

Cabinet Meeting

**Grand Jury Room, Town Hall, High Street,
Colchester, CO1 1PJ
Wednesday, 12 October 2022 at 18:00**

The Cabinet deals with the implementation of all Council services, putting into effect the policies agreed by Full Council and making recommendations to Full Council on policy issues and the budget.

Information for Members of the Public

Access to information and meetings

You have the right to attend all meetings of the Council, its Committees and Cabinet. You also have the right to see the agenda (the list of items to be discussed at a meeting), which is usually published five working days before the meeting, and minutes once they are published. Dates of the meetings are available here:

<https://colchester.cmis.uk.com/colchester/MeetingCalendar.aspx>.

Most meetings take place in public. This only changes when certain issues, for instance, commercially sensitive information or details concerning an individual are considered. At this point you will be told whether there are any issues to be discussed in private, if so, you will be asked to leave the meeting.

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Access

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Facilities

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Colchester Borough Council

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COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL
Cabinet
Wednesday, 12 October 2022 at 18:00

Leader and Chair	Councillor King (Liberal Democrats) Councillor Cory (Liberal Democrats) Councillor Cox (Labour) Councillor Fox (Labour) Councillor Goss (Liberal Democrats) Councillor Luxford Vaughan (Liberal Democrats) Councillor Nissen (Green) Councillor J. Young (Labour)
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AGENDA
THE LIST OF ITEMS TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING
(Part A - open to the public)

1 Welcome and Announcements

The Chairman will welcome members of the public and Councillors to the meeting and remind those participating to mute their microphones when not talking. The Chairman will invite all Councillors and Officers participating in the meeting to introduce themselves.

2 Urgent Items

The Chairman will announce if there is any item not on the published agenda which will be considered because it is urgent and will explain the reason for the urgency.

3 Declarations of Interest

Councillors will be asked to say if there are any items on the agenda about which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest which would prevent them from participating in any discussion of the item or participating in any vote upon the item, or any other pecuniary interest or non-pecuniary interest.

4 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Cabinet will be invited to confirm that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2022 are a correct record.

5 **Have Your Say!**

Members of the public may make representations to the meeting. This can be made in person at the meeting. Each representation may be no longer than three minutes. It is helpful if members of the public wishing to address the meeting register their wish to intention to do so by e-mailing democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk by 12.00 noon on the working day before the meeting date. However there is no absolute requirement to pre-register and members of the public may register in person immediately before the meeting.

6 **Decisions Reviewed by the Scrutiny Panel**

The Councillors will consider the outcome of a review of a decision by the Scrutiny Panel under the call-in procedure. At the time of the publication of this agenda, there were none.

7 **Strategy**

7(i) **Update on Progress in Delivering Cabinet Vision and Priorities** 19 - 24

Cabinet will receive a report providing an update on progress against its strategic priorities, including a presentation on the Council's response to the Cost of Living Crisis.

7(ii) **Cost of Living Crisis - Council Response** 25 - 30

Cabinet will consider the recommendation from the Policy Panel in respect of the Council Response to the Cost of Living Crisis.

7(iii) **Policy Panel Work Programme** 31 - 32

Cabinet will consider a recommendation from the Policy Panel in respect of the Panel's Work Programme.

8 **Housing and Communities**

8(i) **Colchester's Housing Strategy 2022-27** 33 - 36

Cabinet will consider the recommendation made by the Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 5 July 2022.

9 General

9(i) Progress of Responses to the Public 37 - 38

Cabinet will be invited to note a report containing details of the progress of responses to members of the public who have addressed meetings of the Cabinet and Council under the Have Your Say! provisions.

10 Exclusion of the Public (Cabinet)

In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and in accordance with The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 to exclude the public, including the press, from the meeting so that any items containing exempt information (for example personal, financial or legal advice), in Part B of this agenda (printed on yellow paper) can be decided. (Exempt information is defined in Section 100I and Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972).

**Part B
(not open to the public including the press)**

<p style="text-align: center;">CABINET 7 September 2022</p>

Present: - Councillor King (Chair)
Councillors Cory, Fox, Goss, Luxford Vaughan, J. Young

Also in attendance: Councillors Law, Laws, Naylor, Sunnucks

681. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 6 July 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

682. Financial Assistance Policy

The Assistant Director, Communities, submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor J. Young, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities, introduced the report. This policy aimed to support the most vulnerable and needy. Examples of the financial assistance it could provide were grants for the provision of stairlifts, which were not means tested, or fast track home improvement grants of up to £30,000.

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, also expressed his support for the policy which was an example of the Council receiving funding and then pushing it out to vulnerable residents as soon as possible. It was a result of effective partnership working with health and social care.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, emphasised the need for effective communication to residents about the financial assistance that was available.

RESOLVED that the Financial Assistance Policy be adopted.

REASONS

The revised Financial Assistance Policy focuses on clarifying the delivery of the Mandatory DFG, and the Discretionary forms of assistance, widening the scope of the policy to support more residents.

The revised Financial Assistance Policy continues the existing discretionary forms of assistance:

- Disabled Facilities Assistance (DFA) is available to help eligible applicants to fund the cost of adaptations that are not covered by, or exceed the Mandatory DFG, up to a maximum of £30,000. The DFA can also be applied for when applicants are assessed to have a contribution but are unable to raise the funds required to enable works to proceed. The DFA is a repayable form of assistance when the property is sold, transferred, or rented by the owners.
- Home Repair Loan (HRL) is available to provide help to eliminate or reduce to an acceptable level, any significant risks and hazards in owner occupied homes up to £30,000. The council undertakes a HHSRS inspection to determine what hazards exist in the property. The outcome of this inspection will constitute the qualifying works. The HRL is a repayable form of assistance when the property is sold, transferred, or rented by the owners.
- Fast-Track Grant (FTG) is available to support and promote prompt hospital discharge and reablement, preventing avoidable Delayed Transfer of Care (DTOC) from hospital or care and the associated additional costs to health / social care services. In addition to supporting prompt discharge, the FTG also provides the ability to avoid admission, when a recognised risk such as falls has been identified by the referring Health Professional. The FTG is overseen by the Senior Occupational Therapist in Housing that is embedded within the Healthy Homes Team, in a partnership project with Essex County Council. The FTG is available up to a maximum of £30,000.

