



Scrutiny Panel

Item
14

5 July 2021

Report of	Assistant Director, Corporate and Improvement Services	Author	Owen Howell Tel. 282518
Title	Annual Scrutiny Report		
Wards affected	Not Applicable		

This is a report setting out the work of the Scrutiny Panel during 2021/22

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the work of the Scrutiny Panel during 2021/22 and requests that the Panel recommend the report to Full Council for approval on 19 October 2022.

2. Action Required

- 2.1 The Panel is asked to consider and comment on the draft Annual Scrutiny Report.
- 2.2 The Panel is asked to recommend this report to Full Council for approval on 19 October 2022.

3. Background Information

- 3.1 The Constitution states the Scrutiny Panel shall report annually to the Full Council on its work and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate.
- 3.2 The purpose of the report is to inform the Council of the work undertaken by the Scrutiny Panel, and for the Full Council to form an opinion of the effectiveness of the scrutiny function. The final report will be submitted to Full Council for consideration and approval following endorsement by Scrutiny Panel members.
- 3.3 This Scrutiny Report is a descriptive record of the scrutiny reviews undertaken by the Scrutiny Panel in 2021/22.

4. Standard and Strategic Plan References

- 4.1 Scrutiny and challenge is integral to the delivery of the Strategic Plan 2020-2023 priorities and direction for the Borough as set out under the strategic themes of:
- [Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability](#)
 - [Creating safe, healthy and active communities](#)
 - [Delivering homes for people who need them](#)
 - [Growing a fair economy so everyone benefits](#)
 - [Celebrating our heritage and culture](#)

- 4.2 The Council recognises that effective local government relies on establishing and maintaining the public's confidence, and that setting high standards of self-governance provides a clear and demonstrable lead. Effective governance underpins the implementation and application of all aspects of the Council's work.

5. Appendices

- 5.1 Appendix A – Draft Scrutiny Panel Annual Report 2021-22.

Scrutiny Panel Annual Report 2021-22

This Annual Report demonstrates the contribution made by the Scrutiny Panel at Colchester Borough Council.

Scrutiny Panel Role

The role of the Scrutiny Panel is to examine the policies and strategies from a Borough-wide perspective and ensure that the actions of the Cabinet accord with the Council's policies and budget. The Panel also reviews corporate strategies that form the Council's Strategic Plan, Council partnerships and the Council's budgetary guidelines, and scrutinises Cabinet or Portfolio Holder decisions which have been called in.

The Scrutiny Panel in 2021/22

The function of the Scrutiny Panel continued to be important, given the challenges faced by the Council in addressing the continuing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the formation of a new Council Administration in May 2021. Pressures on the Budget required the Council to address changes in income and to continue to provide services in a safe but successful manner under difficult circumstances. As a consequence, the Council was required to continue to innovate and look for different ways which enabled the continued delivery of vital services throughout the Borough, whilst minimising costs. The Scrutiny Panel played an important role in examining the strategic decision making relating to the Council's delivery of services.

The Panel continued to carry out its annual programme of scrutinising the Council's financial affairs, budget setting and performance against its Strategic Plan.

The success of Scrutiny Panel reviews depended on the involvement of Councillors, Council officers, partner organisations, expert witnesses and members of the public, and the Chairman of the Scrutiny Panel would like to thank everyone for their contribution to the work of the Scrutiny Panel in 2021/22.

Call-ins

The general low level of call-ins and matters of urgency on Scrutiny Panel agendas suggests that the governance arrangements within the Council are working effectively.

No call-ins were received by the Scrutiny Panel during 2021-22

Decisions taken under urgency provisions

Certain decisions were noted as having been taken under urgency provisions within the Constitution, with these decisions relating to the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Decisions taken by Cabinet or Portfolio Holders

under urgency provisions are decisions made to take immediate action on urgent matters, which must then be reported on to the Scrutiny Panel at the earliest possible meeting. Such decisions are not subject to the usual decision making/call in process.

One decision was taken under special urgency provisions during 2021-22, at the Panel meeting on 15 March 2022, and which related to the awarding of the contract for refurbishment and decarbonising of Rowan House. Over £500k of Government funding had been provided for this work. Changes in the building sector had necessitated a series of changes to the plans to ensure these remained within budget; this had delayed the procurement process. To ensure that the Government funding was not lost, the decision had to be taken and contract awarded before the Government's deadline elapsed on 14 March 2022. This was the reason for the use of the urgent decision provisions and the lack of call-in period. Approval for this had been sought and granted by the Chairman of Scrutiny Panel, and the decision report and documents had been circulated to the Scrutiny Panel prior to this meeting.

