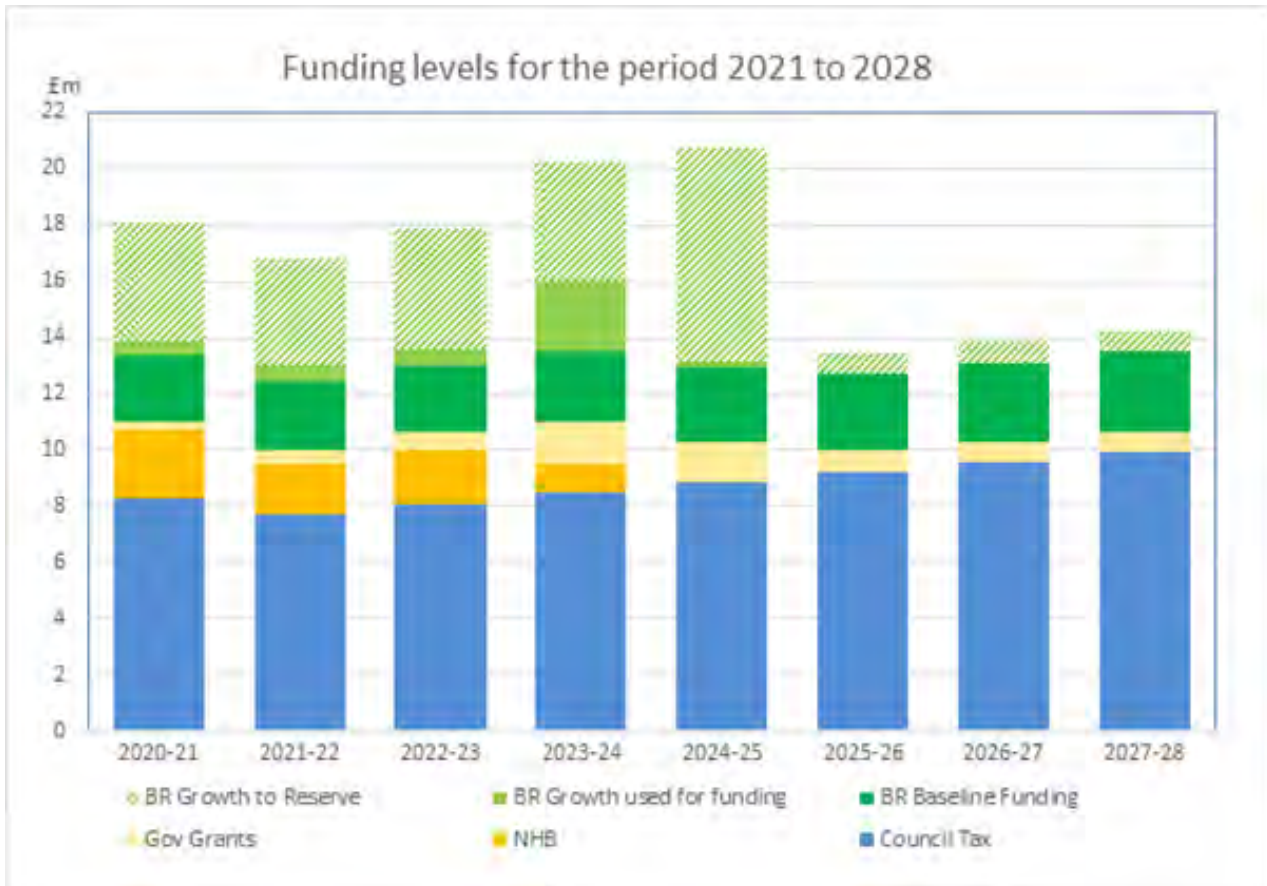
The Equality Network is run by the Warwickshire Equality and Inclusion Partnership (EQUIP) who have been a key partner of the Council for several years. EQUIP has supported the Council in engaging with key communities including during the pandemic. They have also supported the Council in the formulation of the LGBT Action Plan in 2019 which was undertaken in partnership with Warwickshire Pride. The key aim of this action plan was to support the LGBT community and included a commitment to fly the Pride flag on specific key dates, awareness training for officers and councillors, and support and awareness of hate crime and how to report it.

EQUIP will be a key partner in supporting the Council with the development of an equality, diversity and inclusion strategy for the Borough.

## 5. Financial planning and management

### 5.1 Financial overview 2022/23

The sources of funding for the Council since 2020/21 are shown in the table below. Largely it comes from two sources: council tax and business rates. Council tax income remains relatively consistent throughout the period at the level between £8 to £10m. The annual increases derive from a combination of inflationary increases (capped at the greater of 2 per cent or £5 for 2022/23) and growth of the tax base which relates to the increase in homes in the Borough.



Under the scheme that was established in 2013/14, the Council retains growth in business rates over its baseline value which was £2.414m in 2022/23. Following the announcement in 2017 of the proposed business rates reset, the Council established a business rates equalisation reserve to which excess growth above the baseline has been transferred each year. As a high growth borough this has been a significant advantage to Rugby with a contribution to the reserve of (£4.416m) in 2022/23 which was made up of a budgeted contributed of (£2.633m) plus the 2022/23 surplus on the collection fund (£1.783m). This growth has supported the council's budget pressures in recent years to varying degrees. Against a backdrop of uncertainty about the future of local government funding, which has resulted in some difficult decisions being deferred until there is clarity from central Government, the reserve is predicted to continue to be used in this way, alongside supporting the Council's key priorities, such as the one-off £5m contribution from this reserve to a new town centre regeneration reserve as agreed during the 2022/23 budget setting process.



## Medium Term Financial Strategy

In February 2023 the new MTFS, which runs for the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2027, was approved by Council.

The document aligns with the corporate strategy and there are a number of core principles that also underline the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS):

- Set robust, comprehensive and achievable budgets, exploring all avenues of income to meet our financial targets.
- Undertake commercial activities in the open market, where it is sustainable and responsible to do so.
- Maintain robust systems of governance that ensure fairness, accountability, and transparency.
- Treat taxpayers' money with respect and ensure that our high-quality services demonstrate value for money.

This MTFS is also supported by a strong framework of financial policies and strategy documents that include:

- Capital Strategy
- Treasury Management Strategy
- Local Plan 2011-2031
- Asset Management Strategy
- Procurement Strategy
- Housing Strategy
- Risk Management Strategy

The MTFS is now a rolling 3-year document which will be updated as part of the annual budget setting process. This allows the organisation to be adaptable in a period of uncertainty around key Government funding decisions but is also a more effective planning tool.

## 5.2 General fund budget

The 2023/24 general fund revenue balanced budget was delivered and approved in February 2023 and totalled a net £20.636m. This is a decrease of £0.244m from 2022/23.