The new Stairlift Grant (SLG) is available to all residents, removing the requirement for a means test to improve the speed at which this common adaptation is delivered. Stairlifts provide access to essential facilities within the home, increasing independence for disabled adults and children. Stairlifts are usually a relatively straightforward installation requiring little in the way of other home alterations. Given their ease of installation they can provide a proportionally significant enhancement to the lives of those who need them. The introduction of this assistance provides consistency across North-East Essex following Tendring District Council's successful adoption in 2021.

The Covid19 pandemic in 2020 impacted delivery of DFGs nationally, with many councils being unable to undertake property inspection during lockdown for all but the most urgent of applications (usually Fast-Track Grants to enable discharge or prevent admission to hospital). As a result of the pandemic, national lockdowns, furlough and Covid infection rates, delivery has been impeded throughout 2020/21, 2021/22 and continues into 2022/23 with contractor availability being low, increasing waiting times to up to 3-6 months, and the rising cost and availability of materials. The new Stairlift Grant introduced by this policy will support maximising the spend of the allocation during these times when applicants are having to wait for long periods for contractor availability, keeping them as safe as possible when accessing essential areas of their home.

The revised Financial Assistance Policy discontinues underutilised forms of assistance in favour of prioritising the Mandatory and Discretionary forms of assistance detailed above.

Discontinued forms of assistance are:

- HMO Fire Safety Grant – a grant for landlords to meet legal requirements.
This grant has been discontinued due to this being a legal responsibility of the landlord under other regulations and a lack of uptake.
- Home Security Grant - to help households pay for urgent home security works.
This grant has been discontinued due to a lack of uptake. (There is potential that a new style of Home Security Grant could be introduced in the future. This may work in conjunction with other partners and will be brought back to the Portfolio Holder for consultation in the future).
- Empty Property Loans - provided on a discretionary basis to help bring empty properties back into residential use.
This form of assistance has been discontinued due to limited uptake and questionable affordability in the current market. One of the conditions is that the property would be subject to nomination rights for the council, but that the maximum achievable rent was set at the Local Housing Allowance (LHA). LHA is recognised as being under the market value. There is therefore potential that the conditions this assistance places on landlords could mean the venture is not financially viable and lead to the risk of poor-quality housing and maintenance due to a lack of income or that the accommodation may not be in place for the longer term.
Furthermore, these forms of assistance are time consuming to administer for council staff, are not subject to a fee or eligible under the DFG and takes staff away from delivering Mandatory assistance to other more vulnerable applicants.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Continue to operate under the 2008 Financial Assistance Policy (amended 2019) with existing forms of assistance. This option does not take advantage of the councils' powers under The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002 to introduce and widen discretionary forms of assistance to the local population and maintains the availability of outdated financial assistance.

683. Creation of a Northern Gateway Solar Park and Microgrid

The Assistant Director Place and Client Services submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Sir Bob Russell addressed Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) to request further information about the size of the Solar Park, what the land was used for at present and the value of the land. These issues were not addressed in the report. It was not clear how the creation of a solar park would improve biodiversity.

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, explained that he would confirm the overall size of the site, but that the proposed size of the Solar Park was 17 acres. The site had been purchased by the Council and it had allowed the use as a dog kennel to continue. The proposed Solar Park was a good use of the site. It would deliver green energy to north Colchester. It would provide energy security and deliver a financial return. There was an opportunity to increase biodiversity on the site.

Councillor Fox, Portfolio Holder for Local Economy and Transformation, undertook to provide a detailed response to the questions. In the current environment this was an important project which would deliver energy security and would contribute to the Council's commitment to addressing climate change.

Councillor Law attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed Cabinet in support of the project. The Northern Gateway was an exciting project which would deliver housing and business opportunities to the area. This would help ensure the development was sustainable by providing renewable energy. It demonstrated that the Council was able to take advantage of new technology. It was important there was effective messaging and communication to residents about the benefits of the project.

Councillor Fox, Portfolio Holder for Local Economy and Transformation, introduced the report and explained that Northern Gateway was an important development site which would deliver new employment opportunities and housing, in particular considerable affordable housing. It was important to support this development with a secure and efficient energy supply. The Solar Park would also help address grid capacity issues. It would provide a commercial return and would support the Council's climate change policies.

Following the vote on the resolution as below, Councillor Sunnucks attended and with the permission of the Chair, addressed Cabinet. Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for resources, had briefly already outlined Councillor Sunnucks concerns. He considered that Cabinet was being invited to make this decision on the basis of insufficient information. He would have expected more detailed information on the scheme and how it connected to other projects. It was important the Council had a staged approach to the financing that would allow it to withdraw before the full £450,000 was paid, if there were any difficulties. The Portfolio Holder and Colchester Amphora Energy Ltd should consider further the next steps and he would like to be involved in these discussions.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, thanked Councillor Sunnucks for his comments. He understood he had the opportunity to discuss his concerns with the Portfolio Holder and the lead officer. He was satisfied that those involved in bringing the project forward had considered the issues and that the risks involved were properly understood. He would welcome further discussion.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) The work undertaken to date on the development of a Solar Park and Micro Grid be noted and further development of the "CNG Energy System Business Model" (as described in the confidential "base case"), be continued using funding of £450K allocated for this project in the 2022/23 Capital Budget.

