

MINUTES
of the
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 21 November 2022 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor R.J. Poulter (Chair)

Councillors , L. Ashley, M. Bracken, W. Daden, J. Deakin, I. Fuller, R. Gisby, I. Grundy, B. Knight, C. Tron, S. Young, R. Whitehead

Also in attendance:

Councillors C. Davidson, M. Goldman and R. Hyland

1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs N. Chambers, J. Lager and M. Steel. Cllr B. Knight and Cllr R. Whitehead substituted for Cllrs N. Chambers and M. Steel retrospectively.

2. Chairs Announcements

The Chair announced that it had been agreed for item 10 to be heard after item 6.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held 26 September 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 Fairer Chelmsford

The Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford updated the committee on their role. The Committee received a presentation 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 praise for the hard work in each of the 4 services within the portfolio:

- Accountancy services
- Corporate property services
- Internal Audit
- Strategic housing services

The portfolio holder detailed the main challenges that they had faced in the last 12 months. Firstly, in relation to accountancy services and their endeavours to limit the impact of rising inflation, covid-19 and uncertainty about future Government support.

In addition to this, the committee heard of the issues that strategic housing had faced as a result of external pressures e.g., rise in need for temporary accommodation.

It was noted that the city council is not facing these challenges in isolation and that the officers involved have taken additional measures to mitigate these challenges.

RESOLVED that;

1. the update be noted;
2. the cabinet member be thanked for their attendance

(7.35pm to 7:46pm)

8. Review of ‘Our Chelmsford ‘Our Plan’

The Committee were updated on the progress of the plan, which was adopted in January 2020 and sets out the strategic direction and priorities of the city council. The four main priority areas are:

- A fairer and inclusive Chelmsford,
- A safer and greener place,
- Healthy, active and enjoyable lives and,
- Connected Chelmsford.

The detailed action plan reflects the progress of the projects and initiatives that have been devised to meet these priorities. It was reported that of the 124 actions that were identified, 107 are on track or ahead of schedule, 9 have been placed on hold and 5 were not due to have started yet. There were 3 that were brought to the attention of the committee as potential issues:

- OCOP F3.2/CaEE 8b – The automatic flood gates cannot yet be replaced as there is a gas pipe that needs to be moved.
- OCOP H3.1/CaEE 10a – The flood alleviation scheme is no longer being implemented as planned by the Environment Agency. Alternative options are now being explored

- OCOP H4.1 – The council continues to look for an additional site for a cemetery within the district but has had difficulty in identifying a location that is suitable and available.

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

- Despite the delays and amendments to the flood alleviation scheme it is the aim for measures to be put in place for 2026. However natural flood management measures, such planting more trees are being considered in the interim.
- The structural survey of the existing automatic flood gates was due to be completed this autumn but was delayed by a leak on the gas pipe adjacent to the site. Cadent should now be able resolve this in the new year.
- The council is committed to our responsibility to continue to offer cremation and burial services and will continue to look for potential sites.
- Where a new housing development is built, the guidelines around additional community infrastructure, such as schools, that the developer must support is not based entirely on the number of properties being built, it also considers an assessment of need and the capacity of the current infrastructure.
- The café at Hylands is due to close on 24th December as the current occupiers are leaving and the successful applicant in the tender process has withdrawn. A replacement is going to be sought and temporary options are being explored for the interim period. The committee was reassured that there was no concern that this was related to the introduction of parking charges at Hylands Park in November 2021.
- The council is exploring options for broadcasting meetings that are currently not accessible online. Committees will be considered on an individual basis.
- The council understands that there is a shortage of GPs locally, but not GP surgeries, officers are in discussion with the health service about how we can support them with this.
- Delivery of ultra-low emissions vehicles has been delayed due to manufacturer supply issues.

RESOLVED that;

- The Committee thanked officers for their continued efforts.
- The Committee will be circulated updates on annual tree planting targets, how we are engaging older people in active sports programmes and the progress of the survey of local businesses.

