

# MINUTES

## of the

### OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 15 September 2025 at 7pm

Present:

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

Councillors, D. Clark, H. Clark, A. Davidson, P. Davey, S. Dobson, K. Franks, A. Sosin, M. Steel and S. Sullivan

Also in attendance –

Councillors, C. Davidson, N. Dudley, J. Lardge and S. Robinson

#### 1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies were received from Councillors Adutwim, Bugbee, Davis, Mascot and Wilson.

Councillors A. Davidson, Franks and A. Sosin substituted for Cllrs Adutwim, Bugbee and Mascot.

#### 2. Chairs Announcements

No announcements were made for this meeting.

#### 3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

#### 4. Decision and Action Sheet

The Committee considered and noted the decision and action sheet since the last meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2025. It was noted that a training session had now been provisionally booked with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. The Committee agreed to have the training session at 6pm on 17<sup>th</sup> November, ahead of its next meeting, which would be held at 8pm instead of 7pm on the same evening.

#### 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 public questions had been submitted for the meeting.

## 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 Finance

The Committee received an update from Councillor C. Davidson on their role as Cabinet Member for Finance. The Committee were informed of the three main areas of their portfolio, Accountancy & Exchequer Services, Internal Audit and Revenues and Benefits. It was noted that the Accountancy team had been carrying out lots of research and work into the costs of LGR and the finances behind the five unitary model which had been vital in allowing the Council to submit their proposal to Government. The Cabinet Member informed the Committee, that many financial reports had gone to other meetings throughout the last 12 months, including to Full Council, Cabinet, Audit and Risk Committee and Treasury Management and Investment Sub Committee.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that;

- A planned purchase of a City Centre car park would provide an income generating option to the Council, at a suitable purchase price, alongside giving options for other uses in the future. Other car parks that had recently been sold had been allocated as housing sites in the previous Local Plan.
- The budget report later in the financial year would provide more information, but funds had been set aside to assist with the costs of LGR.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Portfolio Update from the Cabinet Member for Finance be noted.

*(7.03pm to 7.18pm)*

## 9. Cabinet Portfolio Update from the Cabinet Member for an Active Chelmsford

The Committee received a presentation from Councillor Dudley on their role as Cabinet Member for an Active Chelmsford. The Committee were provided with an overview of their role and what the services they were responsible for had been working on recently. It was noted that leisure centre attendances continued to rise positively and that leisure centre staff had assisted with two medical emergencies recently, saving lives as a result. It was also noted that earlier opening hours at CSAC had been received positively and that the refurbishment of Dovedales was under way and going well.

The Committee heard that wedding revenue continued to be positive at Hylands House and that the recent Radio 2 in the Park event had been a great success, staff were thanked for their hard work in enabling it to take place and that it would prove to have been a huge positive for the local economy. The Committee were also informed of work carried out in Health and Wellbeing, including charring Livewell Meetings and the importance of continued relationships with external partners such as the NHS. It was also noted that community engagement continued to be important and that the Cabinet Member had been charring the grants committee and working with Chelmsford Voluntary Service and other community partners.

The Cabinet Member summarised that usage of the Council's excellent leisure facilities had continued to grow, works at Dovedales were on schedule, close collaborative work with health projects had achieved real benefits in the community and that they were lucky to work with excellent staff and to be part of assisting with a thriving and active community.

In response to questions, it was noted that;

- The leisure centres owned entirely by the Council did perform better financially, than ones with joint partnership agreements as they were limited by usage times etc.
- Riverside had the highest increase in usage numbers, partly due to its capacity and opportunities to encourage users to also use other sites had been explored.
- The Council's facilities were now out performing the private sector and this had not been the case in the past.
- Benchmarking was often carried out against the private sector, also with other public sector providers in and out of Essex.
- Active health referrals from GP's etc did initially cost the Council, but many of those referred were choosing to sign up for their own memberships afterwards, which was beneficial for the Council and for the health of those residents.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Portfolio Update from the Cabinet Member for an Active Chelmsford be noted.

