

MINUTES
of the
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 26 September 2022 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor R.J. Poulter (Chair)

Councillors , M.W. Bracken, D.J.R. Clark , W.A. Daden ,I.D. Fuller, I.S. Grundy, G.B.R.
Knight, J.C.S. Lager, L.A. Mascot, N.A. Walsh

Also in attendance:

Councillors C. Davidson, M. Goldman, S. Goldman, R. Moore and G. Pooley

1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Ashley, Chambers, Deakin, Gisby, Steel, Tron and Young. Cllrs Clark, Mascot and Walsh substituted for Cllrs Ashley, Deakin and Young. Cllr Knight substituted for Cllr Steel.

2. Chairs Announcements

No announcements were made.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 21 June 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

4. 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.

5. Public Question Time

No questions were asked or statements made.

6. Decisions Called-In

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

7. Cabinet Portfolio Update – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Connected Chelmsford

Councillor Goldman updated the Committee on their role as Deputy Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Connected Chelmsford. The Committee received a presentation from Cllr Goldman which provided an overview of the role and what had taken place in the last 12 months. [The presentation can be viewed via this link.](#) The Committee heard about each service in the portfolio and the key areas of work that had been taking place in each one, some of these were;

- Processing of energy rebate payments by the Revenue & Benefits team.
- The re introduction bite size training sessions by HR.
- Communications on various Council projects including the Theatre refurbishment by the Marketing and Customer Services team.
- Support from the Procurement and Risk team for major projects including the Theatre refurbishment.
- The Community Governance Review being organised by Legal and Democratic Services.
- A new cloud based system for support calls from Digital Services.
- The museum had also received an award from 'Essex Mums' for the fourth year running.

In response to questions from the Committee, they were informed that;

- The theatre refurbishment project had been progressing well, but had not been without it's challenges. It was noted that issues had been found once the work started but this had been expected. The project continued to be on time though, and the Councillors and Officers were very pleased with the contractors who had been appointed. It was still too early to provide a firm opening date however.
- Sharing services with other Council's had continued to be a success in various areas. One example was provided of the Digital Services team providing assistance to a nearby authority who had experienced a cyber attack. As a result the staff members involved gained a lot of practical experience. It was noted that the sharing of services also offered staff with other opportunities for career progression.
- The cost of living crisis and general financial situation would continue to be a problem for the Council and it's residents. It was noted that costs continued to rise in many areas including fuel for example and that it was disappointing that no assistance for local authorities had been mentioned by the new Government.

Cllr Goldman thanked the staff in their portfolio for their continued hard work. The Committee thanked Cllr Goldman for the detailed presentation.

RESOLVED that;

1. the update be noted;
2. the Deputy Leader of the Council be thanked for their attendance

(7.02pm to 7.30pm)

8. Temporary Accommodation

The Committee received a report on the past and future trends in the need and use of temporary accommodation for homeless households, including plans to reduce the need and cost. It was noted that the need for temporary accommodation had increased over the last decade in Chelmsford and many other areas in the region, leading to concerns about the financial costs and impact on households. The Committee heard that in recent years, a new housing strategy had been produced, recognising the importance of creating an additional supply of affordable homes and street properties had been purchased to use as temporary accommodation. There had also been the enabling of converting or extending properties for temporary accommodation and continuous improvement in the performance of managing Council retained properties and the standards of those provided by others.

The Committee were informed that temporary accommodation was used for, carrying out investigations, when there was a shortage of affordable homes and when the Council wanted to exercise a discretionary power rather than a duty to accommodate. The types of temporary accommodation were also detailed, B&B's, Nightly lets, Owned or leased by local authority, owned or leased by Registered Provider and Hostel/supported accommodation. The Committee also heard that there had been a rise in the amount of households in temporary accommodation from 251 in March 2020 to 332 in June 2022. The Committee were also informed of the various pros and cons of each type of temporary accommodation and the situations where certain ones would be used.

