

MINUTES

of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 29 September 2014

Present:

Councillor M. Springett (Chairman)

Councillors

P.J. Cousins, I.D. Fuller (substitute for Councillor J.A. Deakin) , P.J.L. Hutchinson, V.H. Irwin, A.M. John, C.J.C. Kingsley, L.A. Mascot, R. Massey, J.E. Maybrick, A.F. Sach, M.D. Watson and P.R.A. Wilson

1. **Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J. A. Deakin.

The following substitute appointment was made for this meeting:

Councillor I.D. Fuller as substitute for Councillor J.A. Deakin.

2. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2014 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Arising from Minute 3, regarding a question from Mr. Smith concerning land at Coates Quay, Chelmsford, the Chairman announced that Mr. Smith had written to the Council on 6 September saying that he had decided to contact again the Regulators involved in investigating his concerns and had received a number of responses assuring him that his concerns would be addressed. Therefore Mr. Smith felt that no useful purpose would be served at this stage in asking Council Committees to investigate his concerns and he asked that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee did not pursue the matter at present.

3. **Public Question Time**

No questions were asked or statements made.

4. **Decisions Called-In**

The Committee noted that no decisions taken by the Cabinet on 8 July and 9 September 2014 had been called-in.

5. **Declaration of Interests**

All Members were reminded to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary or other registerable interests where appropriate in any items of business on the meeting's agenda.

6. **Quarter 1 Performance Information and Key Projects Report 2014/15**

(M6,SCR2,2014) The Committee considered an update report on progress with the Council's main performance indicators and key projects at quarter 1 2014/15.

It was reported that at the Committee meeting on 16 June 2014 officers were asked to provide a breakdown of theatre attendances in terms of hirers and Chelmsford City Council promotions. As a result the following two new performance indicators were included in the report before the Committee:

- (i) Theatre Hire Visits – To monitor the level of visit attendance at the Civic and Cramphorn Theatres at shows or events where the venues are hired by a third party; and
- (ii) Theatre Promotion Visits – To monitor the level of visit attendance at the Civic and Cramphorn Theatres for Chelmsford City Council promotions.

The Committee expressed the view that it would be useful for these indicators to be included in future performance reports and that the overall 'customer visits to theatres' indicator should no longer be reported on.

The Committee was informed that a total of 13 indicators had met their target for quarter 1 2014/15. Six indicators had failed to meet their target for quarter 1 and those were listed in the report with explanations. A Member commented that it was the indicators over which the Council had no control which had not met their target e.g. base budget income for the Cemetery and Crematorium, net additional homes provided, and the percentage of waste reused, recycled and composted and residual waste per household.

The following comments were made on the Corporate Performance Report attached at Appendix 1 to the report before the Committee:

(i) **The average time taken in calendar days to process all new claims and change events in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit**

A Member said she had seen a notice on the Council's website stating there was a four to six weeks delay in processing Council Tax changes and she asked for the reasons behind this. In response the Director of Corporate Services said the delay was due to staff shortages and consequently having to train new staff to cover. As there was now less staff in the Council Tax team the level of resilience had been reduced. The Customer Service Centre had been affected by the delay as there had been an increase in telephone calls and visits from customers enquiring about the position. Customer Service staff had offered to help with the backlog of work and it was hoped that the situation would improve soon.

(ii) **% waste reused, recycled & composted & residual waste per household**

A Member mentioned that he had seen Civic posters promoting recycling in the Rectory Lane area and asked for some background information regarding this initiative. The Director of Public Places reported that the Council was working with the Anglia Ruskin University to increase recycling rates from student accommodation and to reduce litter, in order to address a misuse of the refuse system in the area. Posters about recycling had been put up in the vicinity of the University and special collections of furniture were arranged when accommodation changed hands to avoid these items being dumped in front gardens and on the street.

In response to a question regarding what was being done to encourage recycling in Chelmsford the Director of Public Places reported that there was a continuing effort to improve the percentage of waste recycled from flats and the Council was about a third of the way through installing a full set of recycling and food waste facilities at these premises. He informed the Committee that the Council offered a full kerbside collection service and that wood was the only recyclable material not now collected kerbside. Waste composition analysis had revealed that more card and paper was being placed in residual waste than expected so a promotional programme was being undertaken to encourage residents to recycle those materials. One of the impacts of the separate collection of food waste was that less food waste was being produced, but it is estimated that only about 45 percent of households currently participated in food waste collections. Of greater concern was the increase in residual waste being generated by households. There was no explanation for this and it was part of a national trend. The upturn in the economy had an effect on recycling rates as more people moved house and there was an increase in residual waste when properties changed hands. Also there was an increase in residual waste from new properties.

