

MINUTES
of the
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 6 February 2023 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor R.J. Poulter (Chair)
Councillor S. Young (Vice-Chair)

Councillors, L. Ashley, M. Bracken, W. Daden, I. Fuller, R. Gisby, I. Grundy, L. Mascot, M. Steel, A. Thorpe-Apps, C. Tron, N. Walsh, S. Young

Also in attendance:

Councillors M. Mackrory, and R. Moore

1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs N. Chambers, J. Deakin, and J. Lager. Cllr A. Thorpe-Apps substituted for Cllrs N. Chambers. Cllr L. Mascot substituted for Cllr Deakin. Cllr N. Walsh substituted for Cllr J. Lager.

2. Chairs Announcements

The Chair made no announcements in the meeting.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 21 November 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 – Cabinet Member for Greener and Safer Chelmsford

Councillor Moore updated the Committee on their role as the Cabinet Member for Greener and Safer Chelmsford. Cllr Moore had provided the Committee with a written report supporting their portfolio update. Cllr Moore also provided a presentation in which included an overview of their role and the key areas of work that happened across the year, policies that had been implemented, and awards and recognitions received.

Cllr Moore focused on the following key areas in their portfolio:

- Technical Services
- Community Safety
- Public Health and Protection Services
- Hylands House
- Recycling and Waste Collections
- Love Your Chelmsford / Climate Action
- Chelmsford Market
- Street Care

The main key points of the update in Technical Services were the decarbonisation program and looking at the buildings that Chelmsford City Council look after. Cllr Moore reiterated to the Committee about prioritising the decarbonisation of the council by 2030, by looking for alternative technologies which included no gas boilers and no oils from 2025/26. The decarbonisation included phased replacement programs and it was suggested that the overall cost would be around £1.8 million however this would be implemented over 6 years.

The Committee was then informed of the significant work that had been undertaken regarding Community and Safety. The key work undertaken was the Women's Safety Charter and other related outreach and training for safety of women and girls in Chelmsford.

In their updates regarding Public Health and Protection Services, Cllr Moore highlighted the wide range of services including Environmental Health, Housing Standards, Noise/Nuisance, Enforcement, Food Hygiene, Licensing, CCTV, Fly-tipping investigations, and problem waste. Cllr Moore thanked the officers involved in their work and reiterated that this was a large area to manage.

Cllr Moore then discussed Leisure Services which started with updates regarding Hylands House. It was noted that Hylands House was a unique asset to Chelmsford City Council and received 1.3 million visitors each year and £370,000 to manage. The success of the Enlightened event was highlighted and that Creamfields would be returning at Hylands. The wedding services continued to be available and successful, and Cllr Moore particularly noted how the team worked hard to provide wedding services especially during suspension at lockdown period. The Committee was reminded that Hylands House and the estate was open and welcome to all as it had hosted various vibrant and memorable events. The Committee was reminded of the change of parking fees at Hylands Estate which had been in place.

Cllr Moore then updated the Committee regarding Parks and Green Spaces. They commended the team for their magnificent level of services. The Committee was updated with various work including mass greening which was supported by parishes, work by planting groups, and changes to management of spaces to protect wildlife.

Regarding the updates on recycling and waste management, there had been a reduction of waste services due to the unprecedented heat during the summer of last year. This was to ensure the safety of the crew but services were now back to normal.

For markets and street trading, Cllr Moore updated the Committee about how the Council supported traders during lockdown including suspending the rise in rents. Unfortunately, the high street was noted to still suffering and some trades were removed on Fridays and Saturdays as not seen as viable. Lack of footfall is noted as a concern and to lose one trader could affect others. Overall, traders seemed happy and making a living. The Council continued its partnership with Culture Chelmsford and the Council continued to invest in the markets

The Committee was then updated about street care and was informed of the hardworking team behind the different services provided. It was unfortunate that the funding for the Highways Rangers had been withdrawn as they had provided excellent services. It was ensured that there would be no impact on our workforce and were assigned to other duties.

Cllr Moore also updated the Committee regarding Love Your Chelmsford loan scheme of litter picking equipment; the Council supporting the Love Your Chelmsford waste campaign; and clean up events. Cllr Moore also thanked the Street Care team and the parks' volunteers for their hard work.