Portfolio service expenditure increased by £2.536m from £16.145m to £18.501m. Significant expenditure items include £2.790m in relation to inflation and salary adjustments and service growth of £0.758m. To offset this, income and savings of £3.751m have been identified and through the completion of savings delivery plans the delivery will be RAG rated and through post-delivery reviews the impact of the items will be analysed by the Leadership Team. Due to the under-delivery of planned savings in 2022/23, future year savings will be built into the annual corporate strategy delivery plan and monitored via the programme board and the budget working group as appropriate. Furthermore, where appropriate this will also be built into the annual employee appraisal process from 2024 to help provide greater focus on realising the financial goals of the Council.

### 5.3 Reserves balances and future strategy

Reserves are kept under scrutiny to ensure that balances are appropriate but also identify where there could be future challenges.

Plans show that over the medium term the Council is achieving levels of reserves and a general fund balance which continues to meet the risks identified in the financial planning environment. The contributions made to reserves in the past have enabled the Council to establish a level of reserves which:

- recognise the risks of service needs increasing in response to demographic growth or wider economic pressures;
- recognise the potential loss of funding from forthcoming funding changes;
- allow for emergency situations and legal challenges which the Council may face.

The risk assessment completed for reserve usage identifies that the known risks are mitigated with the current balances of reserves. However, analysis takes place on a quarterly basis and is reported to Cabinet and Council as part of the budget setting process.

### 5.4 Future financial outlook and financial resilience

#### Overview

The Council faces a number of funding challenges, the most significant being:

- The loss of all existing growth due to the business rates reset. The reset of the system could redistribute the business rates growth generated since 2013/14, the point at which the retained rates system was introduced.
- The outcome of the fair funding review which could result in a reduction in our assessed funding need.
- The impending end of the New Homes Bonus scheme.
- The impact of rising inflation.

It was confirmed in the local government finance settlement (LGFS) that there would be no baseline reset in 2022/23 (initially planned for 2019/20) and is unlikely to take place for two years. This means the Business Rates Retention Scheme effectively rolls forward unchanged until 2025/26. This provides some confidence that a continued benefit of retained growth of above the baseline will be available to be transferred into the business rates equalisation reserve.

As a high growth borough, being able to maintain another two years business rates growth is significant. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy adopted a continuation policy to transfer any above sustainable baseline growth to the business rates equalisation reserve. Not only does this provide more resilience from the expected cliff edge reduction when the reset takes place, it also provides resources to potentially implement one-off plans to implement the corporate strategy delivery plan. Furthermore it provides more time to bring forward considered proposals to support both income generation and savings required for future years.

Overall, this funding uncertainty makes financial planning for future years extremely challenging, as even the smallest of changes can result in very different outcomes.

## Medium Term Financial Plan

The 2023-27 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) presented to Council at council tax determination in February 2023 is illustrated in the table below;

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
<b>Base Budget</b>	<b>20,682</b>	<b>20,636</b>	<b>23,377</b>	<b>17,473</b>
Growth Requirements	3,548	702	712	150
Other Corporate Adjustments	272	282	184	(17)
Savings and Income	(3,751)	(85)	(295)	0
Financial Management Adjustments	(115)	1,842	(6,505)	79
<b>Revised Budget Requirement</b>	<b>20,636</b>	<b>23,377</b>	<b>17,473</b>	<b>17,685</b>
<b>Financed by;</b>				
Government Funding	(2,463)	(1,324)	(249)	(224)
Council Tax	(9,530)	(9,812)	(10,300)	(10,696)
Collection Fund Surplus/Deficit CT	(70)	0	0	0
Business Rates including Damping	(8,573)	(10,483)	(3,480)	(3,557)
<b>Total Funding Requirement</b>	<b>(20,636)</b>	<b>(21,719)</b>	<b>(14,029)</b>	<b>(14,477)</b>
<b>Savings/transformation required</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,658</b>	<b>3,444</b>	<b>3,208</b>

The shortfall of £1.658m in 2024/25 reflects the following estimated significant items:

- £0.987m reduction in the New Homes Bonus Grant as it is assumed the scheme will come to an end during 2023/24;
- £0.452m increase in staffing costs due to increments and pay inflation;
- £0.250m general inflation for goods and services.

Whilst significant risks remain on future baseline funding levels and any retention of growth, this will continue to be reviewed and updated as further information is made available. The assumptions across the medium term include;

- Settlement Funding Allocation across the MTFP to remain at an estimated level of (£2.900m) on reset from 2023/24. The Review of Relative Needs and Resources will be focussing on this area of funding for all authorities which presents a risk to the Council if the assessment of needs is reduced.
- Following the reset, it is assumed that there will be a significant reduction in the proportion of growth that the authority retains, with total growth dropping from £5.837m in 2023/24 to £0.734m in 2025/26.
- The Council continues to contribute to the BRER with business rates growth above the sustainable baseline.

## Addressing the budget gaps

Whilst the Council cannot predict the outcome of both the fair funding and business rates baseline review, it is preparing for a significant reduction in business rates funding moving forward. The MTFP 2023/24 has highlighted the future risks to funding with officers formulating budgetary plans to address all potential scenarios.

In addition, the existing MTFs sets out a suite of financial policies to provide a framework that will guide our financial planning and decision making throughout the life of the strategy, these assumptions will continue to be updated throughout the year.

Commercialisation has been embraced by the Council for a number of years with a range of commercial services being offered. These have included a trade waste service, a bulky waste collection service, the Lifeline independent living service and the Rainsbrook Crematorium joint venture.

The Council has also agreed five Commercialisation Pillars, developed in conjunction with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) during 2022/23, which provide a baseline to work towards. This baseline supports officers to have active challenge and ensure projects are undertaken with the best interests of the Council in mind. The five pillars are as follows:



#### **Commitment/deliverability**

Ensuring that Rugby has secured appropriate financial commitments; that there is a clear focus on value for money; that the risk profile of the initiative/project is acceptable to Rugby.



#### **Value for resource**

Linked to commitment. Ensuring that Rugby has the required resources (internal/external/voluntary) and that resources are prioritised. Ensuring that there is balance between risk and reward to encourage innovation.



#### **Innovation**

"Encouraging our staff to be innovative". Creating an environment and the support network for staff to generate and realise new possibilities and ways of doing things.



#### **Reward and return**

Striking the right balance to ensure that we maximise the Councils USP as a key enabler for further change. To ensure that we cascade *reward and return* to our communities and the people/business we serve.



#### **Aspiration and inspiration**

Ensuring that we aspire and inspire the organisation to do the right things and that we create the right opportunities. Deliver the corporate priorities to get the best value, outcomes and services for our residents and businesses.

More recently, a number of new initiatives have been developed including the council becoming a shareholder in Sherbourne Recycling Limited. Sherbourne Recycling Limited comprises eight partner Councils and seeks to address the ongoing costs associated with processing recyclate by designing, building and operating the country's first local authority owned Materials Recycling Facility (MRF). Through reductions in the revenue costs of processing recyclate and the treasury benefits of investing in the company, the Council will realise significant annual financial benefits. Furthermore the Council has an opportunity to realise a further return on investment via any commercial business the facility undertakes.