(b) The Council (using its company Colchester Amphora Energy Limited) should continue to progress a feasible scheme through concept design and onto achieving a planning permission (RIBA Stage 3) for the development.

REASONS

The creation of a new Solar Park and Micro Grid at the Northern Gateway would be another flagship, role modelling, renewable energy development led by the Council and its company, Colchester Amphora Energy Limited. It would directly deliver key strategic priorities of the Council in its Climate Emergency Declaration and allow the urban growth area to be delivered with clean, green, energy supply to provide low carbon homes and businesses, supplementing the electricity supply of the (geothermal) Northern Gateway Heat Network.

Aside from the clear social value and environmental benefits of this scheme, there is also good evidence through the work undertaken to date that demonstrates the proposal will also provide positive financial benefits to the Council in the medium to long-term, whilst supporting wider economic growth.

Investment into the energy sector can remove financial risk in the cost of energy to CNG and provide financial returns to the Council. With the current unprecedented increases in energy costs, this is particularly pertinent and will offer certainties to the Council, which will later benefit the immediate users of the energy at the Northern Gateway (both businesses and residents), as well as (more generally) to the wider Borough. The Micro Grid would also help ensure development of the CNG is not restricted by any lack of Grid capacity.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Do nothing; but this will not increase the capacity of the Grid to meet future demands for growth in the area and will lose the business opportunity in addition to creating more risk to the rate of development at CNG.

Reduce the development, or investment in the feasibility work, which will reduce the overall costs, but also reduces the potential financial returns achievable and subsequent social and environmental benefits.

Develop the project in another location; but this would reduce the direct and cumulative benefits in conjunction with the Northern Gateway, and when the Council owns nearby land to directly deliver a project within an area where there are known medium to longer-term Grid capacity issues.

684. 2021/22 Year End Review of Risk Management

The Assistant Director Corporate and Improvement Services submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member together with draft minute 322 of the Governance and Audit Committee meeting of 26 July 2022.

Councillor Fox, Portfolio Holder for Local Economy and Transformation, introduced the report and explained that the Council had a comprehensive approach to risk and that the Risk Management Strategy was reviewed annually to ensure that it remained relevant. The current key strategic risks were partnership commitment, Covid 19, spending power, cyber security and staff wellbeing. Comprehensive mitigation measures were in place were to minimize these risks. The draft Risk Management Strategy had been carefully considered by the Governance and Audit Committee and their comments were before Cabinet.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The Council's progress and performance in managing risk during the period from April 2021 to March 2022 be noted
- (b) The current Strategic Risk Register be noted.
- (c) The proposed Risk Management Strategy for 2022/23 be approved and *RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL* that it be included in the Council's Policy Framework.

REASONS

Cabinet has overall ownership of the risk management process and is responsible for endorsing its strategic direction. Therefore, the risk management strategy states that Cabinet should receive an annual report on progress and should formally agree any amendments to the Strategy itself.

During the year progress reports are presented to the Governance and Audit Committee, detailing work undertaken and current issues. This report was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee on 26 July 2022, where they approved its referral to this meeting.

As part of the Policy Framework, any changes and reviews of the strategy need to be approved by Cabinet and ratified by Full Council.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to Cabinet.

685. City Status Meaning and Opportunity

Cabinet considered draft minute 51 of the Policy Panel meeting of 3 August 2022, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Sir Bob Russell addressed Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) to express concern about proposals to mark City Status by celebrating the Siege of Colchester. This was inappropriate as the siege was the most destructive episode in Colchester's history. It should be commemorated, not celebrated. A reenactment of the Colchester Pageant of 1906 would be a more fitting event.

Destination Colchester and the Civic Society should be represented at the civic reception to mark City Status given their work to secure it. A permanent memorial of some form was needed.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, thanked Sir Bob for his comments which would be taken into consideration. The Council was looking to be as inclusive as possible and to listen to views of residents and other groups.

Councillor Laws attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Committee to encourage the administration not to be timid in its plans for the celebrations. The success of Invasion Colchester showed what could be achieved.

In discussion members of the Cabinet stressed the need to take a diverse, sensitive and cost effective approach to City Status celebrations.

RESOLVED that the comments and ideas put forward by the Policy Panel regarding the celebration of city status be noted, and that celebrations formally commence on 12 September 2022.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

It was open to the Cabinet not to agree the recommendation from the Policy Panel or to amend it.

686. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman – Annual Review Letter 2022

The Assistant Director, Corporate and Improvement Services submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, noted that the one complaint upheld by the Ombudsman related to a payment under the Small Business Grant scheme. This needed to be seen in context. The team administering these payments had done a phenomenal job in very challenging circumstances and the complaint was not indicative of the standard of their work. The report demonstrated that overall this was a very well run Council.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter for 2022 be noted.

REASONS

To inform the Cabinet of the contents of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Annual Review Letter relating to Colchester Borough Council for 2022.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to Cabinet.

687. Year End April 2021 – March 2022 Performance Report Key Performance Indicators (KPI) and Other Performance News

The Assistant Director, Corporate and Improvement Services, submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, introduced the report and explained that it had been considered by the Scrutiny Panel. Where performance targets had not been met, work was underway to look at the reasons why and to improve performance. It was appreciated that these were difficult times and close monitoring of these targets would help the Council monitor and improve performance for the benefit of residents.

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, explained that as Chair of Scrutiny in the last municipal year, he could assure Cabinet that the performance outlined in the Assistant Director's report had been subject to rigorous scrutiny. The Panel had paid particular attention to the target relating to residual waste and work was underway improve performance and reduce waste going to landfill.

RESOLVED that the performance against Key Performance Indicators be noted and that it be noted that where Key Performance Indicators had not been met, that appropriate corrective action had been taken.