The Chairman said that this indicator would continue to be monitored closely and the Committee would look at it again in the future if there was no improvement.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the report be noted; and
- (b) information concerning the two new theatre indicators, included within the report before the Committee at paragraph 2.1, be included in future reports.

7. Tourism - Maximising our City Status Potential - Inform and Debate Session

(M10,SCR13,2013,) The Committee received a presentation from Stuart Graham, Inward Investment, Economy and Growth Manager and Catherine Palmer, Inward Investment, Economy and Growth Officer, regarding Tourism in Chelmsford.

The Committee was informed that although the term tourism usually described the obvious tourism elements such as overnight visitors, attractions, and accommodation establishments directly, Officers preferred to use the term 'the visitor economy' which was a more useful term to understand the complexity of the relationship between the visitor and their expenditure and the supply chain which provided for their needs. It took into account that that not all visitors stayed overnight, that leisure day visitors had different needs, that business visitors and people visiting friends and family were important. It also took into account the wider range of businesses that benefited from visitor expenditure e.g. bars and restaurants, shops, petrol stations, local food suppliers, laundry services and the people that serviced the tourism businesses.

It was reported that the total value of tourism to Chelmsford was £277,603,000 per annum and it provided 3,471 full time equivalent jobs. Three Essex authorities (including Southend) had a higher value of tourism than Chelmsford and four had a lower value. Chelmsford had a varied range of accommodation to offer which included 11 hotels, some self-catering properties and serviced apartments, and some B&Bs. A new Premier Inn was being developed in Victoria Road. Members were informed that Chelmsford also had a wide range of attractions including three of the largest attractions in Essex – RHS Hyde Hall, Marsh Farm Animal Adventure Park and

Tropical Wings Zoo. RHS Hyde Hall received approximately 180,000 visitors a year. Hylands House and Estate had approximately 1.7million visitors in 2012/13 and Chelmsford Museum had around 62,000 visitors a year. Chelmsford City Racecourse would be opening in 2015, and would attract 2-3,000 spectators on race days.

Chelmsford had a growing reputation for festivals and events such as the V Festival, Dukes Polo, City Diversions, Fling, 3 Foot people, World Scout Jamboree and the presence of the Essex County Cricket Club (ECCC).The V Festival attracted approximately 90,000 people per day and generated around £8.2 million into the local economy. When the ECCC was redeveloped the impact on the local economy was estimated to be £12.5 m. Graduation days at the Anglia Ruskin University were also important to the local economy.

Members noted that the number of restaurants in Chelmsford had grown significantly in recent years and it was proving popular to the national chains and independents. It had a reputation for being a good place to eat and drink. With regard to retail, the Committee was informed that there was 360,000 m² of floor space already in Chelmsford, one third of which was in the city centre. The addition of John Lewis would increase comparison spend in Chelmsford by 27% to £660.9m, placing the city alongside places such as Tonbridge Wells, York and Maidstone. Chelmsford's retail position, alongside its parks, rivers and investment in the public realm and unique facilities such as ECCC, put it in a very strong position to continue to capitalise on this sector.

It was reported that there were 5,700 VAT registered businesses in Chelmsford. There were also a number of international businesses that received visitors from within the UK and overseas. Approximately 19% of the overall spend in the tourism sector was attributed to business visitors. Chelmsford had the infrastructure in place to support its visitors with nine green flag parks, a purple flag for the night time economy, toilet refurbishments, park and ride expansion, improvements to the railway station and public realm investment and the way finding scheme to help people find their way around the City Centre.

Members were informed about what the Council had been doing recently to maximise Chelmsford's potential. These activities included public realm improvements around the rail station in conjunction with the improvements National Rail were undertaking to the station itself. In addition there were ongoing plans to improve the public realm along areas of the High Street thereby generating a more attractive shopping and leisure environment for visitors to enjoy. The recent Tour de France event raised the profile of Chelmsford on a national scale, and the Grand Pavilion at Hylands House had already hosted some large business events, drawing business visitors to Chelmsford. The shopping facilities in Chelmsford were being improved with the Bond Street development due to open in 2016, and plans were underway to extend High Chelmer and create new restaurant quarters. The new Premier Inn, located in Victoria Road, near to the rail station had been granted planning permission and would provide affordable and convenient accommodation for visitors. The Council had continued to develop links with Chelmsford's sister city, Wuxi, to encourage business delegations to Chelmsford. High Chelmer was also hosting a Jiangsu Cultural Festival from 16 to 18 October. The recent improvements to Central Park had developed the recreation offer in this area, including the opening of a new café, new landscaping, and fountains on the lake.