In 2021, the council formed a trading structure with Caldecott Group Limited (CGL) acting as a holding company. A Shareholder Committee has also been set up to oversee the commercial trading activities.

Within this structure, Caldecott Developments Limited (CDL) is a joint venture company acting as a development delivery vehicle, supporting the council to deliver its strategic vision for the Borough. The aim of CDL is to help deliver new housing and facilitate the development of property and land, while achieving financial returns for the shareholders and securing economic, social and environmental well-being within the administrative area of the council.

CDLs initial work has focussed on the regeneration of redundant garage sites, however due to the rising cost of materials and interest rates and thus increased risk associated with such projects, these activities are currently paused pending further review.

Officers are currently working to refine the council's commercial strategy to ensure that a robust framework and governance arrangements are in place for any future commercial activity. It is anticipated that the commercial strategy will be finalised in autumn 2023.

## Financial resilience conclusion

A balanced draft General Fund revenue budget has been presented for 2023/24. However, due to the current challenging financial environment further savings and transformation still need to be identified in order to deliver a balanced budget across the medium term.

The high level of uncertainty around retained business rates and the reset of the system presents a considerable risk to the Council's finances. With the introduction of a new MTFs, the Council has set out how it is going to tackle proactively the challenges facing not just Rugby, but the sector as a whole.



## 6. Capacity for improvement

### 6.1 Where are we now?

The Council's recent experiences of leading the Borough through challenging times, continuing to deliver essential services and taking a long-term approach to shaping Rugby's future has built the confidence to go further to deliver its corporate strategy outcomes.

A renewed organisational identity provides a platform on which to build, grow and develop. This confidence also comes with humility and the Council continually seeks to learn and improve including through regularly engaging with others to learn, check and challenge its work and how it's done.

Work undertaken by the Council in establishing the Rugby Blueprint provides a sound basis for understanding where we are now, reflecting the views of the workforce.

### 6.2 Where are we going?

In adopting the Corporate Strategy and emerging from the pandemic, the Council has positioned itself as a place-shaper, leading work to support the wellbeing of the broader Borough. As such, the Council's core business can be viewed as:

- Business as usual services – continuing to provide high quality, value for money services to Rugby's residents and businesses.
- Transformational Projects – changing the ways in which the Council operates to enable the needs of residents to be met and reflect the changing operating environment .
- Place Shaping – recognising the Council's wider role as a deliverer, enabler and influencer of broader change within the Borough.

Within the Rugby Blueprint, the Council has clearly established how organisational culture needs to evolve to support delivery against each of these points and remain a forward-thinking, sustainable organisation.



### **6.3 What do we need to do to get there?**

To support the delivery of the Council's corporate strategy outcomes, there are several elements of its internal working which are developing. It is recognised that these aspects need to reach maturity to enable the culture which the council strives for. Some of these are described below. However the Council recognises the considerable change experienced by officers in the last three years and thus the change fatigue that may arise.

#### **Leadership capacity**

Following the recruitment of a new Chief Executive, the Council recognised that the previous structure (One Executive Director and four Heads of Service) did not provide the strategic capacity required to allow the Council to evolve and progress its place shaping journey. Reflections on previous working practices revealed that the former Senior Management Team spent a disproportionate amount of time managing operational demands and a less-than-desired amount of time on collectively leading the organisation.

Therefore, a new Leadership Team was created, consisting of one Chief Executive, one Deputy Chief Executive and eight Chief Officers. Once recruited, the Leadership Team undertook joint development, supported by a learning and development coach, to determine its role, remit and methods of working. An early action arising from these conversations was to rename the team from Senior Management Team to Leadership Team to reflect the team's leadership purpose.

The Leadership Team is now well established and provides a strategic lead for all Council business. Effective relationships exist with the Council's political leadership and the principles to which the Leadership Team work are now filtering down, throughout the organisation.

With the expanded strategic capacity of the Leadership Team, there has also been a marked increase in diagnostic capacity, leading to the identification of more areas for improvement and subsequently generating additional service improvement and transformation requirements. Whilst this does provide an increased demand in the short term, it is recognised that the long-term benefits will lead to more efficient working and improved performance within services.

The next tier of leadership is the council's Management Team. The Management Team remains a relatively new collective, but has already progressed to a position of meeting regularly, having an agreed role and providing collaborative leadership for operational matters.

At the point of formation, the Management Team consisted of existing service managers, for whom many of the new ways of working represented a new approach and significant change from established expectations. Furthermore there have been a number of new post holders in the last few years. The Management Team has therefore been implemented as an iterative approach, with a clear end goal of truly leading all aspects of service delivery across the organisation. This team was formulated following the success of the Council's Tactical Coordinating Group during the Covid-19 pandemic. Comprising largely of the Council's service managers, the collective approach to problem solving sowed the seeds for a new way of working.

Within the Management Team there is also a buddy scheme to allow two managers to support one another. This was established within the external development sessions with the Management Team and the clear objective of this being a supportive journey for all members of the Management Team.

Leadership Team remains committed to supporting the Management Team on their individual and collective development to enable them to fulfil this role successfully.



### **Councillor capacity**

The Council continues to commit to training and empowering councillors to enable them to fulfil their democratic and local leadership roles.

The recently adopted councillor learning and development policy aims to establish a culture whereby councillors are provided with a clear framework for development. It addresses developmental needs in skills, attributes and knowledge, having regard to the context of local government in a rapidly changing society.

The revised councillor and officer protocol provides a framework for effective collaboration with officers, setting clear guidance on how councillors and officers should work together in a productive and respectful manner.

Good progress has been made on the new implementation of a new member case management system, with an initial pilot group of members being trained on how to use the system in September 2023. It is anticipated that training will be given to all remaining councillors during November 2023, with the system being fully live in December 2023.

The council has recently moved into no overall control, with a minority Conservative administration. Officers and councillors are working collaboratively to ensure the full engagement of all councillors in taking forward the communities aspirations. New mechanisms such as the All Leaders Steering Group and existing mechanisms such as Member Conversations covering key topics support this objective.

The Council is keen to understand what more could be done to support collaboration, while recognising and respecting political difference and to continue supporting councillors in their community leadership role.



## Organisational culture

As detailed in section 4.6, the Leadership Team has engaged with the entire workforce to co-design a 'Rugby Blueprint' which seeks to establish a new organisational culture and set a framework for the Council to progress in its evolution.

Now implemented, the blueprint is referred to by our employees, referenced in many communications, highlighted at employee briefings and discussed during internal meetings. However, to be truly successful, it is recognised that there is more to do to ensure that the blueprint principles are embedded in everything which the Council does and are recognised by all staff in their day to day working.

The Council recognises the level of maturity needs to evolve further in relation to the Rugby Blueprint journey and therefore is keen to understand what further steps can be taken to truly embed the blueprint principles in all service areas.