The Scrutiny Panel underlined the importance of strong decision making and the fundamental importance of the right of councillors to call in decisions about which they held serious concerns for scrutiny by the Panel. Whilst it was accepted that there were occasional needs to use urgency provisions, the Panel underlined the importance of gaining an explanation as to why the decisions had to be taken under the Council's protocol for urgent decisions. Richard Block, Assistant Director for Corporate and Improvement, underlined the Council's reticence to use urgent decision provisions unless absolutely necessary, and noted that this was a rarity, with this being the first urgent decision necessary in the 2021-22 municipal year. If the decision had not been taken in this fashion, it would have cost £500k extra to the Council, to make up for the lost Government funding.

Pre-decision scrutiny of decision making.

During 2021/22 the Scrutiny Panel conducted proactive scrutiny of key areas of decision making by Cabinet, including the setting of Key Performance Indicator Targets, and the process for drafting the Council's Budget for 2022-23.

Setting of Corporate Key Performance Indicator [KPI] targets for 2022-23

On 22 February 2022 the Scrutiny Panel was presented with the proposed KPI targets for 2022-23, many of which were recommended for remaining at the current levels, whilst others had been recommended to return to pre-Pandemic levels, now that service delivery was returning to normal in certain areas of the Council's operations. A new KPI target was proposed for homelessness, which was easier to understand than the previous target and could be benchmarked against other local authorities' performance. This was welcomed by the Panel.

The Panel noted that the target for 'Residual household waste per household' [K1W1] had been proposed to stay static. A member of the Panel suggested that the Council should challenge itself to find opportunities to reduce this. The Assistant Director explained that this was challenging, due to the increase in home working, which was likely to remain to some extent in 2022-23. The target for 'Household waste reused, recycled and composted' [K1W2] was recommended for returning to the pre-pandemic target of 55%, up from 53%. The Panel urged consideration of greater opportunities to promote home recycling options.

The Panel discussed the target for processing housing benefit claims and changes, and Local Council Tax claims and changes. The Assistant Director expanded upon the report to explain that performance here remained strong and well above target. The targets proposed gave a degree of 'slack' but still ensured that performance remained strong and would ensure that the Council continued to perform well in comparison to benchmark performance levels.

A Panel member noted that it would take some time before the effects of the pandemic worked through the system and before long-term changes to targets could be considered without the pandemic affecting them.

It was recommended that Cabinet campaigned and pushed to achieve a reduction in household waste produced and an increase in household recycling. Cabinet approved this recommendation at its meeting on 8 June 2022.

Colchester Borough Homes performance targets for 2022-23

The Scrutiny Panel also considered the draft performance targets for the Council's Arms-Length Management Organisation [ALMO] responsible for managing the Council's stock of housing and corporate premises. These targets were set out for five years in the Medium-Term Delivery Plan and the Government's agenda was changing, with a greater emphasis on compliance, safety, and satisfaction of tenants. The Panel were told that the Housing regulator was consulting on new key performance indicators [KPIs] for repairs.

The target for gas servicing had been removed and a new suite of compliance indicators would be provided to the Council to ensure safety. Work on sustainable homes was set out in the Asset Management Strategy and the aim was for all stock to receive an EPC [Energy Performance Certificate] rating of at least a Band C by 2030. The Panel discussed whether benchmark data could be obtained regarding property energy performance and how the Council compared to other local authorities. The Client Services Manager confirmed that benchmarking could be applied to all targets and that this would be shown when the Panel considers CBH's performance in the Summer of 2022.

Compliments were paid by the Panel for the streamlining of targets and the improvements made.

Returning to an earlier question as to whether a breakdown of performance against the target time for reletting Council properties could be given, broken down to show relet times for properties needing different levels of maintenance work, The Director of Operations explained that this would partly depend on what properties the benchmarking group measured and how they were measured. The definition of major works on void [empty] properties was fluid, but had been tightened. This normally referred to works necessitated by a property being ruled as uninhabitable without such works being carried out. There had been a decrease in relet numbers over time, as pressure on the housing stock continued to rise. Where there were fewer relets, it took fewer lengthy relets to skew the figures.

