

MINUTES
of the
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 20 November 2023 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor J. Jeapes (Chair)
Councillor A. Thompson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors, H. Clark, A. Davidson, C. Davidson, S. Davis, S. Dobson, K. Franks, M. Steel
and S. Young

Also in attendance:

Councillor I. Fuller

1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies were received from Councillor V. Canning, Councillor P. Davey, and Councillor J. Deakin. The substitute for Councillor Deakin for this meeting was Councillor C. Davidson.

2. Chairs Announcements

No announcements were made for this meeting.

3. Minutes

The minutes from the meeting held on 19th October 2023 would be amended to include Councillor Deakin and Councillor Davey's attendances. The Committee also noted that there were small typos to be amended in the minutes.

Councillor Steel expressed dissent on the minutes regarding the vote on the Hylands PSPO. It was questioned that the vote was for the amendment put forward and not on agreeing with the Cabinet decision.

Subject to the typo amendments mentioned, the minutes of the meeting held on 19th October 2023 were agreed as a correct record with Councillor Steel dissenting on the approved minutes.

4. Decision and Action Sheet

The Committee considered the decision and action sheet since the last meeting on 19th October 2023.

It was noted that the terms of reference from the previous Theatre Capital Refurbishment Review Task and Finish Group would be circulated soon and there would need to be further clarification on the membership of the Task & Finish Group. The Committee also noted the changes in the Work Programme. It was confirmed that Essex Countywide Traveller Unit and the Deputy Chief Constable of Essex Police would present on 12th February 2024.

The Committee noted the decision and action sheet.

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

No questions were asked or statements made.

7. Decisions Called-In

To report on any Cabinet decisions called in and to decide how they should be progressed. No decisions had been called in.

8. Report on Cultural Strategy Task & Finish Group

The CEO of Culture Chelmsford, Claire Gevaux, provided the Committee a presentation summarising the overview of the first district-wide Cultural Strategy for Chelmsford. This also explained the rationale for establishing a Cultural Compact and set out its strategic roadmap. The Committee were also to be given options to monitor the progress and ensure engagement and outcomes for all local residents and their communities.

The Committee heard that Culture Chelmsford had commissioned the first ever district-wide Cultural Strategy which had been published on March 2023 and this included a ten-year plan. It was heard that the scope of the strategy was to define culture in the broadest sense, looking at the creative economy of Chelmsford, and recognising its rich heritage. Consultations were made over the last five years and reviewed on a desk research and further consultations were made in particular to the wider district and less represented voices at South Woodham Ferres, Danbury, and Writtle.

It was stated that the vision was for Chelmsford to be a culturally ambitious place. Culture Chelmsford focused on three strategic themes which were:

1. Nurture our Environment – which included both built and natural environments.
2. Improve Health and Wellbeing – which would reflect how culture would support and improve mental and physical health of communities.
3. Outstanding Festivals and Events – which included understanding how to be a city with outstanding festivals and events.

The Committee also heard the seven principles within those themes including young people being at the focus of the cultural strategy; equity, diversity and inclusion; collaboration and knowledge sharing in underpinning how the cultural sector operate at its best; transdisciplinary work as a city and bringing sectors together; sustainability and connection to land-scape and wider ecology; a strength-based approach rather than filling in gaps; and innovation. The idea was that the recommendations in the Strategy were how this would be brought to life and would ensure a city-wide commitment.

The Committee heard about the timeline Cultural Chelmsford was working to. This included a community engagement session in the Meadows and refocusing on delivering the strategy and an action plan. One of the recommendations was to create a Cultural Compact for Chelmsford which aimed for stakeholders to understand their commitment on putting culture at the forefront of their policies and listen to needs of communities. This includes having working groups which work on the ground and strategic oversight groups. Members heard further details and the responsibilities of the working groups that were set up currently and those yet to be set up which include Culture & Health Working Group, Festivals & Events Working Group, Destination & Marketing Working Group, Community Working Group, Ignite, and LCEP.