REASONS

To review year end performance for 2021 – 2022 and ensure robust performance management of key Council services.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to Cabinet.

688. Year End April 2021 – March 2022 Performance Report – 2020-2023 Strategic Plan Action Plan

The Assistant Director Corporate and Improvement Services submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, introduced the report and explained that whilst the Strategic Plan would be reviewed in due course the current plan was still very relevant. It had received cross party support at Full Council.

Councillor Fox, Portfolio Holder for Local Economy and Transformation, stressed the breadth of achievements demonstrated in both the performance reports. The reports also demonstrated the continued impact of the pandemic on the Council's services.

RESOLVED that the satisfactory delivery against the Strategic Plan Action Plan be confirmed and that the Council had made satisfactory progress in meeting its strategic goals.

REASONS

To ensure the Council has robust performance management against key strategic goals.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to Cabinet.

689. Contract Award for Liquid Fuels

The Assistant Director Environment submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Goss, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Waste, introduced the report and stressed that the proposals had been through the necessary governance procedures and had been subject to due diligence. The current environment for the purchase of fuel was difficult and the proposals in the report would help the Council manage this and avoid cost increases. It would also help the Council meet its climate emergency objectives by ensuring DEF was added to fuel and through exploring alternative sustainable fuel options.

RESOLVED that the contract for the supply of liquid fuels at the Shrub End Depot for use by the Council's fleet vehicles for the period 1st October 2022 – 30th September 2023, to include the option to extend the supply contract for a further year (1st October 2023 – 30th September 2024) subject to performance, be awarded to RIX Petroleum, under the ESPO Liquid Fuels Framework (Ref: 301-22).

REASONS

The current contract for the supply of fuel to the Shrub End Depot for use by the Council's fleet vehicles is due to expire on 30th September 2022 and therefore a new contractual arrangement needs to be put in place. The supply of fuel is critical to the day-to-day operation of the Council services, in particular frontline services.

The use of a framework in such a volatile market reduces risk, as the aggregated value of the potential spend means suppliers will offer a competitive pricing structure that would not be available if the Council went to market just for Colchester.

Putting in place a one-year contract with the option to extend for one further year, provides the Council with the flexibility to change the contract should the demands and liquid fuel uses change, to ensure the Council gets value for money.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Not having a contract in place would see the Council operating at odds to the financial rules and put at risk the financial budgets, resilience, and delivery of the Council's operations, therefore it is not an option to source liquid fuel supply without a contract.

The Council could issue an open tender or procure via another framework, (e.g., the Crown Commercial Services framework) to achieve a compliant contract if the ESPO

Liquid Fuels Framework agreement is not utilised. However, based on the market's volatility, these options would be more expensive.

690. Revised Contract Procedure Rules

The Monitoring Officer submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

RESOLVED that the revised Contract Procedure Rules contained at Appendix 1 of the Monitoring Officer's report be approved and that they be included in the Council's Constitution.

REASONS

To ensure that the Council's Contract Procedure Rules are up to date and fit for purpose.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to the Cabinet.

691. Progress of Responses to the Public

The Assistant Director, Corporate and Improvement Services, submitted a progress sheet a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Progress Sheet be noted.

REASONS

The progress sheet was a mechanism by which the Cabinet could ensure that public statements and questions were responded to appropriately and promptly.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to the Cabinet.

The Cabinet resolved under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Meetings and Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012 to exclude the public from the meeting for the following item as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

692. Creation of a Northern Gateway Solar Park and Microgrid

The Assistant Director Place and Client Services submitted a not for publication appendix to the report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

RESOLVED that the not for publication Appendix to the Assistant Director's report be noted.

REASONS

As set out in minute 683.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

As set out in minute 683.

Report of	Interim Chief Operating Officer	Author	Richard Block Richard.block@colchester.gov.uk
Title	Update on progress in delivering Cabinet vision and priorities		
Wards affected	All wards		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 At the Cabinet meeting on 9 June Cabinet agreed a vision for the 2022/23 municipal year and beyond to:-

“Work with our councillors, officers, residents, businesses and partners to help the Council tackle the biggest challenges facing Colchester, from sustainability and climate change to the cost-of-living crisis, homelessness, and inequalities.”

- 1.2 Cabinet also agreed key priorities to deliver this vision. This report provides an update on progress in delivering against these priorities since June.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To consider progress against the Key Priorities and identify any further action required to ensure these are delivered by the end of the municipal year.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 To ensure satisfactory delivery of Cabinet’s vision and key priorities this municipal year.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 There are no appropriate alternative options.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 To deliver the Cabinet vision set out in June several key priorities were identified. The priorities with key highlights of progress are shown below.
- 5.2 **Cost of Living Crisis** – to prioritise support for those faced with terrible choices, between food or warmth or other essential needs, working with communities and through our community partners to build community wealth. This will include working with partners, strengthening the capacity of the Council's high performing welfare support team and leveraging resources to provide targeted help for those in extreme difficulty, acknowledging rising demand for help and support for the most vulnerable:
- Additional investment made in 4 foodbanks to support their efforts
 - Communications plan to advise residents of support available developed and in place including social media, website, and face to face communications.
 - Activities and support have Focus on working families as well as those on benefits
 - Utilised inequalities funding to support fuel poverty and energy efficiency issues and recruited a dedicated energy efficiency support role.
 - Negotiated a Household Support Fund scheme for Colchester to ensure the maximum number of pensioners receive payment in bank rather than vouchers
 - Opened the Discretionary Council Tax Rebate scheme to bands A-D, allowing anyone in financial hardship to apply.
 - Reached 92.5% Council Tax Rebate distribution
 - Continue working with partners through One Colchester to ensure we maximise funding/ resource and support and reduce duplication
 - Early progress recognised by LGA as best practice
- 5.3 **City Status and strengthening Colchester's heritage and cultural offer** – step-up partnership work with local businesses and the County Council to sustain and strengthen the town centre, working with the Business Improvement District and others to respond to the loss of iconic past brands. Work to ensure Colchester remains an attractive destination, in which to invest, to work, live, shop and visit:
- Worked collaboratively to install Parklets
 - Engaged BID Board members to deliver our Levelling Up fund application and on the delivery of Town Deal projects
 - Engagement with the BID and worked with other partner organisations on developing the Town Centre Masterplan
 - Worked with the BID on a successful Safer Streets Bid for a range of measures to ensure people feel safe when visiting the Town Centre.
 - Worked collaboratively to support the Colchester Garden Festival
 - Through the Welcome Back fund supported the development of technology to provide tools for visitors to reassure them and plan for their visit
 - Worked with the BID to install the archway over Short Wyre Street
 - Improved practical working relationship between BID/University of Essex/Colchester Borough Council in the run up to Freshers Week (targeting 4,000 new students from UK/abroad)
 - Signed off two new promotional films – made by CBC and BID