A Panel member asked if there was any indication as to the percentage of applicants on the housing register who had moved to the area to take advantage of potentially less-strict requirements to get on to the register here than elsewhere. The Director of Operations gave assurance that applicants needed to show a local connection to join the register, such as having family

locally or having local residency for at least six of the previous twelve months. The Homelessness Reduction Act had changed the criteria for owing a duty to house. The Director of Operations offered to provide the figures to members but confirmed that there were not many who moved to the area and then joined the housing register.

The Scrutiny Panel were given assurance by explanations of the proposed targets and did not make any recommendations for changes.

Budget setting for 2022-23

At its meeting on 25 January 2022, Scrutiny Panel scrutinised the draft Budget 2022-23, Capital Programme and Medium-Term Financial Forecast.

Praise was given for the usefulness of the budget workshops which had been held for members. These allowed members to go over subjects such as changes to Minimum Revenue Provision [MRP] and the likely impacts.

The Panel raised questions and discussed issues such as:

- The predicted drop from in capital financing from 2023-24 to 2025-26
- The Administration's stated aim to reduce use of New Homes Bonus [NHB] funds
- The main risks and mitigations relating to the revision of spending needs assessments
- The £623k allocated for one-off schemes in 2022-23
- The planned £250k spending on feasibility costs, and the £250k allocated for 'support to Tendring Colchester Borders and Local Plan'

A Panel member noted that the previous administration had not included some detail on future funding in their last budget and had been criticised. A comparison was drawn to the draft Budget for 2022-23, where similar details were again not present. It was asked if this would only become available once the chance for scrutiny was past.

The Panel discussed previous central government encouragements for local authorities to derive greater value from their assets, resulting in many authorities refocussing on commercial operations. The current approach of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government was said, by one Panel member, to seem to want to punish those councils which had done this. The Portfolio Holder was asked to explain how discussions with central government had gone and how other councils with wholly-owned companies were faring. The Portfolio Holder informed the Panel that the Administration had been concerned that some other councils were not as concerned about this as Colchester Borough Council was. Some finance officers of other authorities were not willing to discuss their situations and views as openly as those of the Council. Responses to the consultation on this needed to be submitted by the second week of February and the Council was waiting to see if the Government changed its approach and planned to submit a response nearer to the deadline date. A response was also expected from a group of finance officers from the local area.

The Panel considered the expectation that Council Tax levels would rise over time, with a Government review indicating this would likely rise by 9%-10% by 2024. The Portfolio Holder gave assurance that the Administration wished to retain as much Council Tax income locally as possible, but argued that the need for these funds at Essex County Council, especially for adult social care, was

huge. Explanations were given for the expected increases in Council Tax levels, linked to increasing needs and pressure on services, including increased lifespan of residents. Around 80% of the County Council's income from Council Tax was spent on adult social care. A Panel member suggested that this indicated a need for the restoration of central government grants and argued that the levels of fraud being reported in central government could be used as a reason to lobby for better use of public money locally rather than centrally.

2022-23 Housing Revenue Account estimates and Housing Investment Programme

On 25 January 2022, the Panel considered and discussed the reports provided which detailed the next year's rent increases, which were in line with Government Policy, and the trading position of Colchester Borough Homes [CBH].

Darren Brown, Finance Manager, indicated how easy or difficult it would be to meet the interest cost of HRA debt and highlighted that the Capital Investment Programme was based on investment needs and showed provisions for work on Elfreda House and the refurbishment of sheltered housing.

The Panel questioned and discussed matters such as:

- Investments in the Shrub End Depot by the Council, and no new investment being provided by the County Council.
- The continued building of housing by the Council
- The operations of CBH, the Amphora Companies, and their relationships with the Council
- Changes to 'Right to Buy' receipts introduced in the previous year, including the ability to use a portion of receipts on new shared-ownership homes

The Panel praised the high level of detail in the reports provided, stating that these were laid out in a way that was helpful for non-experts to understand, and approved the approaches and recommended decisions laid out for presentation to Cabinet for approval on 26 January 2022. Cabinet subsequently concurred and approved the recommended decisions.

Prominent Reviews at Colchester Borough Council

The Scrutiny Panel held a number of reviews during 2021/22.