## Community capacity

The Council strives to work with communities to deliver outcomes for the Borough. This can be seen, for example, in the Council's approach to levelling up through area action. In doing so, the Council strives to better understand the needs of communities and build on the strengths of existing relationships with our voluntary and community sector partners.

As well as relationships with community organisations (in particular, where the Council has service level agreements in place), the Council recognises the vital role which infrastructure organisations such as Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action and the Warwickshire Equality and Inclusion Partnership play.

Furthermore, the Council recognises the capacity and passion which exists within our many parish councils and will further explore how to work together more effectively in partnership with them both individually and collectively, alongside the Warwickshire Association of Local Councils (WALC).

The Council will continue to be engaging, listening to residents and communities to develop methods for more meaningful consultation. The Council will also enable stakeholders to play a full role in delivering outcomes, by ensuring mutual respect, the identification of shared objectives and an asset based approach to community development.



## A performance-led organisation

The Council recognises that meaningful performance management is key to being able to demonstrate effective delivery and tailor services to meet local need.

It is recognised that the Council's starting point for performance management was relatively low and that historically, the culture has not been one of being performance driven. The evolution towards a true performance led culture is an iterative process which will require leadership commitment for the long term.

To date, officers have redesigned an initial suite of key performance indicators, operational performance indicators and key statistics which better enable the Council to report current performance. This information is now presented using a PowerBI dashboard, which enables the viewer to select and further interrogate performance data and narrative.

Progressing the performance management journey at service level will require improvements to areas such as the quality of data provided, the narrative which accompanies data, the use of performance data to inform service delivery and benchmarking and the ease with which data can be interrogated/analysed by the user.

To ensure that performance data remains relevant to individual officers, performance targets will take a more prominent role in discussions such as team meetings, 1:1s and from 2024/25 annual appraisals. To support this, managers and all officers will be supported and developed to be able to have meaningful, performance-led discussions. Similarly, training will be provided to councillors (both individually and as committees or political groups) to explain how to use and analyse performance data. This will be complimented by specific dashboards which provide the data required.

To complement the Council's internal performance management arrangements, tools such as CFO Insights and LG Inform are being rolled out across the organisation. Utilising these tools better enables the Council to understand performance in the wider context, benchmarking against peers, geographical neighbours and local authority nearest neighbours.



## 7. Concluding remarks

Within this position statement, there are a number of inter-related factors that the Council is addressing which underpin the delivery of the Council's corporate outcomes.

In addition to a general health check against the five core themes of a corporate peer challenge, the Council welcomes the LGA team's feedback in the following areas:

a) A review of how the Council is progressing as an organisation against the Rugby Blueprint principles and how, whilst noting successes to date, the Council can go further to embed these principles and progress this journey.

b) A review of how the Council can progress in becoming genuinely performance led – how this supports delivery of the Rugby Blueprint and how it can be used to better empower staff in delivering corporate outcomes.

c) Recognising that for several years the Council has continued to see a high level of sickness absence relating to mental health - what further steps can the Council undertake to support employee wellbeing?

d) During 2022/23 delivery of planned savings was a challenge for various reasons. The Council has taken steps in the current year and steps are also planned for the forthcoming year to help strengthen this area. Is there anything further we can be doing to support this?

e) A new All Leaders Steering Group has been established to support cross-party working within the context of 'no overall control' – what more could the Council be doing to promote effective cross collaboration between the political groups, ensuring that decisions continue to be made in the best interests of the community and the Council's corporate objectives?



## 8. Background documents

Please see the links to relevant background documents below.

<a href="#">Corporate peer review document pack</a>	
<a href="#">Corporate strategy</a>	Corporate strategy delivery plan This document is expected to be approved at Council on 25 October. An up-to-date draft will be provided to the peer review team on site.
<a href="#">Annual report 2021-22</a>	<a href="#">Annual report 2022-23</a>
<a href="#">Community safety annual report 2022-23</a>	
<a href="#">Climate change strategy</a>	<a href="#">Net zero website and blogs</a>
<a href="#">Regeneration strategy</a>	<a href="#">Adopted local plan</a>
<a href="#">Organisational structure chart</a>	<a href="#">Rugby Blueprint</a> (link to RBC Sharepoint page will work on site)
<a href="#">Internal constitution</a>	<a href="#">Member and officer protocol</a>
<a href="#">Medium term financial strategy</a>	<a href="#">Annual governance statement</a>
<a href="#">Financial instructions</a>	<a href="#">Risk management strategy</a>
Audit letter This document is due to be considered by the Audit and Ethics Committee and will be provided to the peer review team on site.	



# LGA Corporate Peer Challenge

Rugby Borough Council

10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023

Feedback report



## Contents

1. Executive summary.....	3
2. Key recommendations .....	6
3. Summary of the peer challenge approach .....	7
4. Feedback .....	10
5. Next steps .....	24

## 1. Executive summary

Rugby Borough Council (RBC) previously commissioned a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) in 2013. There has been much change and challenge over the last ten years including the continued pressures facing local government, Covid-19, and more recently the ongoing impacts for the Council and its communities around the cost of living. The peer team recognised there was some apprehension from the Council regarding the CPC, and would recommend RBC ensures that a more regular programme of external check and challenge, and support, is planned in its drive for improvement.

RBC has recognised the need to change and modernise, with an aspiration to be a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council fit to serve the residents now and into the future. This ambition was clear to the peer team. Following the recent elections RBC now has a minority Conservative administration and a new Council Leader, with a relatively new CEX in post since 2020. Now presented a timely opportunity for the Council to undertake a CPC to reflect on its challenges and opportunities to support its modernisation plans.

The Council's Members and officers are passionate and dedicated to the Borough and there is an organisational focus on the importance of putting its communities and customers first. This was at the heart of RBC, and is embedded through the organisation and a clear focus with the Members and officers the peer team met with. This organisational focus was referenced by partners too, highlighting good relationships in place with RBC being viewed very positively by most partners the peer team spoke to. There are opportunities for building on these too – where partners would value more of RBC's involvement, both from Members and officers, to strategically lead the place together and work collectively on the County-wide geography.

There is now an opportunity for the Council to consider its priorities as there is currently a prevailing view that it is trying to do '*everything, everywhere, all at once*'. There is such a lot being done, particularly internally, at RBC. The Council is rightly

ambitious - knowing it needs to change and modernise – but much of this work is being delivered by the same staff, meaning there is a risk to effective delivery. The Council acknowledges the risks of ‘change fatigue’. The peer team feel that there is benefit in giving further consideration to RBC’s priorities in relation to its available resources – both money and people – to improve its capacity. This would also provide clarity on what are the Council’s key areas of focus.

There is an impressive and constant focus on the Rugby Blueprint, as the culture change programme, at the top of the organisation. The change in culture which RBC is trying to achieve is understood by the Leadership Team but this is less well understood and embedded in parts of the organisation. There is an important role for the Management Team to play to embed this further.

