

POLICY PANEL

11 January 2023

Attendees: Councillors Scott-Boutell [Chairman], Bentley, Coleman, Jowers, Law and Pearson.

Substitutes: Councillor Tate for Councillor Smithson.

Also in attendance: Councillor Fox, Councillor Cory

62. Minutes of Previous Meeting

It was confirmed that the minutes from the meeting held on 30 November 2022 had now been produced, circulated for officer comments and would be ready for the Panel to consider at its next meeting. The production of these minutes had been delayed due to heavy calls on officer resources during December 2022.

63. City Status - verbal

Councillor Kevin Bentley (by reason of his wife being a ‘Colchester Ambassador’) declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following item, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7(5).

A statement was read by the Chairman on behalf of Mr Dorian Kelly (who was unable to attend the meeting), pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1). Mr Kelly described the gaining of city status as a chance to showcase Colchester, making it vital that the launch was comprehensive, memorable and enough to spark national interest. Social media, press work and promotion would be needed, which in his view merited the appointing of an artistic director to manage the project. Colchester had a significant presence of the arts, better than the rest of the region, but caution was given that other areas were providing better support to the arts in their parts of the region. Mr Kelly argued that most activity across Colchester had been by members of the public or private sector organisations, including large numbers of festivals and events. Mr Kelly complained that no providers of artistic or cultural attractions or events had been informed or consulted over the city status launch or programme, and urged that the programme of events and publicity must be coordinated and marketed properly.

Rory Doyle, Strategic Director, explained that a more-detailed item on this subject would come before the Policy Panel in March. The work being conducted was in two main strands; launching of city status and legacy building for the long term. Lindsay Barker, Deputy Chief Executive, was leading on city status and legacy work. Lucie Breadman, Strategic Director, was leading on the ‘Year of Celebration.’ The calendar was developing, with key events in the 2023 visitor guide already.

The Council was working with businesses to develop and hold celebratory events

and was engaging with partners and showcasing events, such as the Siege re-enactment and gladiatorial exhibition at the Castle until July 2024. The marketing campaign was being led by the Business Improvement District [BID], supported by the Council, and will include attractions in Colchester's rural areas. The suite of marketing tools and materials for partners would be launched on 16 January. Visit Colchester were showcasing events for the 'Year of Celebration.'

The Council had launched its creative events fund and was seeking applications to deliver high-quality creative experiences, showcasing local heritage and promoting the area's diverse communities. The Cultural Education Partnership, led by Steve Mannix, was planning events and activities across various sites of cultural significance.

The Strategic Director explained the planned legacy work, to be produced collaboratively. Prior to Christmas, Council management and the Leader of the Council had worked with partnership boards to use existing partnerships and assets to promote legacy work. Colchester's 'Ambassadors' had been keen to support the city status work. Ambassadors were people from local businesses, offering a broad range of skills. Marketing and branding of the legacy programme was supported by the BID and Our Colchester, with the scope likely to broaden over time. A full programme of engagement with businesses and residents would be conducted over the coming months, to develop key themes and the meaning of city status to people. More detail would come to Policy Panel in March.

Sir Bob Russell attended and, with permission of the Chairman, addressed the Panel pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1). Sir Bob noted that no reference had been made as to whether a permanent structure would be erected to mark city status. No structure had been put in place for the Jubilee, so it was even more important to produce one for city status. Sir Bob also cautioned that the Siege of Colchester was not something to celebrate, but something to commemorate separately, due to the death and destruction which occurred. Officers were asked if the Civic Society or resident groups had been asked their opinions about city status events.

The Panel discussed the work of Colchester Ambassadors and the access they provided to different networks, some global.

Panel members agreed with the points made that the Siege of Colchester was something to commemorate, but was not an event that should be celebrated.

The siting of a permanent structure was discussed, with support voiced for this, especially given the extensive engineering history of Colchester, with an example being the Town Hall built from the profits of engineering businesses. A Panel member suggested funding should come from public subscription.

The Panel discussed linking coronation events with the city status events programme, in partnership with churches, resident groups, parish councils and other groups. One suggestion was to convene a panel of all Council committee chairs to oversee the city status programme work.

The Panel discussed the relationship between the part of Colchester historically

considered as the centre, with the developing centres such as Tollgate and Northern Gateway, as well as celebrations of the areas farming and fishing.