Regarding the Strategic Oversight Group, it was stated that this group of organisations would not only bring the commitment of the strategy being in their policies but also financial and income commitments. Members were made aware of the organisations that were interested in signing up to Culture Compact and Culture Chelmsford would itemise their offer and signing them to collaboration agreements which would include three-year commitments. There would be a meeting in March 2024 and a Chair would be appointed. It was also advised that there were organisations that were still to be approached with Cultural Compact.

The Committee heard the importance of the Cultural Compact and the work of the working groups especially on filling gaps in knowledge. The Committee was also made aware of the percentage investment from different organisations from different sectors with grants being the largest investments. The role of Culture Chelmsford was to leverage on those grants but also to build up a private donor base.

Another piece of work that was mentioned was a wider mapping piece which was supported by ARU. This would look at the creative assets within Chelmsford as it was still unclear on the population that work in creative industries, what kind of work, and what type of contracts. This would hopefully be completed on the first quarter of 2024. The Committee also heard plans for year two of the Cultural Strategy which included a pilot engagement programme and wider community engagement through National Lottery Bodies. In October 2024, Culture Chelmsford would then be focusing on larger trusts and foundations to look for bigger and deeper investment

programme. It was also hoped that by April 2025 a three-year cultural programme would be successfully established.

The Committee were advised of the recommended next steps and that it was recognised that a Task & Finish Group would not be the best way forward. The alternative recommendation was a cross-party representation on the Community Working Group that would hold the trust and its partners to account. It was also advised that the council involvement in the Cultural Strategy should be overseen by Chelmsford Policy Board.

In response to the comments and questions from members of the Committee, it was advised that;

- It was advised that there was a lack of data about the Creative Workforce in Chelmsford, in what they do, where and how they practice their work, what their needs were. When the asset mapping project, in partnership with ARU, was completed it would provide a clear indication on where and how we should prioritise investment.
- There was a balancing act between local organisations and bigger organisations, and it was important for the priorities of the local cultural organisation to be heard. With regards to the organisations on the Strategic Oversight Group, it was noted that they would be able to influence policy and strategic matters across the city.
- It was advised that officers would approach each party to nominate a representative for the cross-party representation on the Communities Working Group.

RESOLVED that;

1. For Chelmsford City Council to continue its support for Chelmsford's Cultural Strategy and its recommendations;
2. The oversight and responsibility for reviewing the Cultural Strategy and the Council's ongoing strategic support, shifts to the Chelmsford Policy Board;
3. A cross-party representation to be nominated to sit on a "Communities Working Group" set up by Culture Chelmsford.

(7.06 pm to 7.33pm)

9. Cabinet Portfolio Update – Cabinet Member for a Growing Chelmsford

The Committee received an update from Councillor Ian Fuller, the Cabinet Member for a Growing Chelmsford, regarding the work undertaken under their portfolio. The main responsibilities under this directorate were Development Management & Building Control, Spatial Planning, Car Parking, and Economic Development and Implementation. Councillor Fuller thanked all of the officers under their directorate for their hard work on the wide range of responsibilities.

Regarding updates on Development Management & Building Control, the Committee heard that 90% of the decisions were issued in time with 78% of appeal decision were found in favour of the Council. Councillor Fuller also highlighted the main challenges for 2024/25 such as delivering new housing and infrastructure in a falling market, the

New Building Safety Act, Biodiversity Net Gain, and shortages of resources and skills. It was noted that the planning application fee income had reduced compared to last year as the housing market slowed as with fewer planning applications submitted. However, it was advised that workload was still heavy and that targets were still being met within the timeline.

Councillor Fuller then updated the Committee regarding Spatial Planning. It was advised that there had been a number of masterplans being dealt with over the last year as well as significant projects such as the Norwich to Tilbury Pylons, the widening scheme of the A12, and the Longfield Solar Farm. Officers responded to government consultations on the National Planning Policy and Infrastructure Levy. Councillor Fuller also highlighted the work undertaken in the Chelmsford Garden Community and was moving pace. The Essex RAMS Project were also highlighted, with developers required to pay financial contributions to help protect important bird species on the Essex Coast. It was reported that a significant sum had been raised and that the number of rangers was increased.