(7:46pm to 8:17pm)

9. Revenue Monitoring Update

The Committee was provided with a high-level view of the anticipated expenditure and income for the year ending 31st March 2022.

Financial uncertainty and high inflation are the key factors impacting the councils' finances. It was noted that business rates had however exceeded their anticipated income.

Budget variations, which are a result of varying factors (e.g. staff pay award, low income from car parks and inflation) mean that the council is anticipating a shortfall of £1.1 million in 2022/2023.

It was again noted that these concerns are echoed across the country and that the situation is very transient. The committee were encouraged to bear in mind that these figures are the best predictions that could be provided based on the current situation.

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

- The council regularly reviews the existing charges for services, including for car parks. It is understood that the reduced income from car parks was not due to concerns related to the charges but due to changes in customer activity. The cabinet portfolio holder for fairer Chelmsford confirmed that they are reviewing the data related to fees and charges and an update will follow.

RESOLVED that;

- The Committee noted the financial pressures the Council is under;
- Offered their support and thanks to accountancy services for their work in helping to tackle this issue.

(8.17pm to 8.32pm)

10. Cultural Services Presentation and Terms of Reference for a Task and Finish Group

The Committee received a presentation from city council officers alongside their external partners from Culture Chelmsford and Seriously Inclusive. [The presentation can be viewed via this link.](#) They outlined the values and priorities of the city council's museum and theatre and detailed some of the initiatives that are currently being delivered and developed. The continued partnership with Ignite was also highlighted, alongside some of the successful projects that have been delivered in collaboration.

An update was provided on the arts council funding that had been awarded to establish a Cultural Education Partnership and the progress that has already been made in allocating this through 3 workstreams. The goal of these projects is to encourage inclusivity, drive change and seek inward investment.

It is considered a key focus of this project that the benefits are not just seen in the city centre but across the whole district area. They are therefore seeking support from city councillors through a task and finish group to engage with their local communities to meet 3 main goals, to:

- Ensure that projects are inclusive of marginalised communities
- Help communicate the contribution of culture
- Aide in the delivery of the action plan

The task and finish group would begin assisting the project in December, building on research and planning that has already begun, with the aim for the final strategy to be published in January and events to be launched in February.

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

- The council is exploring hosting diverse events at the museum to help engage with the community and boost income e.g. corporate hire and community events.
- The council is exploring membership/loyalty schemes to the theatre. This is separate to the creative membership which will be open to anyone that wishes to participate.

RESOLVED that;

- The Committee would receive a breakdown of ticket sales and attendance for both theatres.
- A task and finish group to support this project was agreed, with the aim to report back to a meeting scheduled ahead of the pre-election period, a date for which will be agreed at a later date.
- Membership of the task and finish group will be agreed before the end of the week commencing 21 November.

The membership was later agreed to be:

Cllr K. Bentley

Cllr J. Deakin

Cllr R. Lee

Cllr C. Shaw

Cllr J. Sosin

Cllr M Steel

Cllr A. Thorpe-Apps

(7:06pm to 7:35pm)

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

The committee received an update on the urgency decisions taken by the chief executive in the period of 1 June 2022 to 11 November 2022.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

12. Work Programme

The Committee considered a report on its work programme which had been updated following the last meeting on 26 September 2022 to reflect the arrangements agreed at the last meeting.

At the request of members, a new item has been added to the future work schedule to reflect a task and finish group to review the theatre refurbishment project, once the project is complete. The terms of reference for this group will be circulated to the committee for agreement before membership is agreed.

The task and finish group would be set up on a confidential basis with 7 cross party members.

RESOLVED that

- The work programme be agreed.
- The terms of reference for the task and finish group be circulated by the end of the week commencing 21 November 2022 for agreement.
- The terms of reference and membership of the group to be agreed by 5 December 2022.
- The meeting scheduled for 24 April 2023 will be cancelled and a new date will be arranged in March.

(8:32pm to 8:40pm)

14. Urgent Business

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

The meeting closed at 8:44pm.