The Strategic Director pledged to feed back the views given and get these to the working group and Portfolio Holder, including the concerns about how to approach the Civil War re-enactment sensitively. There would be much engagement and consultation with residents and partner groups and organisations, including One Colchester and the garrison.

Councillor David King, Leader of the Council, explained that the 'Board of Boards' co-ordinating group had met that day and looked to market the city in a deeper way than previously, with more done and feedback provided to councillors. The legacy programme would be used to improve the economic prospects for the local area.

A Panel member underlined the Panel's need to receive a written report on this important subject and expressed concern that, given the Panel's wish to explore matters at an early stage, it would be very late to bring this report to Panel in March 2023. The Panel member urged that consideration be given to areas across Colchester, and all parts of the city's history.

A Panel member highlighted the thousands of young people who lived in the Colchester area and the need for them to be consulted as to the future of Colchester. Another Panel member noted the school engagement work led by Steve Mannix, Chief Executive of the Mercury Theatre, and agreed that there was a need to capture the enthusiasm and creativity of local young people.

The Panel asked whether the toolkit of resources would be made available to town and parish councils and community groups, including in new-build areas. Inclusion of all was emphasised, including in the branding and marketing.

The City's industrial and commercial heritage was discussed, with Panel members noting that the nearest museum displaying the heritage of Paxmans was in Stowmarket. Hollington Brothers had historically been based in the Colchester area and had supplied uniforms to the British Army. Marine engineering also had a long tradition in the local area and Panel members expressed a wish for the full breadth of Colchester's history to be celebrated or commemorated, as a way to shape an identity for Colchester, reflecting all parts of its history, good and bad. The Deputy Leader agreed with the points made and expressed his support for reflecting the local industrial heritage, including the placing of commemorative assets on the former Paxman site to mark its history. A Panel member suggested reviving the historical title of Port Reeve, to mark Colchester's former role as a working port and as a point of interest. The Strategic Director gave assurance that he would feed the Panel's views back to the relevant officers.

Officers were asked if new TV adverts were being considered to market Colchester to potential visitors. The Strategic Director explained that a number of promotional videos had already been developed, including for screening at cinemas. Further TV advertising could be explored as an option. The Strategic Director also addressed questions regarding train and hotel packages and committed to getting more details on these and ensure they were provided in the written report to come to the Panel at its March meeting.

The Policy Panel discussed whether to make formal recommendations to Cabinet that: -

- a) A clear timeline of events, celebrations and commemorations be produced and marketed;
- b) Investigations are carried out to mark contributions made by individuals, organisations and companies, such as by publicly-displayed plaques showing who funded structures or led events;

The Leader recapped the consultation and marketing work already carried out and ongoing, and highlighted the timetable of events which had already been drawn up. The year of celebration would showcase Colchester's legacy in the widest possible sense, based upon consultation responses. The Leader asked for the Panel's patience to allow the work to continue. The Board of Boards would meet again in a month's time to receive an update on progress and to lay out more marketing. A clearer picture would be possible by March, when the plans and timeline would be ready for full examination by the Panel.

The Panel agreed that no formal recommendations were necessary at this time, and a Panel member suggested that the Panel should note and welcome the Leader's comments and welcome the full publication and circulation of a timeline. The Strategic Director highlighted the timeline which had already been published in 'Visit Colchester 2023' and explained that Councillor Pam Cox, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Heritage, would advertise this to all councillors.

RESOLVED that the Policy Panel notes and welcomes the actions promised by the Leader, regarding the planning and marketing of celebrations and commemorations to mark the awarding of city status to Colchester.

64. Emerging Strategic Plan and consultation

Rory Doyle, Strategic Director, summarised the Panel's work on this subject at its previous meeting. The Panel had been keen to receive more demographic data from the consultation exercises and had recommended that Cabinet focus more on gaining views from young people, which had not been captured by the consultations. The Strategic Director explained why the final report on the consultation had not been able to be included in the agenda for this meeting, as it had only been completed in the afternoon of the previous day [10 January 2023]. The report was a sizeable one, containing much content, and would be shared with councillors and the public to have an opportunity to feed into ongoing consultations. There was content in the report on the Council's communications work and on how residents felt they were being communicated with.

