

# MINUTES OF GRAFFITI TASK GROUP

3 FEBRUARY 2022

## PRESENT:

**Members of the Task Group:** Councillors Douglas and Rabin

**Officers:** Tom Kittendorf (Chief Officer – Leisure and Wellbeing), David Burrows (Chief Officer – Regulation and Safety), Anton Cuscito (Waste and Transport Manager) and Veronika Beckova (Democratic Services Officer)

## 1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

**RESOLVED THAT** – Councillor Rabin be appointed Chair for the meeting.

## 2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received Councillors Ellis and Ms Watson-Merret.

## 3. PURPOSE OF THE TASK GROUP

On 22 November 2021, the Scrutiny Committee agreed the one-page strategy (attached at Appendix 1 to the briefing paper) for the review of graffiti.

The broad topic area of the review was to investigate solutions and explore funding opportunities aimed at reducing incidents of graffiti.

The Chief Officer for Leisure and Wellbeing, the Chief Officer for Regulation and Safety and the Waste and Transport Manager attended the meeting to answer questions and provide technical support.

The briefing paper circulated with the agenda in advance of the meeting covered the following:

- What is Graffiti
- Reported Graffiti in Rugby
- Graffiti Cleaning – Works Services Unit
- Commercial Cleaning – Internet Search
- Legal Graffiti
- Graffiti Solutions

## 4. SCENE SETTING FOR THE REVIEW OF GRAFFITI AND POSSIBLE FUNDING STREAMS AS PER MOTION

### Notice of Motion (NOM) - Graffiti

On 22 September 2021, the Full Council resolved to establish a task and finish group to investigate solutions and seek out extra funds for arts projects in the Borough of Rugby.

The NOM was informed by complaints received by Chair in relation to incidents of graffiti in Newbold and Brownsover Ward and subsequent discussions with the Neighbourhood Police and other stakeholders. The primary aim of the NOM was to look at creative options to prevent graffiti and graffiti tagging relating to gang culture.

Following the NOM, the Chair had further discussions with third parties on the following:

- improvement and prevention of graffiti generally;
- ways of working with the community and the Police to reduce gang culture;
- ways of influencing younger members of the community to not to take part in tagging and gang culture; and
- collaborative activities.

During the discussion, the following comments were made:

The iconic mural, created by Helga Windle, positioned on a pedestrian tunnel in Brownsover has remained untouched by graffiti and vandalism since its installation in 1995. In contrast, the other side of the tunnel, has been repeatedly covered by graffiti and cleaned. The conclusion was that the involvement and engagement of the community, schools, colleges and others in street art such as the mural would encourage pride and respect for the artwork created.

Graffiti had an impact on residents and businesses in the borough.

Reporting of graffiti in general and the Council's communication relating to graffiti removal, distinction between public and private land, prosecution, etc could be improved. Councillor Douglas volunteered to undertake research on the information available to residents and businesses and present his findings at the next meeting of the Task Group.

The Task Group felt that the following idea would benefit from further investigation:

Similarly to litter picking groups, some communities might wish to take charge and deal with unwelcomed graffiti directly. As removal of graffiti could be deemed as vandalism itself, contact with the owner would need to be made in advance. Additional information in terms of boundaries and checks needed would be required. Ward Councillors could be involved to act as community leaders.

The Chief Officer for Regulation and Safety responded that presently, the process for dealing with graffiti was to identify and remove graffiti by instructing the owner if private land or Works Services Unit if Council-owned. There was no fundamental reason why communities could not take charge with the owner's agreement that could be obtained by the Council. The Chief Officer stated that while there were practical issues of who would supply the paint, risk assessments, health and safety checks, these should not be a barrier. As the Council had limited resources, enabling local communities to act would be beneficial and the possibility of this happening should not be excluded.

The Council's policy on graffiti incidents on private land was informed by legislation. A key objective under the Council's new Corporate Strategy was to work with communities and try to find solutions. The possibility of offering graffiti removal to

private landowners as a paid service (similar to bulky waste collection) could be explored. Members should be mindful of resource issues.

Graffiti primarily occurred on public buildings, public spaces and corporate locations. Some towns and cities were replacing tagging and unwelcomed graffiti with informative graphics.

The Broken Windows Theory stated that visible signs of crime and anti-social behaviour created an environment that encouraged further crime and disorder. If an area was improved, the less signs of disorder such as broken windows, graffiti and litter would be seen.

The Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations in June 2022 offered an opportunity for community engagement in creating long-lasting pieces of art beyond this year.

Other areas of community involvement could include the Rugby Art Gallery and Museum with exhibitions on street art and third parties such as Rugby College.

The Chair together with the Rugby College and the local community was looking into the possibility of an art festival with a street art theme on a large open space on Technology Drive. The Chair noted that an Art Teacher, Mr James Bennett, was willing to provide support with the art festival and had links to possible funding streams. Mr Bennett would be invited to a future meeting of the Task Group.

The Task Group agreed the following three areas of focus:

- 1) Prevention (gang culture, tagging, intelligence, engagements and support)
- 2) Replacement (collaborative, constructive activities to create welcomed and locally relevant art that develops local identity and generates community pride)
- 3) Support (support and advice for communities wishing to tackle tagging, collaboration with third parties whose property is affected such as BT's green cabinets)

The Chair thanked the Waste and Transport Manager and his team for their exceptional work in promptly removing unwelcomed graffiti and tagging over the past months.

## **5. NEXT STEPS**

Following the meeting, the Chair would incorporate Councillor Douglas' comments into his notes and share them with the wider group and officers.

The next meeting of the Task Group be agreed via email.

**CHAIR**