The Committee heard that two key areas for the Strategic Housing Team were in reducing the need in the first place for temporary accommodation and reducing the costs. It was noted that a better supply and preventing homelessness in the first place, along with continuing to develop partnerships would be key. It was confirmed that the need and costs associated with temporary accommodation was now a major area of strategic importance for the Council.

In response to questions from the Committee, officers informed them that;

- leasing schemes existed with other providers rather than just CHP.
- The gateway to home choice partnership was a consortium with other local districts to assist in allocating supply.
- The risk of not being able to find temporary accommodation for someone was increasing. It was noted that this was now a strategic issue across Essex and half of the team's work related to temporary accommodation.
- It was difficult to prevent landlords selling their properties and this appeared to be trend which would increase, leading to less properties being available.

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing also addressed the Committee and echoed other members thanks for the teams hard work in tackling the issue. It was noted that along with Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford, they attended meetings with staff and were struck by the level of hard work and organised approach in the team. It was also noted that the whole area needed to be considered in a strategic context and that the team provided an extraordinary day to day response to a very difficult situation.

The Committee and other members present, thanked officers for their continued hard work in this area.

RESOLVED that the Committee recognised the significant challenge that many local housing authorities now faced in meeting housing need and how this was increasing the need for temporary accommodation, alongside the continuous improvements that had been made to improve the quality in terms of accommodation and support and reduce need and costs.

(7.31pm to 8.16pm)

9. Climate Change and Ecological Emergency Action Plan Update

The Committee were updated on the progress made in implementing the initial action plan, that was intended to support to the delivery of the ambitions highlighted in the Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency Declaration. The appendices to the report detailed the initial action plan along with a summary of the achievements made as at 31st August 2022. The Committee were informed that 80% of the actions were on track, 44% had been completed and some were on hold. The Committee were also updated on the progress with the carbon baseline assessment, but were reminded that this was only one of many different areas of focus.

The Committee heard that the second stage of the plan was now getting underway, after the building blocks had been put in place during the first phase. It was noted that this element aimed to identify measures, to decarbonise the Council's direct operations, and that this would be an area that the Cabinet and Full Council would have to consider in terms of funding. The likely financial implications were also noted by the Committee as key areas of focus for future budget planning processes. In summary, officers informed the Committee that if the approach was followed and properly funded there was a reasonable chance the Council would meet its net zero carbon target by 2030.

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

- A City Council program was in place to tackle invasive species such as Himalayan balsam but the Council could not control this on areas of land owned by others.
- There had been an increase in levels of bio diversity as a result of the Council's changed grass cutting policy.
- A recent grant of £116k from the Urban Tree Challenge Fund had been awarded for tree planting.
- The figure of £6.5m indicated in the report as future funding would nearly all be additional capital investment.
- Solar panels had been heavily invested in previously at key sites, where they would be beneficial. It was noted that the merits of using modern battery technology would be explored as they are now more affordable.
- The Climate Change Partnership referred to in the declaration, had not turned out exactly as planned. This was in part due to other bodies and groups that had become active including the Essex Climate Commission and it was felt more sensible to use those existing groups rather than establishing a new body.

- 47k trees had been planted against the initial target 148k, this was in line with the targets. These had mostly been planted on the Council's own land, planting on private individual's land had been explored but it was much more complicated.

The Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford also informed the Committee that the declaration would be assessed again by the Cabinet, to see if any amendments needed to be made. It was felt however that it still held strong and they were proud of the work completed so far. Officers also agreed that some of the wording in the Action Plan would be looked and refreshed and it would be an important part of the future budget process to identify what can be done. The Committee also heard that the next update would be provided in 12 months time rather than April '23 as indicated in the work programme.

The Cabinet Member also thanked staff across all areas of the Council for their hard work and for those residents who had volunteered in areas such as litter picking and tree planting.