- Regarding Members questions, it was advised, in terms of offering differentiating charges to traders, it was confirmed that there was a hierarchy based on the size of the trading pitch and position of the stall. The Council ensured that traders were given attractive offers.
- Regarding the consultancy from the Gender Equality Consultant, it was confirmed that the initial training is funded by Safer Streets Fund and this is for 10 sessions. It was also confirmed that the price of the sessions is greatly cheaper than normal consultancy.
- The Creamfields event is a commercial undertaking that brings in a significant revenue to the Council.
- The £90k funding for the Highways Rangers provided by Essex County Council equates to 100% of the funding.
- Regarding the replacement of vehicles with low carbon alternatives, the plan is to replace over time all smaller vehicles for example street care vans, but for larger fleet vehicles an alternative low carbon fuel [HVO] would be used.
- It was noted that the national trend for household recycling and composting rates were coming down. In Chelmsford the recycling and composting rate is currently 51%, compared to 53% in 2021/22.

RESOLVED that;

1. The annual portfolio update be noted, and;

2. The Committee thanked Cllr Moore for the update and the departments involved for their work.

(7.03pm to 7.53pm)

8. Annual Presentation by Safer Chelmsford Partnership and Essex Police

The Committee received an annual presentation by the Safer Chelmsford Partnership and Essex Police. The presentation was given by Chelmsford City Council's Public Protection Manager and Chief Inspector Paul Ballard, the District Commander for both Chelmsford and Maldon.

The annual presentation by Safer Chelmsford Partnership included updates on their key priorities and projects, its statutory duties, funding, and matters to look out for the rest of the year. [The presentation can be viewed here](#). The Committee were reminded of the statutory duties of the Safer Chelmsford Partnership which were the following:

- Statutory Partners
- Strategic Assessment, Partnership Action Plan and Financial Monitoring
- Coordination of Partnership Activities (One Chelmsford Board)
- Strategic Priorities plus Reducing Reoffending
- Prevent, Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking, Domestic Homicide Reviews and Safeguarding
- Face the Public – Combined with Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and Essex Police
- Survey Public Opinion – Fear of Crime and Perceptions
- Annual Presentation to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Safer Chelmsford Partnership also reminded the Committee of their strategic priorities for 2022/23, which were noted to be largely the same as 2021/22.

The Committee also heard an update regarding the Community Safety Structure. The Community Safety Hub was reported as going from strength to strength and remained to have a strong link with the Community Policing Team. The Committee was notified of the improved partnership buy-in and engagement, joint working opportunities, effective monitoring of the action plan, ensuring better use of tools and powers, and improvement in working with Essex Fire and Rescue and ensuring that there were better data coming in. The Committee was informed of the effective forums for areas of need which were schools, social landlords, rough sleepers and mental health. Good relationships continued to be maintained with partners across Essex which helped the council to deliver safety initiatives.

The Committee was then updated with the key projects for 2022/23 which were the following:

- Community Safety Hub which had now been established since March 2019
- Home Office Safer Streets Round 3 which had now been completed
- Essex Violence Reduction Unit Locality Funding
- PREVENT duty met and situational risk assessment which was completed
- Launch of Chelmsford Against Slavery Partnership, ARU Virtual Reality Project and Chelmsford Women's Safety Charter

- Education, awareness and community engagement and communications
- Night-time Economy Interventions which included street pastors, taxi marshals, SOS Bus Project, safe spaces, Purple Flag and drinks spiking awareness.

Safer Chelmsford Partnership also ensured better community engagement which included engaging with residents and communities by proactive work, MS teams and face-to-face. There was also the Independent Advisory Group on MS Teams and work to ensure that there was an engagement with seldom heard communities and faith groups, online safety schools and parent sessions.

Updates regarding Safer Street Funds Round 3 includes a focus on safety of women and girls (VAWG) and the press coverage for a variety of projects regarding this.

The Women's Safety Charter and the safety of women and girls were particularly highlighted in the presentation. In collaboration with Chelmsford For You and the Gender Equality Consultant, the campaign included a brand book and video campaign, visual assets and a social media campaign. Organisations had signed up to consultations led by the Gender Equality Consultant to become a "safe space" for women.

The Committee was informed of the following updates by the end of the year or that would commence in the next year:

- Serious Violence Duty
- Protect Duty: Martyn's Law
- A refresh of Prevent Duty in 2023
- PFCC Review of Community Safety Partnerships
- Longer impact of pandemic particularly with mental health in young people and parents/carers, domestic abuse, radicalisation, and online exploitation.
- Minerva zones and funding for Chelmsford regarding female victimisation
- Home Office Funding and policing precept.