- Post-mourning period and post peer challenge feedback, we're also broadening the vision/scope of proposed city status activities quite significantly.

5.4 Improve the quality of life of residents - from tree planting, increasing biodiversity and other uses of our open spaces, to opening-up Colchester's waterways, the Cabinet will lead a strategic approach to manage existing natural areas and to develop new places in which to enjoy nature and allow its recovery:

- Proposals developed for Cymbeline Meadow to be created into a nature reserve as part of the Woodland & Biodiversity Project, replacing farmland
- Plans developed for tree planting across various sites including St Nicholas Square, parts of the River Colne and New Town
- Completed workshops with the University of Essex considering a new participatory budgeting approach to future plans for the River Colne.
- Undertaken site safety measures to reduce the risk of unauthorised site incursions.

5.5 Tackle the climate emergency and reduce littering and graffiti - The Cabinet will act decisively on measures that help the Council tackle the climate emergency, easing the transition to net zero carbon and bringing forward new approaches to minimise waste, encourage recycling and support positive action that reduces littering and graffiti.

- Calculated the Council's emissions for financial year 2021/22 showing a decrease of 4.3% on pre-Covid figures
- Rowan House (main council HQ) decarbonisation project progressed with completion due in December
- Commenced Heat Decarbonisation Plans for 7 Council assets to identify actions that will help reduce emissions
- Reviewed the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan to update existing actions, and add additional actions that will be contributing to reducing emissions and environmental impact
- Started fleet transition to low carbon fuelled vehicles by introducing 5 fully electric vans
- Introduction of dedicated Graffiti Team to tackle graffiti across the Borough
- Successfully secured external funding from Keep Britain Tidy for an additional vehicle to support the cleaning of gum from footways.
- Monthly "Action Days" within Town Centre, focusing on "Grot Spots", supported by the Civic Society and BID.

5.6 Affordable housing, physical and digital infrastructure - find creative and effective new ways to bring forward affordable housing, the Cabinet will work with partners to enable essential physical and digital infrastructure and, with others, to tackle long standing challenges such as the flooding in the Hythe

- All 100 homes in last year's 100 Homes project have been acquired on the open market. 82 have been let, 3 are being advertised and the remainder in the process of being prepared for letting
- 6 months into the current year, we have purchased 11 homes and have 26 in the legal processes for this year's target to acquire 40 homes on the open market
- We are working with Almshouse Charities to support the development of new social housing in their sector
- Continue to attend further meetings of the Hythe - installation of alternative valve options continue with inspection and maintenance of current tidal flap valve joint funded by partners.

- ECC with support from partners completed funding application to the EA for a pump solution and installation of duck bill flap.
- 5.7 **New Strategic Plan** - At the meeting in June, Cabinet also agreed to engage widely with others to co-design a new, ambitious, progressive and longer-term Strategic Plan for the whole Council from April 2023. This engagement has now commenced with a borough wide survey and will be followed by a specific survey for councillors and focus groups with the public and other key stakeholders.
- 5.8 This interim report demonstrates a good level of progress in delivering against the priorities identified by Cabinet in June and further reports on progress will be made through the remainder of the Municipal Year.
- 6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**
- 6.1 Consideration has been given to equality and diversity issues in respect of any decisions to implement the priorities set out in this report in line with agreed policies and procedures including production of Equality Impact Assessments where appropriate.
- 7. Strategic Plan References**
- 7.1 The priorities in this report support all the core themes of the 2020 – 23 Strategic Plan and help set a direction of travel for the preparation of a new Strategic Plan from April 2023 onwards.
- 8. Consultation**
- 8.1 Consultation to inform and underpin a new Strategic Plan has commenced and the results will be reported to Cabinet when the proposed new plan is considered.
- 9. Publicity Considerations**
- 9.1 A communications plan has been developed to publicise the support available to residents regarding the support available to them to help manage the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis.
- 10. Financial implications**
- 10.1 The delivery of the priorities in this report will be managed within existing budgets during 2022/23.
- 11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications**
- 11.1 Delivery against several of the priorities detailed in this report will have a positive direct and indirect impact on, health, wellbeing and community safety.
- 12. Environmental and Sustainability Implications**
- 12.1 Delivery against several of the priorities detailed in this report will also have a positive impact on environmental sustainability of both the Council and the Borough.
- 13. Health and Safety Implications**
- 13.1 There are no direct health and safety implications associated with this report.

. 13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 The progress reported in this report will help to mitigate the risks facing the Council in delivering its strategic priorities for the borough.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

None

Extract from the minutes of the Policy Panel meeting of 21 September 2022

56. Cost of Living Crisis – Council Response

Michelle Tarbun, Group Manager - Wellbeing, Prevention & Partnerships, and Zoe Raven, Partnership & Delivery Manager presented the Council's work on assisting residents in addressing financial difficulties. The Group Manager explained that the situation was constantly changing and that officers sought to advertise all major developments to residents and elected members on a regular basis.