RBC’s Corporate Strategy 2021-24 has four priority outcomes alongside an annual delivery plan. Further consideration to what success looks like and the identification of SMART objectives so that progress can be more precisely measured would strengthen this further. It is understood that work is already in progress on this and feeding into the development of a performance driven organisation. This would also provide much needed clarity on the role officers contribute to overall Council objectives for inclusion in their individual performance reviews.

The Council is on track to finalise its HR Strategy and develop its approach in being a learning and development organisation and the peer team encourage the Council to continue this. Staff need to see the benefits of the Council investing in them and implementing quick wins will allow staff to begin to ‘feel’ this change. RBC is also planning to introduce an appraisal process in 2024 which is critical and long overdue. This is important for staff and the delivery of the Council’s goals. The peer team encourage RBC to take this forward with pace and energy and ensure this is clearly linked to performance management and the Corporate Strategy.

RBC has a balanced financial position, with a 4 year rolling forecast in place. This



has been supported by the Council's prudent approach to business rate gains. In the current financial climate RBC is in a good financial position and the peer team feel that it would now benefit from a longer term approach to financial planning to capitalise on its stable financial footing. The peer team recognise the challenges around this, in the current one year settlements, but further consideration on funding assumptions and modelling over a longer period may support RBC with financial planning.

Overall there are good Member / officer relations across RBC but there are pockets where this is not as effective as it could be. The peer team heard from all political groups and senior officers that there is now an appetite to embed the Member Officer protocol and move forward and work positively for the benefit of Rugby and its communities. The peer team encourage the Council to understand the barriers, invest time in developing these relationships, and approach this in a constructive way.

The Council should be proud of its achievements and celebrate its successes. Staff and Members are achieving significant successes for their communities when working together. This is generating a shared pride of cross-Council achievement: for instance the peer team heard first-hand about the recent Britain in Bloom Gold award, and the achievement of performance targets at the quarterly staff briefing. Officers take pride in this and understand the impact they have in service delivery and RBC should maintain and consider how to strengthen this.

## 2. Key recommendations

There are a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Council:

### 2.1 Recommendation 1

Consideration should be given to RBC's priorities in relation to its available resources (money and people), which would improve capacity. This would also provide clarity, internally and externally, on the Council's key areas of focus.

### 2.2 Recommendation 2

Give further consideration to what success looks like for the Corporate Strategy Priority Outcomes through the development of a Performance Management Framework which reflects the 'golden thread' through to service plans and individual objectives.

### 2.3 Recommendation 3

The Council should consider adopting a longer term approach to financial planning by extending the planning horizon of the MTFP and ensuring it is informed by a range of financial scenarios (best to worst) to reflect the uncertainty in local government funding. A longer term financial approach would also help with the delivery of the new Corporate Strategy.

### 2.4 Recommendation 4

The Council should continue to proactively investigate innovative ways to address the significant identified funding gap. There is an opportunity to utilise the time offered by the Council's solid financial position to proactively investigate innovative ways to address the significant identified funding gap (e.g. through 'invest to save' initiatives) and protect service delivery.

### 2.5 Recommendation 5

The Council should continue to invest time in developing Member/Member and Member/officer relationships, capitalising on the current appetite to 'reset' the relationships and move forward and work positively for the benefit of Rugby and its

communities.

### **2.6 Recommendation 6**

RBC should continue to develop its HR Strategy and its approach to being a learning and development organisation, and implement some of the quick wins as soon as possible for the benefit of its staff.

### **2.7 Recommendation 7**

The Council should continue to proactively harness its network of partners to collectively deliver better outcomes for their communities. Partners value the role and contribution of the Council and this can be built upon for benefit of Rugby and its residents.

### **2.8 Recommendation 8**

The Council should continue to encourage and empower officers to identify and implement best practice through sector-led improvement as part of the Rugby Blueprint journey.

## **3. Summary of the peer challenge approach**

### **3.1 The peer team**

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected Member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- **Kathy O’Leary** – Chief Executive, Stroud DC
- **Cllr Michael Wilcox** - LGA West Midlands Conservative regional Member peer, and Lichfield DC and Staffordshire County Council
- **Emily Yule** - Strategic Director (Deputy Chief Executive), Rochford DC and Brentwood BC (Monitoring Officer – Rochford DC)
- **Russell Stone** – Director of Resources, North Kesteven DC
- **Drew Powell** - Director of Strategy and Governance, South Hams DC and West

Devon BC

- **Maariyah Ali** – Shadow peer and National Management Trainee, Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea
- **James Millington** - Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

Members of the extended peer team:

- **Cllr Alistair Dewhirst** - Liberal Democrats, Devon County Council
- **Cllr Alan Rhodes** - Labour, Cabinet Member for Corporate & Financial Services, Bassetlaw DC

### 3.2 Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges. These areas are critical to councils' performance and improvement.

1. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
2. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
3. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
4. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

The Council asked the peer team to particularly reflect on the following areas as part of the above 5 core components:

- a) A review of how the Council is progressing as an organisation against the Rugby Blueprint principles and how, whilst noting successes to date, the Council can go further to embed these principles and progress this journey
- b) A review of how the Council can progress in becoming genuinely performance led – how this supports delivery of the Rugby Blueprint and how it can be used to better empower staff in delivering corporate outcomes
- c) Recognising that for several years the Council has continued to see a high level of sickness absence relating to mental health - what further steps can the Council undertake to support employee wellbeing?
- d) During 2022/23 delivery of planned savings was a challenge for various reasons. The Council has taken steps in the current year and steps are also planned for the forthcoming year to help strengthen this area. Is there anything further we can be doing to support this?
- e) A new All Leaders' Steering Group has been established to support cross-party working within the context of 'no overall control' – what more could the Council be doing to promote effective cross collaboration between the political groups, ensuring that decisions continue to be made in the best interests of the community and the Council's corporate objectives?

### **3.3 The peer challenge process**

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent three days at Rugby Borough Council during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 35 meetings, in addition to

further research and reading.

- Spoke to more than 90 people including a range of Council staff together with members and external stakeholders.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers and Members.

## 4. Feedback

### 4.1 Local priorities and outcomes

The Council's Corporate Strategy 2021-24 was adopted in 2020. The Strategy is supported by an annual delivery plan and an annual progress report. The Strategy has four priority corporate outcomes:

- **Climate:** Rugby is an environmentally sustainable place, where we work together to reduce and mitigate the effects of climate change
- **Economy:** Rugby has a diverse and resilient economy that benefits and enables opportunities for all residents
- **Health and Communities:** Residents live healthy, independent lives, with the most vulnerable protected
- **Organisation:** Rugby Borough Council is a responsible, effective and efficient organisation

The Corporate Strategy was developed in consultation with the local community, attracting more than 1000 responses, demonstrating how the Council actively listens to its communities in the development of its priorities. As a further example of this, there had been a good programme of engagement on its Climate Change agenda where a survey was delivered to understand local perceptions and the Rugby Climate Summit, which was attended by over 70 individuals and organisations, was

held prior to adopting the Climate Change Strategy.