In response to the questions put forward by Members, the Safer Chelmsford Partnership informed the Committee that:

- The funding and the role of the SOS buses in Chelmsford was based on academic research and were utilised mostly on Fridays and Saturdays in the busiest period of the year from April to December.
- There would be a stronger awareness strategy regarding rural crime in consequence of the fires that broke out in Broomfield.
- Regarding questions about the rise of drinks spiking, there had been specific campaigns and interventions and a lot of work with other councils on the "See You Safer" campaign.
- Parish councils were provided a limited service regarding CCTV since the CCTV policy had been introduced at no charge.

Chief Inspector Paul Ballard, the District Commander for Chelmsford and Maldon, Essex Police, provided a presentation on behalf of Essex Police. [The presentation can be viewed here](#). The Committee was updated on various areas of work regarding community engagement, work with youth, fraud prevention, and work with anti-social

behaviour. The Committee also received district data from Essex Police providing crime statistics and data before the presentation.

The key highlights in the presentation focused on works ensuring that Essex Police continued to engage in various communities. They first focused on the younger generation and ensuring that Essex Police create a stronger bond with them. This included attending schools on a regular basis such as when Community Safety Engagement Officers and Children and Young Person Officers attended Thriftwood primary school. Essex Police also worked on building relationships with other “hard to reach” communities, for example their continued engagement with Chelmsford Muslim Society and attending Eid.

Work with tackling anti-social behaviour had involved focus on the areas where the problems were historic and ensuring to engage with the younger community particularly those of school children through attendances in schools. They worked with local partners and businesses and set out days in action to tackle anti-social behaviour which includes targeting gangs in the area with partner agencies and HVP conductions in the area. They reported good liaisons with Neighbourhood Watch which allowed intel from members of the public. Overall, these actions resulted positive feedback from the community and public confidence was built.

The Committee then heard Essex Police’s “Play as One” which was a tool to build further relationships with young people. It was pointed out that many anti-social behaviour incidents involved children of secondary school ages and the aim was to build relationships through one common medium and to create bonds and break down barriers between younger generation and the police.

The Committee heard the need for Essex Police to be flexible and adaptable to different challenges. They had focused in East Hanningfield in the presentation as an example due to the persistent anti-social behaviour and reckless driving. It was reported that they had continued to tackle the problem by installing a camera in the location which was connected to the Chelmsford CCTV office

The Committee was then updated with fraud prevention work and how the Community Safety Team worked in partnership with banks to prevent, detect, and deter fraud and purse dipping. An update regarding other further engagements and awareness of anti-social behaviour, dangerous parking, and dangerous use of the waterways was also discussed.

In response to Member’s questions, Essex Police advised:

- Data and statistics for crime, especially certain ones, were a national problem and not just a problem specific to Chelmsford. Essex Police reassured members that the data is transparent, and they are making significant effort with regards to certain offences, such as sexual offences.
- Regarding perception of certain crimes, such as drug-related offences, Essex Police reiterated to the Members that statistics are divided to victim-based crimes and state-based crimes.
- Regarding dangerous parking and whether the Council should take enforcement action, especially on footpaths and pavements, Essex Police advised that there is no law that prevents parking on footpaths and pavements unless there is a restriction. It was also noted by the Public Protection

Manager that when a report of dangerous parking was received, the scenario was examined by the enforcement officer before identifying the driver to be given advice regarding parking.

- Regarding clarification of the numbers of PCSOs, the Chief Inspector stated there had been no reduction in numbers.
- Regarding support surrounding drug taking and drug dealing, Essex Police noted the use of social media, regarding awareness and trying to feedback more to the community.

RESOLVED that;

- The presentations to be noted, and;
- The Committee thanked the Safer Chelmsford Partnership and Essex Police for their continued efforts.

(7.53pm to 9.10pm)

9. Cabinet Portfolio Update – Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development

The Committee received a Cabinet Portfolio Update from Cllr Mackrory regarding the key aspects of their role as the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development. The presentation covered Development Management & Building Control, Spatial Planning, Car Parking, and Economic Development and Implementation.

Cllr Mackrory reported that the Council received income estimating of £1,646,060 from developments on 2021/22. The main issues facing development management in 2022/23 were shortages in staffing and skills and land registry transfer. It was noted that 86% of S78 appeals and 86% of HH appeals had been dismissed in Chelmsford. The Committee was also informed of the new projects regarding building control such as DataSpace Live which is a new cloud-based Building regulation application system and 'Submit-a-Plan' portal which provides two-way communication with customers. Income received in 2021/22 had been £465k which was an increase of 16% from 2022/21. Challenges included staff shortages, an ageing profession, and the Building Safety Act which resulted from the Grenfell Tower fire which had meant additional responsibilities, training, and certification.