Budget Strategy 2022/23, Transformation and Youth Zones

At its meeting on 20 July 2021, the Panel reviewed progress on the Budget Strategy 2022-23 and Transformation Programme. The Panel indicated that it would like to pre-scrutinise budget reports in future and requested that the timetable of meetings be reviewed to ensure that there was a Scrutiny meeting preceding Cabinet meeting, to facilitate pre scrutiny. Accordingly, on 12 October 2022, the Scrutiny Panel reviewed the Council's financial position and work on the Budget Strategy for 2022-23 and the Medium-Term Financial Forecast [MTFF].

It was noted at that time that some assumptions would not be fully understandable until January, but satisfactory progress had been made thus far in the budget-setting process.

The Panel held discussions as to planned youth service provision, the potential for the Council to proceed with work to initiate and build a Youth Zone in the Borough, and the recommendation from officers that this be removed from the MTFF at that time. The view from Adrian Pritchard, Chief Executive, had been that annual revenue costs to the Council would be likely closer to £1m per year, rather than £400k. Councillor Sue Lissimore, Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources posited Cabinet's position that, if a Youth Zone was to be pursued, specificity was needed as to what cuts members wished to make to Council spending in order to fund it, and the view that it was more appropriate to work collaboratively with the County Council to improve its youth service provision. The Chief Operating Officer underlined the statutory duty for the Council to present a balanced budget, accompanied by a robust MTFF. It was explained that content relating to a Youth Zone could be reintroduced into the MTFF in January 2022, if alternative budgetary options could be found to make it possible.

A sub-group of the Scrutiny Panel was agreed in order further investigate as to whether any additional funding sources could be found to provide the additional funding necessary for such a project to go ahead.

The Portfolio Holder for resources and the Head of Finance participated in the Panel's discussions and gave additional detail regarding the re-profiled income budget for parking income, the Council's work on Disabled Facilities Grants adaptations, and the approach to mitigating increasing pressures on the Council's Budget.

At its meeting on 25 January 2022, the Scrutiny Panel heard back from the sub-group which reported its recommendations. These were discussed and the following recommendations agreed for putting to Cabinet for approval:

RECOMMENDED to CABINET that Cabinet consider and approve the following points and recommendations put forward by the sub-group on Youth Zones: -

- (a) The sub-group is disappointed at the missed opportunity to provide a Youth Zone for Colchester via the Town Deal but accepts that a Youth Zone will not form one of the Town Deal projects.
- (b) The sub-group recommends that, in the short- to medium-term, the Council cooperates with Essex County Council to boost youth services throughout the Borough, such as those at the Town House, supporting these and an increase in outreach activities.
- (c) It was noted that the aspiration for a Youth Zone had cross-party support in principle. The sub-group recommends that an ambition be maintained for a Youth Zone to be completed in Colchester Borough by 2027.
- (d) It is recommended that the Council continue to engage with Onside to outline the Council's ambitions and expectations, and to understand Onside's criteria for optimum site selection and critical issues for inclusion in a business case for a Youth Zone serving Colchester Borough.
- (e) It is also recommended that the Council engages with the One Colchester Partnership to take the ambition of a Youth Zone from principle to reality, including ways to gain contributions from partners.

The sub-group is convinced that, for a Youth Zone to successfully serve the whole Borough, the concomitant public or project-specific transport plan for the proposed location must be comprehended, costed, and funded to guarantee that a future Youth Zone in the Borough is accessible to all.

Pam Donnelly, Strategic Director of Customer and Relationships, informed the Panel that the One Colchester Board was due to meet on 26 January 2022 and agreed to raise this subject with the Board. It was restated that the Council was not the statutory provider of youth services, but assurance was given that the Council could have a significant influence on the creation of an environment where a Youth Zone would be possible and could work with the charity Onside, who worked on supporting the setting up and acquiring of funding for these facilities. The One Colchester Board had much sympathy for aspirations for a Youth Zone. Youth engagement was wanted and would reduce antisocial behaviour and improve health outcomes. A Youth Zone would, however, be dependent on the support and leadership of statutory partners.