Equally, the peer team heard that RBC is keen to regularly engage with its own staff, who as members of the community can also offer valuable insights. The peer team did feel that this rich data from the organisation's staff surveys and the Resident Survey could be better shared and built upon to further support the development of strategies and plans. This could be an opportunity for a 'you said, we did' approach and would work well for the Council, demonstrating how it has heard views and responded.

The peer team consistently heard that "*the Council knows its communities well and when to step in and help*" and that there is a real commitment and drive to "*do what's right*" in delivering local public services. This was in reference to both Members and officers. The Council understands the opportunities and challenges presented by the rapid growth of the Borough where the population has increased by 14.3 per cent, from around 100,100 in 2011 to around 114,400 in 2021, and by 2035 is expected to be more than 130,000. RBC is keenly aware of the disparity in the quality of life within the Borough, which is quite marked, and two of the Borough's Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are in the 20 per cent most deprived in England. RBC recognises how to prioritise the activity at a ward level and the 'Ward Walks' were viewed positively as an effective way to understand the areas and the ward councillor priorities. The peer team recognise the work that has progressed on area action plans and levelling up and agree that such programmes should continue, delivered in priority order and focused as it has done on the areas which would benefit most.

RBC's recent Covid-19 response and the ongoing cost of living response for its local communities have been commendable. The work which it has led with partners to support the Borough's communities has been extremely valuable. This has been a catalyst for the Council's organisational change and has sharpened the community focus of the organisation, and the value of the voluntary and community sector as key local partners.

The objectives of the Council's 'change programme' and link to the Corporate Strategy was not entirely clear to the peer team. A clearer tie back between the Corporate Strategy and the 'change programme' where the Council communicates: what it is aiming to do; how it is expecting the values and behaviours of staff and Members to help it get there; what are the core priorities; and the steps RBC will take to achieve them, would be beneficial. The peer team felt that the 'how' is not clear in the Rugby Blueprint – so a tighter join up between the Rugby Blueprint, Corporate Strategy and the change programme would be helpful in supporting people to understand the strategic intent.

RBC's ambition to move towards being an increasingly performance-led and learning and development organisation is positive. Although RBC has a Corporate Strategy Delivery Plan, it would benefit from this being longer term with a stronger focus on deliverables and timescales. However, the Council is taking some important steps along this journey and recognises that its Performance Management Framework requires sustained effort and further refinement. The peer team agree that RBC's focus on this is needed to create a solid link to the delivery of the Corporate Strategy. There is currently a very long list of KPIs and this needs to be reviewed to ensure they are SMART, strategic and precise – with clarity on when the targets will be achieved.

The LGA's LGInform can be utilised as part of this to explore data for benchmarking with other areas and provide important information for RBC to evaluate service delivery. For instance, reviewing the performance of RBC services compared with its CiPFA near neighbour councils ([https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/lga-research-report-headline-report-bar-charts?mod-area=E07000220&mod-group=CIPFA\\_Near\\_Neighbours&mod-type=comparisonGroupType](https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/view/lga-research/lga-research-report-headline-report-bar-charts?mod-area=E07000220&mod-group=CIPFA_Near_Neighbours&mod-type=comparisonGroupType) accessed Oct 2023 – figures correct at time) shows:

- RBC is performing well against the measure of the numbers of major planning applications processed on time (100%), but is performing less well on the processing of minor applications (85% decided on time) compared with the average (92%). *Figures for Q1 of 23/24.*



- RBC is ranked fourth highest (4 days) for the mean time taken to process housing benefits claims and change events – the average is 3 days. *Figures for Q4 2022/23.*

Measures from this LG Inform report are an example, and indeed the Council may have more relevant and up to date figures to include, but it may wish to continue to explore its performance and benchmarking further in this way. This information and other metrics can provide a valuable contribution to the Council's performance framework and assist its approach in evaluating and improving service delivery.

A robust approach to performance will help RBC to develop the 'golden thread' and relationship between its corporate priorities, service plans and the objectives set for individual members of staff. Service Plans are key elements of this, and whilst they have been developed, they would also benefit from being more consistent and clearly linked to the Corporate Strategy. The performance objectives for every member of staff, at each level of the organisation, should be measurable. The Council recognises the importance of doing this and the peer team encourages that it does this at pace. RBC also recognises that the introduction of a robust and consistent appraisal process and regular 1:1s are important for staff. The peer team heard that staff have variable experiences with these currently – with some confirming they have regular 1:1s and some not recognising this at all. The peer team encourage RBC to consider bringing forward the timescales for implementing its new consistent Council-wide approach.

## 4.2 Organisational and place leadership

The development of a new Corporate Strategy beyond the current 2021-24 Corporate Strategy will be critically important to the future direction of the Council. It is important in developing this that all Members engage to shape this to ensure that the voices of all the Borough's communities are heard. The Corporate Strategy is at its most powerful when it serves the needs of all of wards and communities. The peer team recommend that for the benefit of Rugby and its communities all Members

consider how to work together to agree the priorities and how to deliver on them. This is particularly important for the Corporate Strategy, as a long term piece of work, and in the context of a Council without a majority administration.

RBC has recognised the need to change and modernise. There have been some significant changes in recent years which have driven this and a key positive change for the organisation is seen to be the new CEX, who is keen to make progress on this agenda quickly alongside a new Leadership Team, consisting of a Deputy Chief Executive and 8 Chief Officers. The peer team saw how the Leadership Team are embedding well and have the potential to drive the organisation forward.

The Leadership Team has recognised that it needs to create the capacity and time for horizon scanning and be more outward looking – this is driven by the CEX and the peer team encourages this approach. Creating capacity to do this and looking at the future challenges and opportunities is important for the whole organisation. The Team needs to undertake this important strategic role and not become tied up in the more operational matters which can be handled by other officers, as appropriate. This could also include reviewing how to make the most of the weekly Leadership Team meetings in creating capacity for longer term strategic thinking and collective problem-solving.

The further planned development activity for both the Leadership and Management teams will positively benefit organisational leadership. It is important that these two teams work closely together as one, and the peer team stresses the importance of avoiding the danger of creating a ‘two tier culture’.

Discussions with the peer team and feedback from staff surveys have shown how internal communications have improved and that staff feel informed, with the programme of regular briefings and written communications supporting this. RBC will want to keep this under review and continue to check with staff that this is the most effective way to engage with them, and if there are opportunities for other officers to

take more of a lead on this, as there are benefits of it not always being driven by the Leadership Team.

RBC is focused on how it can support staff wellbeing. The peer team recognises that the Council is already doing some good work on this including a mental health first aid scheme; occupational health service; and financial support for accessing/fast-tracking medical appointments. This is appreciated by staff. The peer team felt that staff wellbeing and wellness could be enhanced further by revitalising the staff groups to also support the Council's EDI ambitions. This is around everyone feeling included and welcome to be their true selves at work, ensuring they feel supported in this, and that this is peer-led, building on the positive work which RBC has done around mental health support.

