

MINUTES
of the
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 22 November 2021 at 7pm

Present:

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

Councillors L. Ashley, W.A. Daden, I.D. Fuller, R.J.E. Gisby, I.S. Grundy, J.C.S. Lager, M. Sismey, M.S. Steel, C.R. Tron and N.M. Walsh

Also in attendance:

Councillors C.K. Davidson, M.C. Goldman, M.J. Mackrory and S.J. Robinson

1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Bracken and Shaw. Cllr Walsh substituted for Cllr Shaw.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2021 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 – Deputy Leader/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 their role, along with recent achievements and some future challenges.

Cllr Goldman highlighted some key achievements in their portfolio, but stressed it was only a small sample set of the hard work undertaken by officers during the year;

- Providing a paid procurement service to Uttlesford District Council.
- Enabling the continued effective use of working from home.
- Phone requests in the Customer Service Centre rather than face to face.
- Launching a new website version of City Life with nearly 11,000 unique visitors per month.
- The use of animated and real-life videos by the Communications team which had been well received.
- Ongoing work with the Business Improvement District and attracting major brands into the City Centre.
- 17 apprentices had started or were due to start from October 2020 to November 2021.
- The testing and implementation of automated processing of Council Tax moves in August 2021.

Cllr Goldman also referred to some key upcoming challenges within the portfolio;

- Retention of staff in Digital Services, where the private sector can offer much higher wages.
- Recruitment of staff in Legal Services and having to still use some agency staff.
- Changes at the Theatre and Museum.
- Theatre refurbishment, which would be an ambitious project to transform the customer front of house experience.

Cllr Goldman thanked the staff in their portfolio for their continued hard work. The Committee thanked Cllr Goldman for the comprehensive update provided.

(7.33pm to 7.47pm)

7. Cabinet Portfolio Update – Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford

Councillor Davidson updated the Committee on their role as the Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford. The Committee received a presentation which provided an overview of their role and covered the work that had been ongoing within the portfolio in the last year. Cllr Davidson advised the Committee, that due to some portfolio changes, Revenues and Benefits along with Procurement, risk and insurance were now under Cllr Goldman's portfolio.

Cllr Davidson highlighted the below points to the Committee;

- The National housing crisis, continued to have a significant impact and along with a refreshed Homelessness Strategy for 2020, a new Housing Strategy had also been consulted on. This had highlighted an acute need for 3 and 4 bedroom family homes, and actions to increase the supply of these had been underway.
- In Accountancy Services, budget management had continued to be a key issue. It was noted that since 2010, basic Government funding for the Council had

fallen by two thirds, leaving a gap of £10.7m. The Committee also heard that the annual funding settlement would not be available until December and that a Local Government needs service estimates was required to set the 2022/23 Council budget.

- In 2020-21 revenues had been down £17m, it was noted that this was due to long lasting or permanent reduction in income from areas such as car parks or rent.
- The Committee heard that the current budget addressed £2m of the ongoing gap, with £1,7m still to close.
- Preparation for the 2022-23 budget was on track, but included strong cost pressures in general inflation and energy costs.
- Suggested measures from other Cllrs were welcomed to help balance the budget.
- The remit of the Treasury Management and Investment Sub Committee had been expanded, with the Committee now also looking at property matters.

Cllr Davidson thanked the staff in their portfolio for their continued hard work. The Committee thanked Cllr Davidson for the comprehensive update provided.

(7.48pm to 8.03pm)

8. Review of Our Chelmsford Our Plan

The Committee considered a report which indicated the progress made to date in implementing specific actions that support the delivery of the ambitions and priorities set out in 'Our Chelmsford Our Plan'. The Committee heard that the initial document had been agreed by the Cabinet in January 2020, and detailed the overarching and strategic direction for the Council's next four years. It was noted that the report provided the Committee with a detailed action plan, summarising the progress that had been made.

