

## MINUTES

of the

### OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 23 November 2020 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor J. Galley (Chair)  
Councillors S. Young (Vice-Chair)

Councillors L. Ashley, M.W. Bracken, I.D. Fuller, I.S. Grundy, R.J. Hyland, G.B.R. Knight, J.C.S. Lager, J.S. Lardge, M. Sismey, M.S. Steel, N. Walsh, T.N. Willis and R.T. Whitehead

#### 1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Shaw and Watson. Councillor Walsh was appointed as the substitute for Councillor Shaw and Councillor Knight for Councillor Watson.

#### 2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### 3. Declaration of Interests

All Members were reminded to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary interests or other registerable interests where appropriate in any items of business on the meeting's agenda. None were made.

#### 4. Public Question Time

No questions were asked or statements made.

#### 5. Decisions Called-In

The Committee noted that no decisions taken by the Cabinet had been called-in.

#### 6. Cabinet Portfolio Update – Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford

Cllr Davidson provided the Committee with an update on his role as the Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford. ([Please note the presentation is available online](#)). Cllr Davidson informed the Committee of his key roles and activities. These included, providing political and strategic leadership for the directorate, providing strategic direction for the Council on finance/housing issues where he was supported by Cllr Tron, the Cabinet Deputy for Affordable Housing. Other responsibilities highlighted were, Finance, Procurement and Audit, Strategic Housing, Land and Property and the Revenues and Benefits Service. The

Committee also heard that key priorities included, maintaining an up-to-date understanding of the budget position and managing the setting of the 2021-22 budget. The Committee was also informed of housing priorities, which had included assisting rough sleepers during the pandemic and continuing to acquire additional homes for temporary accommodation. Cllr Davidson thanked the hard work of the officers in his directorate which allowed the strategic direction and priorities to be met and he highlighted the work that had been undertaken. Cllr Davidson also highlighted that a concerted effort had been made to present the financial data in a more transparent and accountable way.

In response to questions from the Committee, Cllr Davidson stated that;

- The latest figures showed there were currently ten rough sleepers in Chelmsford.
- He felt officers had managed the finances very well during a period of very difficult circumstances and a significant amount of progress on housing had been made in a short period of time. He also stated that they would not be complacent however and there was lots more to be done, especially due to the budget gap that would be present in the coming year.
- Car parking income had seen a significant decrease due to the pandemic and was an area that may take some time to recover in terms of the income received.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

*(7pm to 7.36pm)*

## 7. Mid-Year Budget Review

The Committee received the annual monitoring report setting out the mid-year position on the Council's revenue and capital budgets. The report identified the main under- and over-spends in the revenue budget and on capital schemes, the causes for them and any action taken to remedy them. It was noted that the appendices presented were as seen earlier in November by the Cabinet.

The Committee heard that the financial position had been ever changing due to the pandemic and estimates were often being changed as a result. It was therefore noted that any reporting was a snapshot of that specific period in time. The Committee heard that the overall revenue shortfall for the year was approximately £13 million. It was noted that after allowing for government funding and some reductions in expenditure the expected deficit was around £3million. The Committee heard that this would be met by a reduction in capital spending of £4.8million. It was confirmed that the reduction in capital spending would in turn lead to borrowing to replace assets in the future. The Committee heard that the scale of income variations was unprecedented and likely to continue to fluctuate.

The Committee were also updated on the Capital programme and it was noted that additional scheme costs were set to be considered by Council in December. The Committee also heard that a report in September had agreed the purchase of flats for temporary accommodation, but due diligence checks had highlighted a restricted covenant so the purchase would not be going ahead. It was noted that this had been an additional purchase

though and other planned purchases had been continuing. The Committee heard that some asset purchases had been moved to future years.

In response to questions from the Committee it was confirmed that;

- the £20k for consultants had been for the new finance system and its project implementation costs. It was noted that the system would lead to benefits for the organisation in terms of efficiency and better data reporting.
- Some funding had been put forward as a supplementary estimate from the main budget to assist with invest to save projects, being taken on by the Digital Portfolio office. It was also noted that a report would be produced at the end of the project highlighting the savings made.
- The Tindal Square scheme was not being moved. The capital programme had been looked at with directors and cabinet members however in terms of potentially moving schemes.

Members of the Committee noted that the pandemic had left officers in a very difficult financial position and thanked them for their hard work in responding well to the challenges.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

*(7.37pm to 7.51pm)*

## 8. Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development's Annual Report on Housing Delivery

The Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development presented the annual report on housing delivery, which gave an overview of the key housing delivery monitoring statistics for Chelmsford between April 2019 and March 2020. It included the performance against the annual housing requirement number, the amount of affordable housing delivered, national initiatives on housing supply and local initiatives to address housing need.