The Panel were told that the Council could not operate alone, and that partnership working was vital, allowing the pooling of talents and resources, and for residents to be quickly signposted to organisations which could assist with the issues they faced. A joint Council/Colchester Borough Homes working group had been set up and had then been expanded to become a wider 'One Colchester' Partnership working group, which had commenced the drafting of an action plan to cover the Borough. A current priority was to ensure provision of warm spaces for the coming Winter, and a mapping exercise was being conducted to see what warm spaces were already available and to ascertain geographic areas where they were absent or sparse in number. The Panel was also informed that Cabinet had recently approved additional funding to local foodbanks.

The communications campaign was outlined, with webpages on the Council's website to give information, advice and signposting relating to the cost of living crisis. Content had been designed to easily direct the public to relevant organisations which could provide assistance, to reduce labour-intensive demands on officers to provide direction and advice to residents. Social media posts also provided information and ways for people to obtain advice. A video was being produced for use in public areas such as libraries and GP surgeries. This aimed to reach a wider audience and increase residents' knowledge of their entitlements.

The established support teams already operated by the Council were described, with demand for their assistance continually increasing. Zoe Raven, Partnership & Delivery Manager, explained that Financial Support Officers triaged contacts from residents through to appropriate services and could offer foodbank vouchers where appropriate and administer discretionary funds. About 50% of funding allocated for use on discretionary housing payments had so far been allocated. The Council worked with Essex County Council [ECC] to pay out discretionary funding to applicants and ECC had the ability to offer vouchers for any applicants which had missed out on funding. The payment of Council Tax rebates was explained.

The cost of living crisis was having significant effects on pensioners, those residents who had disabilities and anyone who was not in a position to be able to increase their income via work. The Council was focused on maximising the claiming of entitlements and benefits by residents who were eligible. A summary was given of the appeals process for those residents who were turned down for different types of financial assistance. The Financial Inclusion Team's work to help residents maximise their incomes was described. Community Support Officers worked alongside Financial Support Officers to triage residents to where they could receive assistance, and were also able to address wider problems and offer advice on housing issues and ways to help residents improve their ability to gain employment. Officers were experienced at spotting signs of problems and could help assist in prevention of problems reoccurring for members of the public. Additional training was being rolled out to ensure that officers could maintain the efficacy of their support work. A database of support schemes and grants for people in energy poverty, including from energy providers, was being designed. It was also confirmed that councillors could refer residents to the Council's teams to obtain support and advice.

Council officers regularly conducted outreach work with partners, taking part in events run by local church groups, Community 360, the Job Centre, community centres and foodbanks. In addition, tools and training for identifying problems and directing those in need to services were provided to representatives of a range of community groups and partners. The Council's engagement with established groups helped to increase the spread of information and advice from the Council and its partners in providing support options. This work also helped to reach out and talk to people in need, outside of the formal benefits system, and also helped the Council engage with people who struggled to get into central Colchester.

The Partnership & Delivery Manager described plans to hold a roadshow across the Borough. Investment had been made into a program which could take in financial/economic information (such as rates of inflation) and identify the geographic areas which would be worst affected by changes. An information pack was being designed for distribution in the hardest-hit areas and the roadshow would be there to engage with residents or to give contact details for residents to contact the Council or its partner organisations at a later date. It was expected that the roadshow would also assist the Council in better engaging with rural communities.

The Group Manager emphasised that the Council's work was not only focussed on financial support and benefits, but also aimed to address the wider impacts on people, such as effects on mental health and wellbeing. A local delivery pilot scheme to help health, wellbeing and physical fitness was being run and supported by the Council. Addressing the pressures being experienced by its own staff, the Council was providing assistance including advice on the intranet, drop-in sessions to listen to problems and offer advice on subjects such as income maximisation, and a 24-hour 'phone lined for staff members or their family members to gain wellbeing advice and information about support that was available.

The vital nature of effective data collection and analysis was stressed, especially that which related to the relative efficacy of interventions made by the Council and its partner organisations. A dashboard to display such data was being developed to maximise the impact of interventions.

Further Government announcements were expected, and assurance was given to the Panel that the Council would advertise any additional entitlements to financial support which apply to residents within the Borough. A plea was made for councillors to help officers in reaching those residents who could benefit from the assistance which was available.

Councillor Jeremy Hagon attended and, with the permission of the Chairman, participated in the Panel's discussion.

The Panel thanked officers for their work, and it was acknowledged that the Council had limits to its capacity to help residents, making its role as an enabling organisation an important one, providing direction to a range of organisations which could offer help and support. This would become even more important as the cost of living crisis increasingly affected households which had previously been comfortably off. Praise was given for the recognition of the wider effects on wellbeing, including the effects on the Council's own staff.

Panel members underlined the need to provide contact pathways for residents to access help even if they were not digitally active and could not engage with online contact avenues. Efforts to take advice and contact roadshows out into different communities were praised and officers were urged to consult with local councillors in areas where sites were found to be difficult to locate. A Panel member suggested that producing and delivering leaflets door-to-door might help the Council reach those without digital access. Officers were asked if there was scope for Council officers to attend councillors' advice surgery sessions to offer advice. Concern was raised regarding how to reach digitally excluded residents in small rural communities, who would find it harder to access advice and where communally held knowledge of the benefits and financial assistance options could be lower than in some other types of community. Panel members suggested that the Council could look at approaching local community newsletters and newspapers to carry advice articles and adverts carrying information from the Council regarding where residents can seek help and advice.