RESOLVED that;

1. The progress made to date in implementing the Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan be noted and;
2. The Committee support the proposed approach and strategy for 'decarbonising' the Council's operations and activities, so that the target for a net-zero carbon position by 2030 can be achieved and;
3. The Council be encouraged to continue to prioritise the delivery of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan and consider allocation appropriate resources to support the proposed approach and strategy for 'decarbonising' the Council's operations and activities as and when they become available.

(8.17pm to 8.53pm)

10. South Essex Parking Partnership Presentation

The Committee received a presentation and update on the South Essex Parking Partnership, from the SEPP manager. The Committee were informed that the partnership was responsible across South Essex for on street parking, but the individual districts dealt with off street parking individually. It was also noted that the agreement between the individual districts and Essex County Council who were responsible for delegating the function had been renewed in 2022 after 11 successful years. The Committee was informed that Chelmsford remained the lead authority, with 49 staff employed across office functions and civil enforcement officers. It was noted that the partnership was an excellent example of the benefits of shared working between local authorities. It was noted that it saved costs and led to shared learning between each authority.

The presentation covered in detail the below areas;

- On-Street Parking
- SEPP responsibilities
- Governance
- Financial aims and objectives
- Stats on Penalty Charge Notices

- Investing back into the operation
- Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs)
- The School Parking Initiative
- Future Opportunities

Cllr Knight left the meeting at 9.27pm

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

- Any surplus achieved following the deduction of the enforcement and TRO operational costs, the investment into new innovation, the maintenance of parking related road signs and lines and the funding to introduce new parking restrictions, will be allocated to a new Parking Partnership Highways Strategic Panel who will determine how these funds will be distributed and allocated as per the requirements of Section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.
- Traffic Regulation Orders could often take a while to be completed due to the various consultation stages involved and each statutory time period. It was also noted that often the requests are initially declined for not fully meeting the necessary criteria to warrant the introduction of a parking restriction but may be implemented a few years later as parking pressures increase over time. . It was noted that the expected timescale was between 12 and 18 months.
- Staffing costs were the highest ongoing expenditure area for the partnership and therefore careful consideration must be given to the business case before introducing more enforcement officers to the operation. Moving forward, the preference of the Partnership is to explore new technology for the use of data led enforcement for greater patrol coverage
- All local primary schools across all the Partnership areas were contacted regarding the School Parking Initiative.

RESOLVED that;

1. The presentation be noted and;
2. Officers be thanked for their continued hard work.

(8.54pm to 9.40pm)

11. Annual Report from the Chelmsford Policy Board

The Committee received an update from the Chair of the Chelmsford Policy Board. The update summarised the work of the board across the last 12 months and detailed the various masterplans it had considered. It was also noted that the board had looked at a range of housing related issues, solar farms and the implementation of the Health and Wellbeing Plan. The Chair thanked the officers involved for their assistance over the past year.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(9.41pm to 9.43pm)

12. Terms of Reference for Task and Finish Group

The Committee considered a report asking them to approve the terms of reference for a Task and Finish Group on the Council's appointments to Outside Bodies and to appoint members to it. The Committee agreed the terms of reference but asked if

appointments could be made outside of the meeting via email, due to the amount of apologies and substitute members at the meeting.

RESOLVED that;

1. The terms of reference for the new Task and Finish Group on the Council's appointments to outside bodies be approved and;
2. Nominations for membership be sought via email and agreed with the Chair and officers.

(9.44pm to 9.46pm)

13. Work Programme

The Committee considered a report on its work programme which had been updated following the last meeting on 21 June 2022. The work programme was agreed with one change to the CAEE update being moved from April 2023 to September 2023

RESOLVED that

1. The work programme be agreed with one change;
2. The CAEE update be moved to September 2023 from April.

(9.47pm to 9.48pm)

14. Urgent Business

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

The meeting closed at 9.48pm.

Chair