On 26 January 2022 Cabinet considered the Panel's recommendations as an Urgent Item. Cabinet made the following resolutions in response to the Panel's work:

- a) Cabinet thanks the Scrutiny Panel for their work in respect of a potential Youth Zone.
- b) Cabinet notes that there appears to be agreement a Youth Zone cannot proceed at this time. The opportunity for a Youth Zone was explored extensively but the Youth Zone was removed from the Town Deal Fund bid in early 2021 due to a lack of clarity around identifying a suitable site, the capital financing shortfall and the annual running costs.
- c) The recommendation from Cabinet on 13 October 2021 asked for a broad consensus on future funding, an agreed site, and a solution to incorporating the £400,000 or above annual cost in the budget to be identified. The lack of specific recommendations on these leads Cabinet to deduce that the Panel agrees that there is no current acceptable way of incorporating a Youth Zone in the budget's Medium Term Financial Forecast.
- d) Cabinet fully agrees with the recommendation that, in the short to medium-term, the Council cooperates with Essex County Council to boost youth services throughout the Borough, such as those at the Town House, supporting these and an increase in outreach activities.
- e) Cabinet notes and agrees that the aspiration for a Youth Zone had cross-party support in principle. Cabinet accepts the Panel's recommendation that an ambition be maintained for a Youth Zone to be completed in Colchester Borough by 2027. However, to achieve this target a suitable site will need to be identified quickly and gain wide cross-party Councillor support as due to the nature of long term planning and master-planning the necessary land will need to be reserved.
- f) Cabinet accepts the recommendation that the Council continue to engage with Onside to outline the Council's ambitions and expectations, and to understand Onside's criteria for optimum site selection and critical issues for inclusion in a business case for a Youth Zone serving

Colchester Borough. However Cabinet is disappointed that the Scrutiny Panel have failed to suggest any specific potential sites.

- g) Cabinet accepts the recommendation that the Council engages with One Colchester Partnership to take the ambition of a Youth Zone from principle to reality, including ways to gain contributions from partners but it should be noted One Colchester does not have the necessary financial resources itself for a project of this magnitude.
- h) Cabinet agrees with the Panel's comment that, for a Youth Zone to successfully serve the whole Borough, the concomitant public or project-specific transport plan for the proposed location must be comprehended, costed and funded to guarantee that a future Youth Zone in the Borough is accessible to all.

Review of Colchester Borough Homes Performance 2020-21

The annual performance review for Colchester Borough Homes [CBH] was presented by Dirk Paterson, Chairman of the CBH Board, Philip Sullivan, Chief Executive of CBH, and Lyndsay Barker, the Council's Strategic Director of Policy & Place.

Tribute was paid to the work of CBH during the course of the pandemic, including work to maintain service delivery and crucial maintenance work. In November 2020, the Council's Cabinet signed a five-year extension to the Management Agreement with the company. The two-year project to bring in a new housing management system had been completed in August 2021, on time and on budget. In other work, new housing had been completed in places such as Creffield Road [Colchester] and Hardings Close [Fordham], and the renovation of Elfreda House accomplished.

The Chairman of the Board highlighted the strength of the organisation and the oversight provided by the Board, and also by the Council's bodies such as Scrutiny Panel. The Chairman thanked the former Chief Executive, Gareth Mitchell, for his contribution to the Company, as well as the Directors of Operations and Business Improvement for their work as joint interim Chief Executives, prior to the unanimous decision to appoint Philip Sullivan to the position.

The data on performance and tenants was presented and discussed, alongside information on the main areas of work for the Company. All service areas were now judged to be high-performing and low-cost within the benchmarking work carried out by independent assessors, HouseMark.

The Panel discussed the partnership work conducted by CBH during lockdowns, including with the One Colchester Partnership, as well as the excellent performance of the Company during the pandemic, maintaining full gas safety certification on properties, disabled adaption works and widespread insulation of properties (160 properties in total). Praise was given to the communications carried out to show what CBH was doing, aimed at both the public and members.

The Chief Executive, Chairman of the Board and the Council's Strategic Director of Policy & Place answered a broad range of Committee questions on topics such as interim and temporary accommodation, repair work on empty [void] properties, the Administration, committal to increasing the housing supply,

data collected on tenant demographics, work on antisocial behaviour and increased resident empowerment and opportunities.