The Committee also heard that officers were reviewing the local plan and noted that only 40% of local authorities had submitted a local plan in the last five years. Councillor Fuller also highlighted the Travelling Showpersons' Sites Planning Advice Note and was pleased that Chelmsford had taken an initiative on that. It was also reported that the Little Baddow Neighbourhood Plan was approved and a referendum for Sandon Neighbourhood Plan was imminent.

Regarding car parks, it was reported that they still generate encouraging levels of income above estimates. The Council also continued to invest in car parks with £90,000.00 used for waterproofing works on the top level of High Chelmer Multi-Storey Car Park. There were also funds from the South Essex Parking Partnership which would be used to improve stairwells and staircases. It was highlighted that city centre car parks were reaccredited with "Park Mark" quality standard in August 2023 and the Council would continue to manage the two park and ride sites.

Councillor Fuller also thanked Councillor Simon Goldman regarding the work done on Chelmsford Business Improvement District (BID). It was reported that more than 500 businesses had been supported with various programmes including workshops, training guidance, renewal plans, and advice. The North Essex Economic Board was also highlighted which involved seven local authorities aiming to deliver economic opportunity and bring in investments. Various events were also mentioned such as Skill Fest.

The Committee heard about various projects taking place and Councillor Fuller highlighted the success of the CIL which raised £35 million since 2014. This sum was used on various projects including improvement works on Trinity Road school. Members were also made aware of the 40 Blue Plaques in Chelmsford, the public art, and wayfinding signage. It was also reported that Chelmsford now has six changing facilities and a mobile unit had been rescued after it had been left underused. Councillor Fuller also advised of their attendance on other groups such as PATROL, Essex Coastal Forum, and Cycling Forum.

In response to a query regarding an increase or new facilities for sewage/water works in large developments and infrastructures being built, it was advised that the Council had commissioned consultants to produce a water cycle study with specialist

consultants and Anglian Water in identifying the capacity in the water recycling centres. It was advised that the main water Chelmsford water recycling centre has significant capacity. There were also smaller water recycling centres in the rural areas but their capacity would be limited.

RESOLVED that;

1. The Cabinet Portfolio Update be noted.

(8.13 pm to 8.31pm)

10. Cabinet Member for a Growing Chelmsford's Annual Report on Housing Delivery

The Committee received the annual report on housing delivery which was presented in the meeting by the Cabinet Member for a Growing Chelmsford, Councillor Ian Fuller. The annual report provided the Committee an overview of key housing delivery monitoring statistics for Chelmsford from April 2022 to March 2023. The report provided an update on housing delivery statistics, including performance against the annual housing requirement number and affordable housing delivery, as well as updates on national initiatives relating to housing supply and local initiatives to address housing needs.

The Committee heard that affordable housing was made available at below market levels which included affordable rents at least 20% below market rents and shared ownership housing which sold at share between 10% to 75% of the market value. It was reported that there had been an increase in the delivery of new affordable housing in this monitoring year compared to the previous year. There were also nine Gypsy and Traveller pitches. The overall net new housing completions had decreased slightly but were still above the housing requirement figure in the local plan. The number of new homes with planning permission had fallen however completions were forecasted to remain above the annual housing requirement.

The Committee heard that the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill had received Royal Assent and appendix 2 of the report contained the Council's response to one of its main elements, the Infrastructure Levy. It was noted that the consultations sought views on the technical aspect of the design of the Levy and the feedback was still being analysed. There would also be a consultation on the regulations and this was yet to occur. A further consultation was also heard regarding plan-making reforms and the deadline to submit plans under the current plan-making system was the 30th June 2025. This was also stated that the Council was working to submit the review of the local plan to the Secretary of State within this timeframe.