The Committee heard that the report had taken a while to compile, due to the pandemic starting shortly after the plan had been produced, leading to significant additional work in other areas. It was noted by the Committee, that of the 125 detailed actions, 103 were currently on track, 5 needed some attention and 7 were on hold. It was also noted that 9 actions had not been started and one was currently off target. Officers informed the Committee that significant progress had been made against the plan and along with the Leader of the Council could answer any questions.

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

- Key areas included, the Chelmer Waterside and Lockside developments, the delivery of the second station and the North East bypass, affordable housing and climate change.
- A meeting was scheduled for December with the Environment Agency to discuss the Margaretting element of the Chelmsford Flood Alleviation Scheme.
- Cllrs would be provided with access to certain read only sections of the new finance system providing the date in the report at a later date.
- Many ideas had and continued to be developed to maximise revenue from Hylands Estate, but it had to be remembered that the significant income from the V Festival was no longer received. It was also noted that wedding booking

enquiries were now significant, with bookings being made a few years in advance.

Members of the Committee thanked officers for providing a comprehensive and clear report and agreed that it was very positive to see a large percentage of the actions being met already.

(8.04pm to 8.23pm)

9. Revenue Monitoring 2021/22

The Committee received a report, providing them with a comparison of financial activity against the approved budgets, which enabled them to consider any matters that required future review. The Committee heard that the report had recently been considered by the Cabinet too. It was noted by the Committee that the figures were improved upon the previous pandemic affected year, but that there had still been higher than expected losses against the budget. The Committee heard that there was an overall projected overspend of £0.088m. It was noted that within the overspend, Service Income and Expenditure was expected to be £2.36m over budget. This was however, offset, by Non-service costs which were projected to be under budget at outturn by £2.272m, leading to the £0.088m figure. The Committee also heard that due to the resilient level of reserves, it may be possible to make an unbudgeted contribution to capital of £4m to reduce future financing costs.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(8.24pm to 8.25pm)

10. 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 2020 and March 2021. 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 report summarised that housing delivery had remained stable in 2020/21 with 829 completions being recorded for the financial year. It was noted that this was lower than expected, due to the pandemic, the figure did however still exceed the annual target of 805 dwellings. The Committee also heard that forecasts indicated completion rates would remain above the annual housing requirement over the next five years. It was also noted by the Committee that there had been a 40% increase in affordable housing delivered during the year but the size of the properties needed to increase to better match the SHMA requirement. The Committee heard that the Council would continue to monitor and respond to changes to the national planning framework along with optimising opportunities to attract grant funding. It was noted that the funding would support the delivery of housing and other essential infrastructure identified within the Local Plan.

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

- Further information on longer term support after the Government's rough sleeping accommodation programme ends in 2024 would be provided by officers after the meeting.
- Section 106 agreements helped to secure guarantees on affordable housing as part of developments and nomination rights were provided to the Council to allocate to those with the greatest needs on the housing register.
- Standards were set in the same way for affordable rent properties as other market residential properties but with a larger spec, due to them tending to be closer to maximum occupation rather than market rent properties.
- Close monitoring of the handover process of affordable housing between developers and the chosen providers, was performed by Planning and Housing Services.
- Monitoring of developments continued to be crucial in ensuring the most needed properties were being developed.
- It was important to have a buffer in certain years of higher dwellings being completed, to compensate for years with lower figures.
- The 805 completed dwellings figure was an average over a long period of time, and historically it had been met.

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

(7.04pm to 7.33pm)

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

The Committee received information on the two decisions taken during the period 1 July 2021 to 31 October 2021 under the Chief Executives delegated authority to take urgent decisions.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(8.25pm to 8.26pm)

12. Work Programme

The Committee considered a report on its work programme which had been updated following the last meeting on 26 July 2021. Officers informed the Committee that some future topics had been discussed and proposed the following topics and dates.

- South Essex Parking Partnership – *April 2022*
- Rough Sleeping – *June 2022*
- Cultural Services – *June 2022*
- Temporary Accommodation – *September 2022*

The Committee agreed that the reports should be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED that;

1. the report be noted and;
2. the above items be added to the work programme.

(8.26pm to 8.31pm)

13. Urgent Business

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

The meeting closed at 8.31pm.

Chair