It was reported that a number of promotional activities had taken place in order to let people know about what Chelmsford had to offer. The Council was a member of VIsitEssex the tourism body associated with Essex County Council. Through its

membership the Council was able to include an article on the Council's conference venues in an Essex supplement of Conference News magazine which went out to approximately 15,000 readers. The Council was also able to have a stand at a venue showcase in Southend, where group organisers were invited to come along and see what's on offer in Essex.

The Council had recently launched the VisitChelmsford website which pulled together all the visitor information about Chelmsford in one easy to use, attractive place. The Council also supported the Tourism and Hospitality awards, which raised the profile of shortlisted businesses.

The Committee was informed that possible future promotional activities included the development of various campaigns around the VisitChelmsford website, workshops with stakeholders, linking in with some VisitEssex promotional campaigns that were particularly relevant to Chelmsford and looking into options for how the Council could provide effective visitor information. In addition the Council could start a campaign to encourage hotels and venues to apply for and gain quality assurance, in order to promote Chelmsford as a place of high quality attractions and accommodation. Work could also be done to attract some high quality accommodation providers to the City to increase the range of options for visitors. The events programme in the City was continuing to be developed and there were a number of visitor infrastructure projects that could be invested in in the future, including public realm improvements, parks development and the new entry point signs. Another option for the future could be to develop a bespoke visitor map of the City which highlights various attractions and points of interest in order to encourage visitors to make the most of their visit.

In response to questions officers advised Members that:

- (i) Funding was in place for the new brown City signs and it was likely that approval from the Department of Transport would be received in the near future.
- (ii) It was hoped to be able to develop some discounted product packages in the future via the VisitChelmsford website.
- (iii) Parish Councils and community groups would be encouraged to advertise their events on the new VisitChelmsford website as it was developed.
- (iv) There was not a lot of information available regarding feedback on tourism in Chelmsford yet. More work could be done on this in the future with VisitEssex.
- (v) The VisitChelmsford website was launched in April 2014 and it received 479 hits in its first month of operation. This rose to 1,558 hits in August and most of those clicked through to the attractions area.
- (vi) The Council was best placed to develop a unique story for Chelmsford but in doing so it would work with VisitEssex.
- (vii) At present it was not known where Chelmsford's visitors came from but in the future more work could be done with hoteliers to gather this information together with occupancy levels.
- (viii) It was most important to ensure that the tourism industry was confident in Chelmsford so that it invested in it.

The Committee expressed the view that it would be useful to have an update report on tourism in a year's time. Meanwhile the Committee requested that the number of visitors to the VisitChelmsford website should be reported to the Committee quarterly in the performance information report.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the position be noted;
- (b) the Committee's thanks be extended to the Inward Investment, Economy and Growth Manager and the Inward Investment, Economy and Growth Officer for their presentation;
- (c) an update report on tourism be submitted to the Committee in a year's time; and
- (d) the number of visitors to the VisitChelmsford website be reported quarterly to the Committee in the performance information report.

8. **Annual Review of the Council's Significant Partnerships 2013/14**

(M76,SCR9,2013) The Committee considered a report which updated Members on the work of the Council's significant partnerships. The report also identified where partnerships contributed towards the delivery of priorities within the Corporate Plan and Community Plan and the funding available to each partnership, including any financial contribution from the Council.

It was noted that the Council currently has six significant partnerships as follows: One Chelmsford Partnership; South Essex Parking Partnership; Essex Waste Partnership; Chelmsford Local Delivery Mechanism; Essex Online Partnership and Mid Essex Children's Partnership (MECP).

The most up to date information for each partnership was detailed in Appendix 1 to the report before the Committee. It was reported that since last year's report was presented to the Committee on 30th September 2013, the MECP had been re-structured and details of the new arrangements were provided in Appendix 1.

Progress on the remaining recommendations from the 2012 Annual Review and the internal audit review 2013/14 was contained in Appendix 2 to the report. The recommendations ensured that partnerships operated effectively and transparently.

Members were informed that partnership working continued to bring benefits to Chelmsford City Council, local organisations and communities. It allowed the Council to tackle challenging, cross-cutting issues with partners and provide more efficient and effective outcomes as a result.