The Committee also heard that officers continue to maximise Government funding streams to tackle rough sleeping and secure supported housing for single homeless people. Funds had also been secured to increase the temporary accommodation offer for homeless households and provide homes on Afghan resettlement schemes. There was also an update on initiatives and interventions to meet priorities in the housing strategy, in addition to reporting on progress on strategic sites.

It was stated that the delivery of housing, especially affordable housing, remains a key priority of the Council. The Council would continue to respond to opportunities that support the delivery of housing and other essential infrastructure.

In response to comments and questions from members of the Committee, it was advised that;

- The shortage of four-bedroom housing was recognised and that the planning advice note was put in place to seek additional affordable housing for rent of this size on those strategic sites allocated in the Local Plan where the number of houses being built was above in the local plan. In terms of implementing the planning advice note and securing the additional four-bedroom houses, this would be implemented via Section 106 agreement.
- It was advised that the Council was closely monitoring planning applications against the mix from the Strategic Housing Needs Assessment.
- A new Strategic Housing Needs Assessment had just been published recently and it was found that the need for four-bedroom houses was still 10%.
- Regarding large units, it was advised that not every site would be able to accommodate this especially in consideration of on previously developed land such as brownfield sites and on urban areas.
- Most registered providers were keen to provide shared ownership due to demand. It was also advised that they should still follow a standard leasehold agreement produced by Homes England as this is a requirement of the s106 agreement.
- The Council was required to provide shared ownership units through the National Planning Policy Framework to ensure a mix of affordable housing.
- Regarding office accommodation redeveloped into residential units, it was advised that there had been a contraction in the office market mainly on the combination of post-COVID consequence of people working from home and the dynamic market. However, there were co-working spaces opening up in Chelmsford.
- It was advised that the Council could not require affordable housing on changes of use from office to residential that were permitted development, and other planning contributions that could be sought were very limited.
- It was also advised that on an economic development perspective, the conversion of office spaces to residential balanced out the office market in Chelmsford. It was also noted that there was still good office accommodation available in the city.
- Regarding larger developments, it was reported that viability was becoming an issue. It was also advised that building regulations have changed especially post-Grenfell which makes taller buildings less economically viable.
- Regarding the former Runwell Hospital, it was advised that the Council had not bought additional private rented dwellings in this location. It was also advised that Council would not be notified if an institutional investor was to buy units off plan.
- It was suggested that the private rental market was declining as a result of landlords selling properties and as a result of less supply in the market residents were being priced out.
- Processing bids could be time-consuming especially on bids where there was a relatively small chance on getting the money. Potential for success would be

looked at and prioritising bids that make the greatest contribution to meeting our most acute housing needs.

RESOLVED that;

1. The annual report on Housing Delivery be noted.

(7.33 pm to 8.13 pm)

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 from the period 1st June 2023 to 10th November 2023. The Committee heard that there were three urgent decisions made during this period and their summaries were available as the appendix to the report.

RESOLVED that;

1. The report be noted.

(8.31 pm to 8.32 pm)

12. Work Programme

The Committee considered a report on its work programme for the year 2023/24 which had been updated following the last meeting on 19th October 2023.

In response to questions and comments from the Committee, it was advised that;

- The first meeting for the Theatre Refurbishment Task & Finish Group would be scheduled soon once membership was confirmed and the terms of reference circulated.
- Regarding Youth Engagement, it was found that this posed to be a far-reaching project and officers were in the process of identifying the most useful approach for this discussion. The Committee was advised that proposals would be brought to the next meeting.
- It was also advised that Chelmsford City Council should not take on work that used to be on Essex County Council nevertheless some could be looked at should there be resources.
- Regarding ECTU, it was advised that the reason why this was to be presented was to further understand the relations with the police with regards to illegal incursions and what to do in these circumstances. It was also advised that the Committee also look on understanding relationships and the Council do have a relationship with ECTU.

RESOLVED that;

1. The Work programme be noted.

(8.32 pm to 8.37 pm)

13. Urgent Business

There were no matters of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.37pm.

Chair