*(7.19pm to 7.45pm)*

## 10. Theatre Inform and Debate

The Committee were reminded that one of the recommendations from the Theatre Review Task and Finish Group, had been for the Theatre to provide a presentation on performance and programming following the refurbishment.

The Committee received a presentation on progress at the Theatre and its performance and programming. The presentation focused on the below areas;

- Growth drivers for 2025/26 & Programme over-view
- Expenditure and Income
- Summary & Sales position
- Staff Structure & Establishment
- Quick wins & Opportunities
- Future risks
- Mitigation Strategies
- Customer Comments

In summary the Committee heard that there were three key strands to the programme overview at the Theatre, Presenter, Discover and Partner and that across these a varied and exciting programme of events was being delivered. They also heard that ticket sales had increased across the board, leading to a significant increase in income, with the box office performing at higher levels than previous years. It was noted that new staff had been brought into the marketing and technical teams to assist with managing the increased offer of events and that there had been a restructure of ticket fees, so booking fees were per ticket rather than per booking. The Committee also heard about the partnership working with Mountview who were now utilising a space in the Coval Lane building and that this presented a great opportunity to open up areas for the wider community. It was also noted that it was key to look at sponsorship options and other business opportunities going

forward and that some future risks included capacity of the building, marketing budgets and maintaining a positive audience experience. It was acknowledged that mobility issues remained with the redeveloped building, but these were due to unresolvable issues with the building itself, but that staff had been excellent in working around these issues and advising hirers/users of them in advance. The Committee heard various positive user comments, from visitors to the Theatre and hirers and the Theatre Director thanked their team for their continued hard work and their helpful and friendly approach that had helped make the Theatre a success for the Council and the City.

The Chair thanked the Theatre Director for their insightful presentation and invited questions from the Committee. In response to the questions, it was noted that;

- Local produce was used in the Theatre Café and Bar, but officers would check on the fairtrade status of what was being sold.
- It had been a bit of trial and error to work out the best food offer for the Café, due to a lack of ancillary space, but that it was now thought to be operating successfully.
- Broadening the offer of performances was an ambition of the Theatre, but it would have to be done on a step by step basis, to ensure the correct balance of programming and income was maintained.
- The majority of performances sold very well, but not all performances could sell 100% of their tickets, especially some more specialised performances in the studio, but these were still important to have on offer.
- The Council's work on getting a VAT exemption for Culture and Leisure had been beneficial for the Theatre's finances.
- There was not a significant quiet period and the summer maintenance period had been reduced to allow more events to be added to the programme.
- The program for the discover strand of events, had been organised by the Theatre's Creative Engagement Officer and this was carried out via staff's extensive experience within the industry.
- 80% of audiences came from within a 5 mile radius of the Theatre.
- Wear and Tear issues would always be a concern for any business, but a level of capital had been built into future budgets to address these matters.
- It was a disappointment that the mobile changing places offer had not been possible, but any future plans would attempt to build in improvements to accessibility.

**RESOLVED** that the updated be noted.

*(7.46pm to 8.28pm)*

## 11. Cabinet Portfolio Update from the Leader of the Council

The Committee received an update from Councillor Robinson on their role as Leader of the Council. They highlighted their appreciation for the great staff at the City Council and noted that the presentations on the Theatre and Leisure helped to demonstrate the positive work being carried out across the Council. They stated that LGR had led to a huge increase in their own and many members of staff's workload but that as a result of this a submission had been made to the Government for the 5 unitary model. They highlighted other important areas of their role including liaising with other Council's and Government, but that recent announcements on infrastructure works for example no longer taking place at the A12, had been a big impact for the Council. It was noted that the Local Plan would now be submitted at a later date as a result. The Committee also heard of the important

work and analysis that had been carried out in advance of LGR and that a Joint Committee of Leaders would be set up once the Government decided who the Council would be merged with. The Committee also heard that the Leader had recently become responsible for Communications and that various campaigns were underway or planned, highlighting the housing crisis, the Community Governance Review and that a new social media Manager was in place and that an effort was being made to engage in a less bureaucratic way with residents on social media.