The Scrutiny Panel discussed and questioned its guests as to how the CBH/Council relationship could be managed so as to maximise what the Company could offer to the Council and the Borough, and how to ensure efficiency in working between CBH, the Council and the Amphora companies. Formal officer meetings strengthened the relationship, including quarterly four-way meetings between CBH and the Council. These and other meetings ensured that Council scrutiny was effective. It was noted that there had been other councils which had taken back control of their housing stock, dissolving their Arm's Length Management Organisations. These were examples of where relationships had broken down. The Chairman of the Board explained that it was largely for the Council to explain what work it wanted from the Company. Suggestions for new partnership working were always welcome. The Strategic Director of Policy & Place described the Council/CBH relationship as being mature, where challenging discussions could be held. The Chairman of the Board explained that CBH was structured very differently to the Amphora companies and, whilst it was important for them to work well together, it would not be appropriate for CBH to comment on the work of Colchester Commercial Holdings. The Strategic Director of Policy & Place gave an example of collaborative working being the '100 Homes' project. Funding and specifications were provided by the Council, whilst maintenance and management of the new properties would be conducted by CBH.

A request was made that future reviews include greater information on performance data and the benchmarking work conducted by HouseMark.

Although the Panel made no official recommendations, the Strategic Director of Policy & Place gave assurance that the points and suggestions from the Panel would be taken forward to future conversations with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and with CBH.

Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2022-23

The Scrutiny Panel examined and discussed the proposed Scheme for 2022-23.

The Panel discussed the proposals, welcoming the avoidance of reductions, and asked for details of the metrics used to inform the decision to recommend 'no change.' The increase in uptake and the planned review of the situation in January 2022 were queried, including questions as to what exactly would be reviewed in January 2022. The Group Manager explained that officers had consulted regularly with colleagues from across Essex. Colchester's scheme remained one of the most generous, and there was no appetite shown by other authorities to change their schemes. The January review, by Cabinet, would be to ensure the situation regarding uptake, Covid effects etc would continue to be monitored.

Officers were asked whether the Council could be even more generous, especially in helping the most vulnerable, and whether the January review would be too late to effectively identify and mitigate impacts on household incomes. The Group Manager explained that the Scheme and eligibility would be set by Full Council in December 2021, to meet the statutory deadline in place. Comprehensive analysis had been carried out as part of the long process

to get to this point, and, in answer to questions as to whether approval could be delayed, a delay would risk the deadline being missed.

The view was expressed by a Panel member that it would assist the Panel's work to see the comparative data from other local authorities which was used to inform the recommendations of officers on this item. Furthermore, the inclusion of any benchmarking data in reports, where possible, was extolled as a way to help scrutiny be effectively carried out. The Group Manager explained that the benchmarking data had been provided to the Portfolio Holder and agreed to work with the Portfolio Holder to expand the future Cabinet and Council reports on this item to show this data.

Partnership arrangements

Business cases of Town Deal Projects

On 15 February 2022 the Scrutiny Panel conducted an in-depth scrutiny session on the business case of each Town Deal project. Whilst these were overseen by the 'We are Colchester' Board, the Council was the accountable body for the projects, and had a significant investment of officer resource in the projects' management and progression.

Review of Arts Organisations in receipt of Council funding.

The Scrutiny Panel holds an annual session to hear from the local arts organisations which receive Council funding, namely The Mercury Theatre, FirstSite and the Colchester Arts Centre. This was carried out on 22 February 2022.

Representatives of the three organisations briefed the Panel on the effects of Covid-19 on their operations, the outreach work they had conducted during the year and on specific highlights. Following direction from the Panel, the representatives gave information as to the positive effects that Council funding had had on their operations, and their work to comply with the requirements laid out in the funding agreements which they had signed with the Council. This included work on increasing outreach and accessibility to people from demographics which often experienced greater difficulties in engaging with arts organisations. Plans for the future were likewise scrutinised.

The Panel scrutinised funding which had been leveraged, in part, because of the Council's funding. It also discussed performance, partnership working, outreach work, environmental sustainability, press coverage generated, social return on investment and the increased employment and training opportunities provided to local residents.

One Colchester Partnership

The Scrutiny Panel requested the opportunity to question officers of the Council and representatives of One Colchester Partnership and to scrutinise the governance and oversight arrangements introduced when the Safer Colchester Partnership was moved to fall under the oversight of the One Colchester Partnership. A scrutiny session for this was arranged for the Panel's meeting on 15 March 2022, however this was postponed until 2022-23 when the main

speaker, Tracy Rudling, Chief Executive of Community 360, was unable to attend owing to illness.

Scrutiny Panel operating as Crime & Disorder Committee

The Scrutiny Panel sat as the Crime and Disorder Committee to review the performance and operation of the Safer Colchester Partnership on 14 September 2021. An additional meeting was also scheduled for 15 February 2022, however the Scrutiny Panel replaced this with a Panel meeting, in order to give enough time to scrutinise the business cases for the Town Deal projects.