A further concern was that the scarcity of social housing meant that applicants often had to move away from family support and advice networks in order to gain housing. A Panel member urged for more to be done to examine whether local links to areas could be strengthened regarding the allocations policy in place over the letting of Council-owned properties, and how new developments might be forced to provide a certain number of new properties which would only be available for those with links to the local area. It was confirmed that Scrutiny Panel was due to examine this issue at its meeting scheduled for 8 November 2022.

Concern was raised by a number of Panel members that the Council's current website design was dull and unappealing. Requests were made for a rebranding and brightening of the content and branding, to engage better with visitors and emulate the appealing branding shown in other publicity materials and presentations produced by the Council. The importance of language/wording choice was emphasised by one Panel member, who asked how the Council decided upon the wording of its materials. A suggestion was made that the Council could look to match the wording and approach taken by central government's online content. The Group Manager took on the suggestions regarding online presentation and wording and told the Panel that she would discuss this with the Council's Online Team to seek ways to improve how information is presented.

The Panel discussed the Cabinet's three-point plan to address the cost of living crisis. Point three, 'Prevention of Hardship', was discussed and a Panel member suggested that this should be reworded, as the Council could help to minimise hardship but could not prevent it entirely. An example given was the suggestion that the Council should take a tougher line with utility providers who were responsible for lengthy loss of supply to residential properties owned by the Council. The Deputy Leader of the Council agreed that language use was very important, especially during crises, and argued in favour of the use of the phrase 'Prevention of Hardship' as the Council could offer crisis support to prevent additional hardship.

A request was made for a summary to be produced and circulated to councillors to show what types of requests for help are made of the Council by residents, and the numbers of requests being made.

The Panel asked for details of any funding or support which might be available to support potential providers of community/communal warm spaces. The Group Manager explained that the County Council had funding which could be used by community groups to help them offer warm spaces.

Responding to questions about the local development pilot funding to improve physical and mental health, the Group Manager explained that the funding was to support communities to set up initiatives to improve levels of wellbeing, and offered to share more information to councillors who would like to know more. The link between physical fitness and wellbeing was emphasised by the Panel.

Officers were asked what support there was available to help and advise residents facing difficult financial and lifestyle decisions, and whether data held on vulnerable residents could be used to identify those who might benefit from being contacted to discuss potential avenues of support.

The Group Manager explained that data sharing, including with the County Council, could be difficult. The data teams at the Council and County Council did talk regularly. Regarding the use of data to identify people who may need support, this

was easiest for tenants of Council or private properties, but was more difficult with people who owned their own properties.

The Panel were informed that the 'Anti Loo Roll Brigade' mentioned in the report was a community group, set up during the height of the pandemic, which aimed to provide community support and help to those in need.

RECOMMENDED to CABINET that: -

- a) The Council makes its website more user-friendly, with better branding to maximise its effectiveness at providing information and links to organisations which could provide advice and assistance
- b) Cabinet ensures that future resourcing reflects the need to support people across all communities within the Borough

RESOLVED that the Policy Panel had previously examined the situation relating to the payment and claiming of Universal Credit and that an agenda item be provisionally added to the Panel's Work Programme for 2023-24 for the Panel to re-examine the local situation relating to Universal Credit in twelve-month's time.

Extract from the minutes of the Policy Panel meeting of 21 September 2022

57. Work Programme

Rory Doyle, Assistant Director (Environment), addressed the Panel to explain that Cabinet and officers were working on development of the new Strategic Plan, with a programme being planned to consult and survey the views of residents, focus groups, businesses, and local organisations. The suggestion was made that the Panel's meeting scheduled for 23 November 2022 could be promoted and used as an avenue for garnering the views of residents, businesses and organisations to feed into the creation of priorities for the new Strategic Plan.

The Panel agreed that it was important to involve the wider community in creating the Strategic Plan, and stressed the importance of giving as much notice as possible so that people had the opportunity to contribute. It was also noted that public expectations would also need to be managed. A Panel member urged the Panel to work with the Cabinet, avoiding confrontation and considering ideas and feasibilities free from ideological concerns.

The Panel urged officers and Cabinet to create better, more engaging names for plans and strategies. The Assistant Director agreed, and confirmed that Cabinet also agreed. Language used was important and it was recognised that strategic documents needed to use effective language to catch people's interest and make documents easily understandable. Councillor Adam Fox, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Local Economy and Transformation, agreed with the points on language use, and gave assurance that this would be heeded when wording the Strategic Plan. This would make it clear that the Plan would address what people wanted Colchester to look like by 2030, and what they wanted the Council to do.

The Assistant Director explained why the draft Green/Blue Infrastructure Strategy could not be brought for the Panel to consider at this meeting, with the Portfolio Holders wanting more work to be done to the draft before it was looked at by councillors. It was proposed that this Strategy be examined by the Panel at its meeting on 23 November 2022.

It was confirmed that updates on city status ramifications and celebrations were planned for future Panel meetings. Other potential subjects for consideration by the Panel were raised.

RECOMMENDED to CABINET that Policy Panel be given permission to consider the following subjects: -

- a) Council support for small local businesses
- b) Proposals for a Colchester Rapid Transport System, including design, plans

and connectivity [subject to the Monitoring Officer's advice]

RESOLVED that the Policy Panel will: -

- a) Receive continuing updates on city status matters
- b) Receive an item on the Green/Blue Infrastructure Strategy at its meeting on 23 November 2022
- c) Use its meeting on 23 November 2022 as an opportunity to gain views from residents, business and organisations for inclusion in the drafting of the Council's new Strategic Plan

Extract from the minutes of the Scrutiny Panel meeting of 5 July 2022

359. Colchester's Housing Strategy 2022-27

Councillor Julie Young, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities, explained that it was a statutory duty for the Council to have a Strategy, which was being put in place for 2022 to 2027. This would give a vision for the future to provide access to safe and affordable housing, and to include content on private rental standards, neighbourhood improvements and health and wellbeing connotations.