Partners the peer team met recognise and value the input of the Leader and would welcome the increased input of all Members. Where Members are involved, particularly on a ward-level, partners were complimentary about their engagement. For example, RBC's role in tackling key issues such as ASB and unwanted attention through the Community Safety Partnership was welcomed by the Police and Rugby First. Partners value engaging with councillors as the local elected representatives and there are opportunities to build on this.

Partnership working is generally good and RBC can build on and sustain this. The Chief Executive was identified by partners including Health, the Police, education and other public sector partners as a key positive player in improving place leadership and they would welcome more of this from the CEX and other senior officers. Relationships with parish councils (via the Warwickshire Association of Local Councils) has also improved recently and a quarterly forum has been reinstated, with RBC hosting in November. However, some relationships will need to be nurtured, particularly where key personnel in partner organisations are changing, and RBC will need to build new connections and maintain these.

Partners view RBC as a key influencer and want to see the Council at the table as much as possible to take advantage of all the opportunities which are coming forward. For example, the Council needs to remain sighted on the Government's plans on County Deals and how it may need to shape and influence the discussions. A greater presence at regional level could also lever in increased investment to the Borough and continue to improve the outcomes for Rugby's communities.

Local business leaders reflected on the increased and positive engagement, including around planning and economic development and the shared ambitions which the Council is forging. For instance, there has been good engagement on the development of the Rugby Town Centre Regeneration Strategy and now may be an opportune moment to strengthen relationships with partners to secure buy-in and commitment as part of the next stage. Businesses want to be further engaged in this and move together with the Council for the benefit of the Borough.

The Council has a clearly articulated priority outcome on climate, with an action plan in place which sets out the goals for 2030. RBC has a range of measures including: progressing energy efficiency measures to Council buildings and its housing stock; the planned decarbonisation of Council vehicles; development of the green corridor for safer cycling; and working with local businesses for addressing their needs around Climate Change. There is an impressive programme which has been developed. The Council recognises that it needs to work with others on this and partners feel there is an opportunity to reinforce the focus on the Council's carbon emissions and leading by example to support the strategic messaging. Others can then take inspiration from this.

### **4.3 Governance and culture**

The peer team heard positive views about how good governance is seen as a shared responsibility by all officers at RBC and not just the statutory officers and the Leadership Team. To support this there is a well-developed suite of policy and

procedure documents which underpin the Council's governance framework. There are opportunities to help with the navigation of these, by making them more concise and focused, and the peer team thought that there was an opportunity to simplify these to make them more accessible.

The Council would benefit from developing its culture of empowerment which complements this governance framework. For instance, the peer team did feel that there may be opportunities to review the scheme of delegated authority and this can be reviewed and benchmarked with similar councils to assess whether the current levels are appropriate for the size of the organisation. It did appear that some of the levels may benefit from being adjusted to ensure RBC is delegating appropriately, and if there is an opportunity within this to free up capacity at the top of the organisation and support RBC's ambitions around empowering officer decision making.

There are important changes currently being made, including the proposed changes to the code of conduct complaints process and the role of the Audit & Ethics Committee. These are positive and should be implemented quickly in a way that can help move the organisation forward positively. This is important as if not handled appropriately, continuing to deal with similar complaints can otherwise be a distraction to the business of the Council.

RBC recognises the importance of continuing to develop positive Member and officer relationships and ways of working for the benefit of Rugby and its communities. All staff seemed to understand that they served all elected Members of the Council and this will be important to maintain, particularly in a minority administration. The Member and Officer Protocol is positive step and this has been socialised well throughout the organisation. The recent LGA joint Member and officer workshop on the Protocol was very well received. There is an opportunity to consider how to develop this approach and embed further.

Building on this, it is recognised there is now an opportunity and appetite for a 'reset' of some of the Member and officer relationships which are not working as effectively as they could be. This opportunity needs to be taken for the benefit of the communities that the Council serves. The peer team would encourage the Council to reset and work on these relationships and this will require effort from everyone. A good example of this is the All Leaders' Steering Group which is a good means of ensuring all groups play their important part in the Council. For this Group to be successful everyone needs to play their part for it to be effective and RBC should consider collectively how to facilitate this.

In supporting the improvement of positive relationships, briefings for Members by officers appears to be good but there do not appear to be any consistent response standards for managing Member enquiries and expectations. It is understood that the introduction of consistent response times was agreed at the LGA facilitated Member Officer Protocol workshop in September 2023. RBC should ensure this remains part of its approach as it progresses plans to develop the Member enquiry system and this will help resolve the current frustrations Members feel in response to their enquiries.

The induction programme for new councillors was well received and RBC encourages councillors to have personal development plans and share biographies to understand their needs. There is an opportunity to build this into a more thorough and meaningful ongoing development programme for all Members to support them in their 'councillor career', in which all Members need to engage. This can draw on internal support and offers from other providers, including the LGA. There may be an opportunity to consider how Members can help to shape this more actively with officers than they do currently, and group Leaders may want to consider their important role in this. This applies equally to support those more experienced Members, in addition to those recently elected.

The peer team heard about the importance of the Scrutiny function to the Council and how the effective contribution this can make may be enhanced, particularly in

respect of the alignment to the Corporate Strategy Delivery Plan. This will help with focusing the resources needed to deliver scrutiny and RBC may want to consider the capacity and prioritisation given to this.

RBC officers and Members both describe a deep connection to place and are passionate about improving the lives of Rugby's communities. This can explain why the workforce is so loyal and even though they sometimes described feeling stretched by what is expected of them at work, they are loyal to the place. Employees describe their colleagues as highly supportive and collaborative within their teams and the peer team heard that there is a supportive 'family feel'.

The Rugby Blueprint, which was launched in 2022, is the Council's model for developing the organisational culture, and this was developed via a thorough engagement programme with staff. In discussions with the peer team this was recognised and supported by the majority of staff but there was inconsistent feedback from staff on what this means for them. The peer team recommends that the Council now considers the steps needed to be taken in 'how to get there' and the Management Team then has an important role to play to embed it with all staff.

As part of the improvement culture, the Council has created routes for staff to be able to raise issues and recommendations for improvement including using the internal sharepoint site. Staff are making suggestions. However, there does appear to be an inconsistent feedback loop. RBC may want to consider what existing forums and communications channels could be used to improve this, as this good intention can be undermined if staff feel that they do not get feedback on why their suggestions are not taken forward for further consideration. Similarly, staff raised that although the Leadership Team are keen on empowering staff to make decisions, at times their steer can appear slow, and officers would appreciate the outcomes and rationale behind the responses being reported back to them.

#### 4.4 Financial planning and management

The Council has a balanced financial position, with a 4 year rolling forecast in place. The Financial outlook and wider determinants impacting the financial outlook are well understood by senior officers and Members. Arrangements are in place to ensure a sound basis for financial control and the accounts are produced on time and to a good standard, with regular budget monitoring taking place.