Cllr Mackrory provided updates regarding the local plan and policy implementation including maintaining housing supply, masterplans, the Chelmsford Garden Community, Essex RAMs Project, and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

RESOLVED that;

- The presentation to be noted, and;
- The Committee thanked Cllr Mackrory for his attendance.

(9.12pm to 9.32pm)

10. Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development'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 Sustainable Development, Cllr Mackrory. The annual report provided the Committee an overview of key housing delivery monitoring statistics for Chelmsford from April 2021 to March 2022. 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.

Cllr Mackrory noted that housing delivery remained stable and it had been reported that completions exceeded the annual target. It was reported that there were 20% more affordable housing dwellings delivered over the identified need in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment in 2015 and further new homes were in the pipeline. Currently, there were about 9,400 dwellings that are subject to Planning Performance Agreements and there was good progress on strategic sites in the Local Plan. The Committee was also informed that there are around 3,600 new homes within planning permissions that are yet to be built.

The Committee was also notified of the changes to the planning system and these would continue to be monitored and responded to accordingly. Members were also informed of close partnerships to increase provisions in housing for the homeless and other opportunities for funding to deliver housing.

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

- Regarding strategic applications taking a long to come to planning committee, officers advised that planning applications on these sites were not brought forward until they were satisfied with proposals.
- When it was asked what the latest position on sites it was noted that there continue to be a good supply of new housing and they will carry on monitoring starts as well as completions closely.
- With regards to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, it was advised that officers were waiting for details to determine whether this will be advantageous to the Council.

The Committee also noted that some information in the appendix that refers to determinations before the end of the year is out of date and advised officers to circulate new data including quarter 3 information, which the officers agreed to do after the meeting.

RESOLVED that;

- The annual housing report to be noted;
- The Committee to thank the officers and Cllr Mackrory, and;
- Updated tables 2 and 4 in the appendix attached to the report to be circulated after the meeting.

(9.32pm to 9.51pm)

11. Final Report from Task and Finish Group on Outside Body Appointments

The Committee received the final report from the Task and Finish Group on Outside Body Appointments which was presented by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, Cllr Mascot. The Committee was reminded of the duties of Outside Bodies Task and Finish Group including identifying which appointments continued to be beneficial to the Council, which ones needed a different number of representatives, and to also identify new appointments. Responses were received from both city councillor representatives and from the organisations and the Group had met on three occasions to discuss the appointments. The Committee received the terms of reference and a spreadsheet detailing all the responses as annexes to the final report.

It was reported that a vast majority of the appointments were beneficial and that they should continue. However, it was also felt by the Group that there needed to be a greater level of oversight by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and that it would be beneficial for the Councillors to report back on an annual basis. It was found that there are three appointments that were no longer required which were the following:

- Fields in Trust, due to no meetings,
- South Woodham Ferrers Swimming Pool Steering Group, due to no meetings, and,
- William De Ferrers Centre Users Committee, due to no response received from the Council representative (although they are a former Councillor).

It was also recommended for a new outside body to be included which is the Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation Advisory Committee.

Further recommendations included that the Committee receive annual updates from each appointed representative at February meetings; that the Committee review the appointments to any outside bodies that do not meet before May 2024, and; that the Committee consider which outside bodies they would like to invite to a meeting, to further understand their role when setting their future work programme.

RESOLVED that;

- The report be noted and recommendations to be agreed, and;
- The recommendations be put forward in the Full Council meeting in February 2023.

(9.10pm to 9.12pm)

12. Work Programme

The Committee discussed the updated work programme and the alternative date to the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. Due to elections, it was decided that the April 2023 meeting was to be moved to March 2023. The updated work programme consisted of reports from the Task and Finish Group regarding the Theatre Refurbishment Project Evaluation and Cultural Strategy.

However, regarding the report for the Theatre Refurbishment Project Evaluation, it was noted that the group could not begin its meaningful work as the project is not yet complete and is still subject to contractual negotiations. It was therefore suggested that a report might not be possible for the March meeting. It was suggested by the Director of Connected Chelmsford that a meeting of the Task and Finish Group could be convened to have an initial exploratory discussion around the areas that could be evaluated however financial matters cannot be discussed until the negotiations are complete.

It was decided that the Group would meet informally as soon as possible and determine whether a report could be presented at the March meeting.

RESOLVED that;

- The Theatre Refurbishment Project Evaluation Task and Finish Group to hold an initial meeting.

(9.51pm to 10.03pm)

14. Urgent Business

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

The meeting closed at 10.03pm.