Libby Britcher, Research and Change Officer, confirmed that all of the headline points from the previous report on this subject still stood, with new points being added, including the need for better communication. This included the giving of explanations as to the areas of work for which the City Council was responsible (rather than those within the remit of the County Council, such as roads). Work was identified to ensure staff could signpost residents to the correct routes for dealing

with problems, and to ensure that the best methods/platforms of communication were chosen for each type of message. Full cycles of communication were necessary, with start, middle, and end, including feedback to be provided to those who took part. The importance of appropriate weighting of inputs was noted. Two new priorities had been identified; the City centre and infrastructure (including roads) and how this had not kept pace with the development of Colchester.

The Research and Change Officer agreed with the importance stressed on youth consultations. Further resources had not been available for further consultation within the framework of the current exercise, but officers had analysed the data as far as possible, such as to compare rural response with urban responses. It was found that there was little to no difference in response rates.

Many residents mentioned a wish for areas to be cleaned, and outdated elements replaced or improved. A unique identity for Colchester was called for, whilst examining successful cities to generate ideas. Concerns had been raised that residents needed to be heard more, both individually and in groups, with some residents voicing concern that there was no point in engaging with Council consultations.

Panel members noted the lack of a written report for this item and stressed the importance of providing committees and panels with written reports on agenda items, as this allowed members to consider information prior to meetings. A timeline was requested to cover the ongoing work. Officers were asked how Stanway residents could be included within the City as a whole, considering how many considered that they were residents of Stanway, rather than of Colchester. A Panel member stressed the importance of full cycles of communication and showing that the Council listens and was responsive, even where it could not fulfil all wishes. It was agreed that road complaints were a major issue and needed to be forwarded to the County Council, as the responsible authority in most cases. The Panel discussed views on devolving road maintenance to Colchester City Council, with views in favour of devolution expressed, but one Panel member arguing that any such devolution would need to be at a higher level than just a single borough or district council level. It was noted that the Council was often blamed for problems over which it had no control, and that it was a difficult task to educate people as to which organisations had different issues within their remit, and as to how the income from Council Tax was split between different public-sector organisations.

The Panel discussed previous methods used to invite residents to give their views and ideas without large expense being necessary. A Panel member argued that most people were less interested in wider strategic matters, and were more concerned with getting services which worked well. The work and customer-facing presence of the Highways Rangers Team was praised, and a Panel member argued the importance of the Council being seen as a 'human' organisation. The Research and Change Officer gave assurance that, once the priorities were laid out, officers would report back to residents on the outcomes from the consultations and show what the Council would do.

A Panel member noted that a Strategic Plan could be put in place by an administration, only for a new administration to be appointed, after elections, with a Leader who did not support it. The member argued in favour of all-up elections once

every four years, to tie in better with the setting of strategic plans. The Deputy Leader made reference to the current all-party working group set up to examine the electoral cycle and noted that the previous [current] Strategic Plan had received cross-party support. The Deputy Leader gave the view that a four-year strategic plan could be successful with the current electoral system of elections in thirds, with a benefit of this system being that councillors and parties tended to maintain communications with residents throughout each year.

The Leader confirmed that the Strategic Plan was being drafted to reflect the views shown by councillors, as well as priorities of residents. Members' views were needed and the Administration would follow the recommendation from the Local Government Association [LGA] to link widespread aspirations to future actions, and to build consensus, which was highlighted as a strength of the Council by the LGA. Adjustments could be made to the Plan each year, after consultations, and the new Plan followed on from the spirit of the current Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Director summarised that the consultation report was working to feed into the Strategic Plan process. Cabinet wanted Policy Panel to have the opportunity to hear public views and make recommendations to Cabinet. The final report wasn't ready for this meeting, but it was hoped that it could be circulated to Panel members to get their views and feed these into Cabinet's deliberations when it considered the draft Strategic Plan. The Chairman agreed that the Panel could discuss its members' views further and that she could present these to Cabinet.

65. Member Champions

Rory Doyle, Strategic Director, gave the background to this item. The Leader of the Council was keen for the Panel to consider the idea and to give its views as to the merit of having Champions, and suggestions as to areas for them to cover. A common approach was given as being to focus champions on significant areas of councils' business, or where key groups felt that they were not sufficiently or appropriately being heard or engaged with. It was important not to duplicate the work of portfolio holders and to consider how champions would fit in with the work of the Policy Panel.