The Finance Team is well respected across the Council but the peer team noted that there are some vacancies within the team. This is currently being managed but to mitigate challenges around recruitment and retention RBC should consider further developing more finance professionals internally as there might be an opportunity and, given recruitment challenges, a need to grow internal talent.

Due to the growth of the Borough the business rates have played an important role in the Council's finances, where under the scheme that was established in 2013/14, the Council retains an element of growth in the business rates over its baseline value. Since 2017 the Council has held a business rates equalisation reserve to which excess growth above the baseline has been transferred each year. As a high growth Borough this has been a significant advantage to Rugby with a contribution to the reserve of more than £5M in 2022/23. This growth has supported the Council's budget pressures.

The Council's prudent and proactive approach to financial management has been demonstrated through setting aside significant Business rate gains, which creates a safety net in times of financial pressure. RBC has also had the foresight to borrow in advance of need to protect the scheme delivery and, due to delays in scheme delivery, is also generating a temporary financial return for the Council. It has also demonstrated its ability to plan well in setting aside of funds to deliver change and support the Council's modernisation agenda.



The Council is aware of its future financial risks. These risks include: the loss of all existing growth due to the business rates reset; the outcome of the fair funding review; the impending end of the New Homes Bonus scheme; and the impact of rising inflation. The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2023/24 highlights the future risks, with gaps in future years currently assessed as: 2024/25 - £1.786M, 2025/26 - £3.534M and 2026/27 - £3.871M. The challenges now being faced, including inflation, will likely worsen this position. The Council should consider building on this approach and extending the planning horizon of the MTFP and ensuring it is informed by a range of financial scenarios (best to worst) to reflect the uncertainty in local government funding. A longer term and more strategic financial approach would also help with the approach to the delivery of the new Corporate Strategy.

As at the 31st March 2023 RBC's General Fund revenue reserves stood at £26.5M. Through RBC's solid financial position and the 'cushion' it has created with its business rates and transformation reserves there is an opportunity to proactively investigate innovative ways to address the significant funding gap it forecasts and protect service delivery. Whilst there is currently a balanced position RBC is aware that this is due to retained business rates growth and the use of reserves. In the time that is available, consideration should be given to how best to further develop the Council's approach to financial planning by making more of 'invest to save' opportunities which drive forward improvements and the delivery of savings. RBC has an opportunity to identify ways to close the budget gap by growing income, making efficiencies and driving an impactful transformational change programme. The Council should investigate best practice and see how it can learn from others to drive innovation. Delivery of this could then allow some of the reserve funding to be released to support corporate priorities.

The peer team found that budget savings are largely delivered and Chief Officers 'own' their budgets and understand the uncertainties and challenges RBC faces. However, following the under-delivery of planned savings in 2022/23, future year savings are to be built into the annual Corporate Strategy Delivery Plan and

monitored via the Budget Working Group. RBC is also considering building into the annual employee appraisal process greater focus on realising the financial goals of the Council. To enhance this, in-year financial monitoring could be more robustly scrutinised by the Budget Working Group with late variances investigated, and the culture of openness and shared responsibility be further developed.

RBC should consider enhancing and embedding the framework around savings identification, income generation, delivery and monitoring of service performance and ensure corrective action is taken. The Council intends to link service performance with budget monitoring and the role of the Finance Business Partner, and both the Leadership and Management teams and the Budget Working Group are important to this.

The Council should ensure there is a focus on maximising the tax base and appropriately collecting outstanding debt. Figures in comparison to peers are not as high as they could be – for example the Council at 4.45% has the highest rate of council tax not collected as a percentage of council tax due (compared with its CiPFA near neighbour mean of 2.32% for 2021/22). Although RBC has not felt this financial disadvantage disproportionately due to the significant growth in the council tax and business rates base, this could make an important contribution to the Council's future financial position and should be tackled.

#### **4.5 Capacity for improvement**

The peer team recognises there is a real appetite for improvement at the Council and it has made some considerable progress over the past 2 years with the ambition of being a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Council. This is supported by the committed Leadership Team, Management Team, staff cohorts and Members. However, the Council is aware of the need to consider the impact of 'change fatigue' on its staff. The peer team supports this and recommends that RBC gives further consideration to the prioritisation and overall management of resources to match planned delivery.

There is an opportunity now for the Council to be clearer and provide a more consistent view on its priorities to staff and partners, as this was inconsistent to those the peer team met with. By sharpening its focus the Council can better ensure that everybody is clear on the things which are most important to RBC and what it is trying to achieve in what priority order, within a realistic and achievable timeframe.

The Council has aligned some resources to support the delivery of its corporate outcomes through the creation of the 'Corporate Strategy Delivery Unit'. This is an important element of RBC tightening its grip on the delivery of the expected outcomes and will play a key role in the developing the ambition as performance-led organisation.

RBC is developing its HR Strategy and its approach in being a learning and development organisation including launching the Developing Talent Programme, and people management training for all managers. RBC recognises the importance of its staff and the: appraisal system; approach to talent management; leadership skills for bigger roles and succession planning opportunities are important components to this. This is important and further work can be done through the development of the HR Strategy to support staff to understand their role and how it fits with the Council's vision. Equally, this needs to be the case for all elected Members - building on the benefits of the current approach to appraisals and profiles, to support their development.

The Council recognises the challenges around staff wellness and wellbeing, which is a significant issue. Staff turnover is 20% and sickness is 15.2 days per FTE, with the main reason for absence around stress/anxiety and depression. Prioritisation and managing workloads will be important considerations for addressing this as will proactively managing sickness absence.

There are several existing initiatives that support the wellbeing of the workforce, including an established mental health first aid scheme; a highly effective and valued

occupational health service; wellbeing focussed discussions; wellbeing action plans; and financial support for accessing/fast-tracking medical appointments. Seasonal campaigns to support staff wellbeing include mental health wellbeing week, cost of living support and support when working from home.

In discussion with staff RBC should consider developing a more comprehensive set of support options and ensure that these are accessible, understood and well publicised. Regular and structured contact with line managers and an annual appraisal linked to the Corporate Strategy, and a consistent approach to absence management, will support this. The Council can learn from others on this and looking outward and hearing how others are addressing this through wellness and wellbeing programmes which are contributing to a reduction in sickness absence / stress and improving staff satisfaction.

There are opportunities for building on the approach to staff recognition and reward and celebrating success. RBC has made some significant inroads and there may be opportunities to do more. Now is the time for the Council to continue to look outwards at what others are doing to support its improvement journey.

## 5. Next steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider, discuss and reflect on these findings.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships formed through the peer challenge. The CPC process includes a progress review within twelve months of the CPC, which provides space for the Council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the recommendations from this report.

In the meantime, Helen Murray, Principal Adviser for the West Midlands, is the main

contact between your authority and the Local Government Association. Helen is available to discuss any further support the Council requires:

[helen.murray@local.gov.uk](mailto:helen.murray@local.gov.uk).