

MINUTES

of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 13 January 2020 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor J. Galley (Chair)

Councillors L. Ashley, N.A. Dudley, S.M. Goldman, I.S. Grundy, R.J. Hyland,
D.G. Jones, J.C. Lager, L.A. Mascot, M. Sismey, M Springett, M.S. Steel,
M.D. Watson, R.T. Whitehead and S. Young

1. **Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Lardge, who had appointed Councillor M Springett as her substitute.

2. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. **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. None were made.

4. **Public Question Time**

No questions were asked or statements made by members of the public.

5. **Decisions Called-In**

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

6. **Cabinet Portfolio Update**

The Leader of the Council was unable to attend the meeting to update the Committee on matters for which he was responsible. The Committee therefore decided to defer the item to a future meeting.

7. **Annual Report on Housing Delivery**

The Cabinet Member for Greener Chelmsford presented the annual report on housing delivery, which gave an overview of the key housing delivery monitoring statistics for Chelmsford between April 2018 and March 2019. 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.

The Committee was pleased to note that housing completions in 2018/19 had increased compared to 2017/18 and that similar rates of completion were expected over the next five years. In large part this was as a result of the development framework provided by the draft Local Plan, the work to maximise numbers through national and local initiatives, and the guidance and support provided by the Council to developers.

In response to a question, the Committee was informed that there was no direct correlation between the number of planning permissions granted over the past three years and the number of dwellings started or built. The number of planning permissions referred to in the report related to extant permissions, they were not cumulative and it was not a given that a development granted permission would proceed.

During discussion the opinion was expressed that while regulations required new homes to be more sustainable and energy efficient, it could not be argued that this was directly attributable to the Council and would contribute to its aim to be carbon neutral by 2030. The Cabinet Member said that although the Council was not directly responsible for the design of the developments, it could influence developers through its policies and guidance and working with them to bring forward schemes that would help contribute to the City as a whole reducing its carbon emissions.

Asked whether the Council would be producing new criteria as to what constituted a truly affordable home, the Cabinet Member said that the definition of affordable housing was established by the National Planning Policy Framework, not the Council. Affordability was also influenced by the welfare and benefits system and the level of rents charged by landlords. Within those limitations, however, the Affordable Housing Working Group would be looking at how the Council could influence the affordability of properties for those in most need of them.

RESOLVED that the Annual Report on Housing Delivery 2018/19 be noted.

(7.05 pm to 7.21 pm)

8. **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 information represented the financial position at November 2019 and that any changes since then would be reflected in the budget being considered by Cabinet and Council in the coming weeks.

During discussion of the report, reference was made to the level of income achieved at Hylands. It was suggested that this could be looked at as part of the Leisure Management Performance item within the Work Programme which was due to be considered by the Committee on 8 June 2020.

RESOLVED that the information on the 2019-20 Mid-Year Budget Review be noted.

(7.21 pm to 7.28 pm)

9. **Parks and Green Spaces Performance Review**

The Committee received a report and presentation on the performance of the City Council's Parks and Green Spaces Service. They examined the facilities provided by the service, how they were managed and maintained, the extent of their use and whether they represented value for money, and how the Council's performance compared with that of other local authorities in the provision of similar services and facilities.

Whilst welcoming the report and commending the service on its performance, the Committee sought clarity as to whether the assessment of parks and green spaces provision against the standards set out in the Local Plan took into account playing pitches, play areas and allotments etc. provided by local town and parish councils and other organisations. It was confirmed that this was the case and the purpose of the Open Space Assessment that was prepared to support the Local Plan was to give this overall view of provision against the standards, irrespective of who the provider was.

It was agreed that supplementary information and a breakdown of the open space, allotments and recreational facilities provided in each area, including that provided by the City Council and others, would be presented to the Committee at a subsequent meeting.

The Committee also referred to a growing tendency for the responsibility for the maintenance of public open space to remain with a management company set up by the developers rather than offered for adoption by the Council. By using this arrangement, the developer avoided paying a commuted sum to the Council for the ongoing maintenance but there was increasing concern that this resulted in residents being unduly burdened with the cost of maintaining spaces meant to be part of the public realm. The Committee felt that the implications of this should be looked at and was told that the issue would form part of the forthcoming review of the Parks and Green Spaces Strategy.

RESOLVED that:

1. the report and presentation on the Parks and Green Spaces service be noted; and
2. information on the Open Space Assessment be submitted to a future meeting, together with an appraisal of the extent to which the standards for the overall provision of open space and facilities in Chelmsford are being met

(7.28 pm to 7.56 pm)

10. Terms of Reference for Task and Finish Group on Riverside Leisure Centre

The proposed terms of reference of a Task and Finish Group set up to evaluate the Riverside Leisure Centre redevelopment scheme were presented for the Committee's consideration. Members suggested a number of changes to the terms of reference, which were accepted.

RESOLVED that:

1. Subject, to the following amendments, the terms of reference for the Task and Finish Group on the Riverside Leisure Centre redevelopment scheme be approved:
 - in the Purpose section, delete the words "Generally" and "post" in the first line and remove the three paragraphs that following the bullet points;
 - in the Scope section, add the words "but not be limited to" at the end of the first line and make it clear in item number 8 that the Group should look at the financial aspects of the development up to 2020
2. the Task and Finish Group comprise Councillors D Clark, S Goldman, R Hyland, M Sismey and S Young.

(7.56 pm to 8.03 pm)

11. Decisions taken under Delegation to the Chief Executive

The Committee received information on the one decision taken during the period 1 June to 31 October 2019 under the Chief Executive's delegated authority to take urgent decisions. The decision related to membership of committees.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(8.03 pm to 8.04 pm)

12. Future Work Programme

The Committee was invited to comment on its future work programme and to agree the programme for the remainder of 2019/20 and for 2020/21.

RESOLVED that the Committee's work programme for 2020 to 2021 be approved, subject to:

- the Task and Finish Group on Community Safety only submitting an interim report to the next meeting, and
- the inclusion at an appropriate point of an item on the review of the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

(8.04 pm to 8.05 pm)

13. **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 8.05pm.

Chairman