It was noted that housing completions were still above the requirement despite the Covid-19 pandemic but had fallen 33% in 2019/20 although this had been anticipated. The Committee heard that 832 completions had been recorded against the target of 805 dwellings per annum. The Committee heard that planning applications were still at a relatively high level and the housing supply forecast remained very positive. It was noted that there had been a fall in the number of affordable housing units delivered, but this had been anticipated due to the phasing of developments. The Committee also heard that the April 2020 Housing Site Schedule also indicated a steady increase in housing completions over the next five years.

In summary, the Committee was informed that housing delivery had dipped but was forecasted to remain above the annual requirements for the next five years. This was supported by the plans and guidance put in place by the Council who would continue to closely monitor housing delivery whilst working closely with stakeholders. It was also noted

that the Council would continue to monitor and respond to changes to the national planning framework and optimise opportunities to attract grant funding.

In response to a question from a Committee member, it was confirmed that all efforts were made by the Council as the Planning authority to ensure affordable home obligations were met. It was also noted that phasing had an impact, where certain areas of developments are completed in different phases.

The Cabinet Member and Committee thanked officers for their continued hard work in this area and for their help in producing a comprehensive report.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

*(7.52pm to 8.10pm)*

## 9. Leisure and Heritage Performance Review

The Committee received a report and presentation on the performance of the City Council's Leisure and Heritage services. The report contained a comprehensive overview of the services offered and the latest information on them. The presentation focused on the key areas including, leisure centres, Community Sport and Wellbeing, Hylands House and the Stables and finally the impact of the pandemic.

The Committee heard that the new Riverside Leisure Centre had opened in June 2019 and information was provided on the other centres run by the service. It was noted that over 1.4m customer visits per annum had been achieved and 1.6m was expected in a good future year. The Committee also heard that by the end of March 2020 there were 6,500 premium card monthly members, well above forecasts and Riverside customer satisfaction had been between 80 and 90%. The Committee was informed of the projects and initiatives delivered by the Community Sport and Wellbeing Team, which had annual attendances regularly over 50,00. The team engaged in partnership working with other bodies and was a well-respected team. The Committee heard that Hylands House and the Stables helped contribute to 1.5m visits per annum to the estate and 35,435 people had attended formal hires at the estate in 2019/20. It was noted that there had been a successful commercial approach to hires, rents and events with income around £1.2m.

It was noted by the Committee that the Pandemic had impacted the service leading to monthly leisure centre attendances between 30-54% of their normal use but Covid safe measures had been appreciated by customers. The Committee heard that attendances had been picking up until the second lockdown and that financial projections were regularly being updated. The Committee was informed that Hylands income had been significantly affected, but that 73.5% of weddings had been postponed rather than cancelled. It was also noted that a £105,000 grant had been received from the Cultural Recovery Fund.

In response to questions from the Committee it was noted that;

- In line with national guidelines, Riverside and other centres were set to reopen after the end of the second lockdown and in working with Active Essex and other bodies the Council had successfully promoted safe opening since July.

- Officers were not aware of any customer Covid-19 cases linked to its leisure facilities.
- Prices for memberships were regularly analysed against competitors and officers felt the pricing was currently about right, this was reflected in the membership levels and income exceeding targets.
- Hire fee income was received from Chelmsford City Football Club for their use of the facilities together with rent for their clubhouse at the Chelmsford Sports and Athletics Centre.
- A commercial use of the Flint Cottage in Hylands had been explored previously, but there were various difficulties presented such as it not being serviced and being a listed building that prevented a viable commercial use.
- Data on the demographics of centre users was collected and this had increased since the recent switch to the “Lite” membership cards being mandatory after the first lockdown.
- The facilities at Dovedales were part of a joint use agreement with the college running until 2033.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and officers thanked for their presentation.

*(8.11pm to 8.44pm)*

## 10. Report on Decisions Taken Under Delegation to the Chief Executive

The Committee received information on the five decisions taken during the period 1 May to 31 October 2020 under the Chief Executive’s delegated authority to take urgent decisions.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

*(8.45pm to 8.47pm)*

## 11. Work Programme

The Committee considered a report on its work programme which had been updated following the last meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> September. The Committee was informed that the Chair and Vice Chair had agreed to move the Riverside Task and Finish Group report to the April 2020 rather than February meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

*(8.48pm to 8.49pm)*

## 12. Urgent Business

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

The meeting closed at 8.50pm.

Chair