

MINUTES

of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 29 June 2026 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor J. Jeapes (Chair)
Councillor L. Mascot (Vice-Chair)

Councillors,
Councillors, D. Clark, P. Davey, S. Davis, D. Eley, A. Sosin, J. Sosin, M. Steel, S. Sullivan, A. Thompson, R. Whitehead and P. Wilson

Also in attendance:
Councillor J. Hawkins, Cabinet Member for a Connected Chelmsford

1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies were received from Councillor P. Davey

2. Chairs Announcements

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting and extended a particular welcome to the new Committee Members and the newly appointed Vice-Chair. Appreciation was expressed to the former Vice-Chair, Councillor Thompson.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on 12th March 2026 were agreed as a correct record.

4. Decisions and Action Sheet

It was shared that an action had been raised previously, requesting the addition of fly-tipping to the Committee's work programme. Members were informed that the work programme was currently being reviewed and that the matter would be addressed under item 12 of the agenda.

5. 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.

6. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

7. Decisions Called-In

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

8. Cabinet Portfolio Update from the Cabinet member for a Connected Chelmsford

The Committee received a presentation from Cabinet member for a Connected Chelmsford. It was shared that services within her portfolio comprised of Human Resources, Customer Services, Digital Services, Legal and Democratic Services, Revenues and Benefits and Building Services. Key priorities across the portfolio included Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), workforce development, digital transformation, customer access to services, and maintaining strong governance and resilience.

Members were advised that recruitment and retention remained strong, with staff turnover just above 10% and a significant increase in applications for vacancies. Investment had continued in staff development in preparation for future organisational changes. The Committee also heard updates on the work of Revenues and Benefits, Legal and Democratic Services, Building Services and Digital Services, including major investment projects, election support, cybersecurity improvements and preparations for the implementation of new technologies and customer service systems.

Questions were raised in relation to the impact of LGR on staff workloads, staff retention rates compared with other authorities, ongoing issues with planning systems and the resilience of the Council's IT and telephone infrastructure following a period of down-time with telephony services. It was explained that the impact of LGR varied across services but was expected to increase over time and that staff turnover remained favourable when compared with neighbouring authorities. Members were advised that planning system improvements continued to be explored, while work was also underway to improve business continuity arrangements and replace aging telephony systems.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

(7.04pm to 7.27pm)

9. Customer Service Centre – Inform and Debate

The Committee received a presentation from the Marketing and Customer Services Manager and the Customer Service Centre Manager on the work of the Customer Service Centre (CSC).

Members were informed that the CSC provides a single point of contact for residents across a range of council services, including council tax, benefits, housing, planning, building control, public health, parks and electoral services. The service was established in 2010 to improve customer access and reduce the need for residents to contact multiple departments separately.

The Committee heard that customer contact had changed significantly over recent years, with residents increasingly using online services. During 2025/26, online enquiries increased by almost 47% to more than 21k contacts, while telephone calls reduced to

approximately 69k and face-to-face visits fell to around 6.5k. Officers advised that, although overall contact volumes had reduced, enquiries were becoming more complex and often involved vulnerable residents requiring additional support. Members were informed that the CSC was staffed by almost 16 full-time equivalent officers who supported multiple council services using 14 different systems. The Committee noted that staff training was delivered in-house and could take up to a year to complete. Officers highlighted the strong team culture, good staff retention and the role the CSC played in signposting residents to wider support services where appropriate.

The Committee heard that operating costs had reduced over time through service redesign and efficiency improvements. Performance remained strong, with a target of responding to online enquiries within one working day and a focus on resolving customer issues at the first point of contact wherever possible.

Officers outlined a number of future challenges and opportunities, including Local Government Reorganisation, recruitment and retention, increasing customer expectations, replacement of ageing contact-centre technology and the introduction of a new customer contact platform. The proposed system would bring together multiple communication channels, improve self-service options and provide a more joined-up customer experience.

Questions were raised in relation to support for vulnerable residents, complaints and feedback processes, housing enquiries, out-of-hours services, customer safety and the future use of digital technology and automation. Officers explained that technology would be used primarily to support simple transactions, allowing staff to focus on customers with more complex needs. Comments and Complaints could be raised on the feedback hub on the Councils website: <https://www.chelmsford.gov.uk/your-council/have-your-say/feedback-about-our-services/>.

It was **RESOLVED** that presentation be noted.

(7.27pm to 8.17pm)

10. Annual Report of the Committee (2025/26)

The Committee received the annual report on the Overview & Scrutiny Function 2025/26. Members were reminded that as per Code 6 of the Local Corporate Governance the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had to produce an annual report. The report covered the following matters: statutory provisions, terms of reference, membership of the committee, publication of information, work undertaken in 2025/26, future work for 2026/27, “call-in” of Cabinet decisions, and training and development.

It was **RESOLVED** that the annual report be recommended to Full Council for approval and its subsequent publication.

(8.17pm to 8.20pm)

11. Report on Decisions Taken Under Delegation to the Chief Executive

The Committee received a report summarising the decisions taken under delegation to the Chief Executive. One decision had been taking during the period February 2025 to 31 May 2026.

The committee was informed that during this period there had been five decisions taken under delegation to the Chief Executive during this period.
It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

(8.21pm to 8.24pm)

12. Work Programme

The Committee considered the updated work programme and noted future items.

Members were advised that changes to Cabinet portfolios meant that a review of the work programme was required and that updated proposals would be agreed with the Chair and Vice-Chair before being brought back to a future meeting.

The previously requested item on fly-tipping remained under consideration as part of the programme review.

The Chair reminded members that suggestions for future scrutiny topics could be submitted to officers outside of meetings.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted and updated accordingly.

(8.24pm to 8.28pm)

13. Urgent Business

There were no matters of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.29pm

Chair