Matt Sterling, Strategic Economic Growth Manager, gave a presentation on the content of the draft Strategy and explained that this would provide an overarching framework for other individual policies. The delivery plan for this Strategy was detailed and would include partnership working and Council contributions to the providing of housing by other organisations. Statistics were provided to show the extent of local needs and the demographics most in need. Key achievements were listed, including the 117 of 741 new homes built during 2020-21 being affordable housing.

Karen Paton, Housing Strategy Co-ordinator, informed the Panel of the updated evidence base and consultative work carried out to inform the Strategy. A project group had been used to examine views and evidence obtained. The draft Strategy had then been shared with officers, Colchester Borough Homes [CBH] and the Council's relevant partners. The Strategy had been drafted to align with national priorities. The Strategy's four key aims [Increased supply, Sustainability and Community Building, Improved Structure Standards, and Prevention of Homelessness] were outlined, with a separate strategy also to exist for tackling homelessness. The implementation and monitoring of the delivery plan was explained, with regular reporting to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities. The Strategy would be an organic, evolving document.

The Chairman explained that the Panel would look at the Strategy and offer views as to whether it was fit for purpose. Praise was given for the clear presentation and explanation of the key priorities and how the Strategy had been formed around them. Questions were asked as to how to supply the greatest amount of necessary housing for sale and whether funding would be provided to housing associations for affordable housing developments or purchases.

The Panel discussed evictions from private rental properties, caused by landlords selling up and a variety of other reasons. Officers were asked for estimates as to the numbers of applicants joining the housing waiting list, and whether reasons were given for their needs to apply for housing. A Panel member also asked if data existed as to how many applicants were from Ukraine. The Strategic Economic Growth Manager explained that it was hard to predict eviction levels in the private rental

market. Council officers provided advice to local residents regarding the eviction process and as to how to register their housing need with the Council.

A Panel member noted that the average house price for Colchester was over £350k whilst the median income in Essex being around £27k, which made house buying unaffordable for many, thus increasing demand pressure on the rental market.

The 20% target for affordable housing as a percentage of new build properties was not met in 2020-21 and officers were asked how the Council would meet the updated target of 30%. The Strategic Economic Growth Manager outlined the range of different types of affordable housing schemes possible, with the Council striving to achieve a balance of the different types. The Council now routinely and successfully demanded that 30% of homes in new development be affordable housing. The four main avenues to increase affordable housing were to insist on it being included in developments (as planning gain), for the Council to build affordable housing itself, to buy stock (including homes sold under 'Right to Buy' provisions, and to work with non-profit deliverers (such as alms houses) to help them build more. A Panel member pushed for stronger wording than to 'seek' 30% of properties on new development to be affordable housing, and for the Council to examine why it does not achieve this 30% for all major developments. It was confirmed that the draft Strategy did call for 30% on all major developments, and that the Council sought this from all new major developments. Members discussed the instances where developers agreed to a set percentage of affordable housing, but later sought to reduce or remove requirements for affordable housing, on viability grounds. Assurance was given that the Council did its best, case by case, to hold developers to the requirement. Any request for variations to the requirement would need to be backed up by evidence to prove unviability.

The Panel discussed the possibility of prioritising local people to give them first chance to buy new affordable housing, before it is offered on the open market. The Portfolio Holder explained that, working with CBH, partnership schemes, the Council were looking at ways to offer new properties to local people first, such as the developments on sites formerly used for garages. A member highlighted a pilot trial, where an application for a village development had been granted subject to a local prioritisation scheme being tested when the properties were ready to be sold. Panel members suggested that the draft Strategy contain content that would lay out the Council's approach to prioritising sale of affordable housing to people with local connections or residency.

Caution was urged that affordable housing provision was just one part of developers' contributions to the local area and local authority. Some County Council members felt that the County Council's requests for section 106 contributions were often set at lower levels than they should be. Planning authorities such as the Council would need to be mindful of the overall financial commitment levels applying to developers and balance the requirements set upon them.

A Panel member queried the lack of environmental content, such as regarding allotments, minimising carbon output from transport options/car use, and on finding more green spaces. The Strategic Economic Growth Manager gave assurance that this would be covered in the framework and detailed in the delivery plan.

The Panel discussed whether to make recommendations regarding strict enforcement of the requirement that 30% of each new development be affordable housing and regarding prioritisation of local people and those with local links when affordable housing was completed. The Portfolio Holder emphasised Cabinet's commitment to pursuing the 30% requirement, and the other options for providing affordable housing. As a partner in Gateway to Homechoice, the Council would continue to take a sensitive but firm approach to making best use of the existing stock of housing in the social rental market.

RECOMMENDED to CABINET that the Council retains a target that 30% of the properties to be built for any major development must be required to be affordable housing.

RESOLVED that the Panel directs officers to present reports to the Panel on: -

- (a) Collection of Section 106 developer contributions
- (b) Family/local affiliation in letting and/or sale of local affordable housing and Gateway to Homechoice Allocations Policy

PETITIONS, PUBLIC STATEMENTS, QUESTIONS

(i) Have Your Say submissions from members of the public

Date of Meeting	Details of Members of the Public	Subject Matter	Form of Response	Date Completed
Cabinet, 7 September 2022	Sir Bob Russell	How the award of City Status should be celebrated	Verbal response provided at the meeting by Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy	7 September 2022
Cabinet, 7 September 2022	Sir Bob Russell	Northern Gateway Solar Park and Microgrid	Verbal response provided at the meeting by Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, and Councillor Fox, Portfolio Holder for Local Economy and Transformation	7 September 2022

Date petition received	Lead Petitioner	Subject Matter	Form of Response	Date Completed
No valid petitions received in this period.				