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

- Before any data was shared between services, checks were carried out with the Council's Data Protection Officer.
- Once a Joint Committee could be set up with future partner authorities as a result of LGR, it was hoped that it could include all political groups.
- The Government would decide which of up to 4 proposals for LGR would be publicly consulted on, with an announcement of the chosen proposal due in March 2026.
- As housing targets were now not being met, due to the Government cancellation of the A12 widening, officers were working hard to find other solutions and meetings had been taking place with the developer consortium for the Chelmsford Garden Community as a result and that future reports to the Chelmsford Policy Board would set out revised dates for the Local Plan timetable.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Portfolio Update from the Leader of the Council be noted.

*(8.29pm to 8.53pm)*

## 12. Update/Review of 'Our Chelmsford, Our Plan'

The Committee received a report that outlined the progress made to date in implementing the strategic actions that supported the delivery of the ambitions and priorities set out in 'Our Chelmsford, Our Plan'. The Committee were informed that the document had been launched in 2023 and covered the actions to be taken to facilitate a fairer, greener and more connected place at the heart of Essex. The Committee heard that the report set out key areas of progress and in presenting the report, the Chief Executive highlighted the invaluable and important work being carried out by teams across the Council. It was noted that Local Government Reorganisation had obviously impacted staff workloads, but staff had continued to make progress on key projects along with getting on with day to day tasks. The Committee heard that Council staff cared about their local community and residents and that there were plenty of success stories across services, such as the Theatre that highlighted the positive impact that the Council was having on its local area.

In response to questions, it was noted that;

- Housebuilding targets had increased significantly due to Government changes and along with the removal of funding for A12 widening and the Meadows housing site no longer coming forward, it would be difficult to meet the 5 year housing land supply and that the Local Plan would be submitted at a later than planned date as a result.
- It had been difficult to staff Building Control roles recently, due to new required qualifications coming into place and options to share staff with other nearby Councils was being explored.
- Sites such as the one near Boreham that had been purchased for housing, tended to be gifted to an organisation, in return for the Council to get nomination rights, to assist with the Housing crisis.

The Chair thanked officers for their report and echoed the comments on staff made by the Chief Executive, especially for the Spatial Planning Services Manager and their team.

**RESOLVED** that;

1. The progress that the City Council has made in delivering the ambitions and priorities set out in 'Our Chelmsford, Our Plan' be noted.
2. The Spatial Planning Services Manager and their team be thanked for their continued hard work and assistance.

*(8.54pm to 9.15pm)*

### 13. 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 31 January to 1 September 2025.

**RESOLVED** that the report be noted.

### 14. Annual Report of the Committee (2024/25)

The Committee received the annual report on the Overview & Scrutiny Function 2024/25. 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 2024/25, future work for 2025/26, "call-in" of Cabinet decisions, and training and development.

It was noted that the Theatre Task and Finish Group had carried across from 2023/24 into 2024/25, but this had not been referenced in the annual report. It was agreed that this would be added in prior to the final version being agreed by Full Council.

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

### 15. Work Programme

The Committee considered a report on its work programme which had been updated following the last meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2025. It was noted that the training session from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny would be held on 17<sup>th</sup> November at 6pm. It was also agreed that where possible for future meetings, presentations would be circulated just prior to a meeting so members could follow the slides on their own device during the meeting.

**RESOLVED** that;

1. the work programme be noted and
2. where possible for future meetings, that presentations would be circulated just prior to a meeting.

## 16. Urgent Business

There were no matters of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 9.17pm

Chair