Councillor P.J. Cousins referred to The One Chelmsford Partnership community safety priorities in 2013/14. He mentioned the Rochdale sexual abuse cases and asked for assurance that it was not happening in Chelmsford. In response, the Partnerships and Improvement Manager said that the Council had a reporting role and staff and Councillors had received training on safeguarding. She would ask the Director of Community Services to provide Councillor Cousins with a more detailed response following the meeting.

RESOLVED that the contents of the review of the Council's significant Partnerships 2013/14 be noted.

9. **Energy Management within Council Owned Buildings - Inform and Debate Session**

The Committee received a presentation from Michelle Keene, Energy Manager Safer Communities, who updated Members on energy management initiatives carried out by the Council since the last report to the Committee in November 2011.

The Energy Manager informed Members that the Council had reduced its qualifying electricity consumption which resulted in the Council being under the threshold for participation in the next phase of the Carbon Reduction Commitment Energy Efficiency Scheme. A saving of approximately £100,000 per year would be achieved as a result. In order to get a clear idea of where all the Council's energy was being used the Council had installed new energy management software and placed automatic meter readers in its buildings. This has enabled the Council to forecast its energy budget more accurately. The new energy management software was now also being used to provide energy management reports to Basildon Council.

It was reported that the new Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plant at Riverside Ice and Leisure Centre had significantly reduced energy consumption. Tenders were currently being evaluated for re-lamping the Council's multi-storey car parks and the work should be completed by the end of this financial year. The new lighting would be more energy efficient and require less maintenance. Tenders were also being evaluated for the installation of solar PV panels on some of the Council's buildings. This initiative would reduce the Council's energy bills in the region of £2,000 per year. The Committee noted that during the last year the Energy Manager had spoken at a couple of national conferences on energy management.

Members were informed that the Council has a statutory duty to display a Display Energy Certificate (DEC) in all publicly accessed buildings with an internal floor area over 500m². Since 2011 all our certificate ratings had improved. New legislation being implemented in 2017 would change the way commercial customers can pick their supplier. Although this might be more expensive initially, as companies became more competitive costs should reduce.

Under the Energy Saving Opportunity Scheme all businesses with more than 250 employees had to have an energy audit. The Council had a lot of experience in this field and could perform a leadership role in the community and provide advice to businesses showing them how they could become more energy efficient. The Energy Manager would continue to work with staff and Members to promote efficient use of energy within the Council's building portfolio and to comply with existing and emerging energy regulations.

In response to questions the Energy Manager advised Members that:

- (i) The Energy Manager's future objective is to work closely with the Council's electrical and mechanical contractors to identify opportunities and utilise their commercial experience.
- (ii) Solar PV panels would pay for themselves within ten years. Payback on re-lamping the Council's multi-storey car parks would take approximately five years.
- (iii) An income is received from Basildon Council for producing their energy management reports. It could be expanded to other authorities with a similar billing format, however prior approval to do this would have to be obtained from the software provider.
- (iv) The Council did not have in place any Environmental Management system,

- such as the energy management system ISO14001.
- (v) With regard to reducing domestic energy, the Essex Energy Partnership (comprised local authorities and registered providers) promoted energy efficiency to residents. The Government's Green Deal scheme assisted residents to make energy saving improvements to their homes. New build homes had to comply with national energy standards.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the position be noted; and
- (b) the Committee's thanks be extended to the Energy Manager for her presentation.

10. **Work Programme**

(M11,SCR7,2014) The Committee considered a report on its work programme for 2014/15 which had been updated following the Committee's meeting on 16 June 2014.

Members noted that the Annual Report on Housing Delivery would be moved from the meeting on 24 November 2014 to the meeting on 2 February 2015 in order that the Cabinet Member for Strategic Housing could attend the meeting to present his report and answer Members' questions. A report back from the Corporate Parenting task and finish group and the Presentation by the Clinical Commissioning Group had been added to the meeting on 24 November 2014. With regard to un-programmed reports, it was noted that an item regarding an update on the impact of Chelmsford City Council's Tenancy Strategy, as requested by full Council in December 2012, had been added and was likely to be made in September 2015 when a complete set of two years data should be available.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the report be noted; and
- (b) an update report on tourism, requested by the Committee in Minute 7 above, be included in the work programme for September 2015.

11. **Urgent Business**

There were no matters of urgent business brought before the Committee.

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm.

Chairman