The review held by the Crime and Disorder Committee provided information on the work of the Safer Colchester Partnership during 2021/22, the new governance model of the Partnership now operating within the One Colchester Partnership, the work of the Council, and provided updates from partner organisations covering their work over the year. Additional detail was given on work done to tackle priorities, such as reducing violent offences, exploitation, 'hidden harms', County Lines gangs and the supporting of vulnerable individuals, including action to reduce suicide rates.

The Committee questioned the statistics relating to use of 'stop and search' powers, with Police assurance being given that these powers were used as part of an intelligence-led approach and were only used when it was deemed to be an appropriate and proportionate way to proceed.

The Committee were briefed on approaches to tackling rural crime and antisocial behaviour, including the work of the Rural Engagement Team, and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's encouragement of a scheme to post officers in villages through the Borough.

The Committee examined further matters, such as likely effects of the merging of probationary services, the work of the Police's Town Centre Team, noise complaints, fly-tipping and other antisocial behaviour levels and changes to partners' operations to reflect the provisions within the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.

The Committee was given assurance that Colchester Borough compared favourably compared to many other parts of Essex. The overall conviction rate relating to offences within the Borough was given as being 19%.

The Committee thanked the representatives for attending the meetings and responding to members' questions and noted the work of the Partnership. In response to questions from members regarding the governance arrangements now in place for the Safer Colchester Partnership and relating to the One Colchester Partnership, the Committee resolved that an item would be brought before the Scrutiny Panel on this subject later in the year, to allow an in depth scrutiny session to be held.

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA)

There were no CCfA issues brought to the attention of Scrutiny Panel during 2021/22.

Task and Finish Groups

There were no Task and Finish Groups commissioned by the Scrutiny Panel 2021/22. The Panel did form a sub-group to examine potential funding sources and sites for a Youth Zone; the details of this can be found above in the section on prominent reviews conducted during the year.

Appendix

Appendix A – Schedule of Meetings and Reviews for 2021/22.

Schedule of meetings and reviews

Scrutiny Panel 2021 /22

Councillor Cory (Chairman)*, Councillor Bourne (Deputy Chairman)*, Councillor Barton, Councillor Chapman, Councillor Loveland, Councillor Whitehead, Councillor Willetts, Councillor Wood.

8 June 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work Programme 2021-22
20 July 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year End 2020/21 Performance Report and Strategic Plan Action Plan 2018-21 • Budget Strategy and Transformation Programme • Annual Scrutiny Report • Work Programme 2021-22
17 August 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Town Deal • Work Programme 2021-22
14 September 2021 (Crime and Disorder Committee)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safer Colchester Partnership (Crime and Disorder Committee)
12 October 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Colchester Borough Homes: 2020-21 Performance • Local Council Tax Support – Year 2022/23 • Budget Strategy for 2022-23 • Work Programme 2021-22
9 November 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolio Holder Briefing from Cllr Dundas [Strategy and Leader of the Council] • Work Programme 2021-22
14 December 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolio Holder Briefing from Cllr Lissimore [Resources and Deputy Leader] • Half Year 2021-22 Performance Report & Strategic Plan Action Plan progress • Budget Strategy for 2022-23 • Work Programme 2021-22
25 January 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolio Holder Briefing from Cllr Oxford [Communities] • 2022-23 Revenue Budget, Capital Programme, Medium Term Financial Forecast and Treasury Management Investment Strategy

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Revenue Accounts Estimate and Housing Investment Programme • Recommendation from Panel sub-group on Youth Zones • Work Programme 2021-22
15 February 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolio Holder Briefing from Cllr Laws [Economy, Business and Heritage] • Business cases of Town Deal projects • Work Programme 2021-22
22 February 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolio Holder Briefing from Cllr Ellis [Housing and Planning] • Reports from Arts Organisations (Mercury, The Arts Centre, FirstSite) • Corporate Key Performance Indicator Targets for 2022-23 • Colchester Borough Homes: Key Performance Indicator Targets for 2022-23
15 March 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolio Holder Briefing from Cllr Crow [Environment and Sustainability] • One Colchester Partnership/Safer Colchester Partnership [cancelled due to illness of key guest/presenter]