The Panel discussed the subject, including concerns that champions should avoid being 'cheerleaders' for portfolio holders, must be non-partisan and have a set-out way to report back to councillors. The Panel considered areas for champions, such as for physical health, leisure, retail, and open spaces. It was asked how councillors could volunteer for champion positions. Panel members considered concerns as to the call on the time of Portfolio Holders and officers which may come from operating member champions.

A Panel member suggested that there should be a champion for the garrison/armed forces. Councillor King, Leader of the Council, clarified that he was the current Armed Forces Champion, and agreed that this showed the limitations as to how widely known that championship was.

The Panel considered a member's suggestion that there should be champions for rural and coastal issues, as well as one for transportation and travel who could direct work at long-term plans for the future, including road infrastructure and usage.

Champions could show leadership and be 'friendly critics', and improve links to other organisations. A Panel member asked to see evidence as to how the roles would work, suggesting the piloting of a champion role, to be evaluated as to how it had worked. Questions were asked as to how the value of champions could be reviewed, as to what they add. Members underlined the need for champions to utilise councillors' expertise and knowledge, and that councillors should be asked to give the areas in which they had expertise and knowledge. The Leader agreed that this was a good idea and committed to opening champion positions up to all parties.

The Chairman outlined a previous champions scheme which had been operated at Colchester Borough Council. This had fallen away, due to not receiving significant support or engagement, and it was suggested that there needed to be good communication with officers, and for Cabinet to direct meaningful matters to champions when appropriate.

The Deputy Leader cautioned against setting an exhaustive list of Championships and agreed with the suggestion of trialling a couple of roles, followed by a review of their operation, and effort made to minimise additional workload on officers. Following this conversation with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, the Policy Panel decided not to make formal recommendations, but members of the Panel suggested the following as potential areas for which Champions could be looked at: Physical health, retail, open spaces and leisure, rural and coastal issues, travel and transport, young people, older people, climate change.

RESOLVED that the Policy Panel had debated the merits of creating Champion roles to support the business of the City Council.

66. Climate Change Policy

Ben Plummer, Climate Emergency Officer, gave a presentation on the key points relating to the Climate Change Emergency which had been declared by the Council, including actions taken and the embedding of this within the culture of the Council, including the draft Strategic Plan, Climate Emergency Action Plan and in work with partners. All committee reports now had a standard 'Environmental Implications' section and environmental assessments were carried out in the initiation stage of all projects.

Low-carbon offices at Rowan House were being prepared for in-person use by staff, including the use of heat pumps. A sustainable travel plan was in place for staff, including greater use of online working and reductions in waste. Environmental training had been rolled out for all staff. SPDs [supplementary planning documents] were being written on a range of environmental and sustainability topics. An Energy Manager was being recruited to help reduce bills and emissions.

Partnership working relationships, such as with Essex County Council, were described. The Climate Emergency Officer outlined the Active Travel Fund and the hosting of the Climate Action Anchor Institution's working group.

The Council's sustainability work included working to meet the Future Homes Standard 2025 and to entirely phase out use of glyphosate weed killers. The Amphora Energy Heat Network and solar park were described.

The Council continued to engage with community groups, and its approach to community engagement was outlined.

The Council's emissions data from 2021-22 were described, with an explanation of how emissions were measured and where they originated from. The main parts of the Council's carbon footprint came from gas, electricity and the Council's vehicle fleet. A 10.1% decrease in Council emissions had been recorded since its declaration of a Climate Change Emergency. Projections of Carbon Dioxide emissions to 2030 were given, having been produced in cooperation with the Carbon Trust, and including emissions from Colchester Borough Homes. The Panel were told of the surveying and work which was ongoing to achieve net zero Carbon emissions by 2030.

A request was made for the Climate Emergency Officer to circulate his presentation slides to all elected members.

Monitoring included by the Climate Change Working Group, the Environment and Sustainability Panel, and the County Council Project Board. The work of these bodies was explained. Climate Emergency UK [CEUK] conducted external reviews and provided advice. The Council's action plan was scored at 52% by CEUK, compared to the average score of 43%. A plan was being drawn up to implement actions based on recommendations from CEUK and scoring from CEUK on climate action was expected from February 2023 and would be published.

The Panel considered the report and presentation. A Panel member gave the view that climate change and sustainability were related but different subjects. When looking at vehicles for use by the Council, the Panel member argued that the Council should examine vehicles' complete footprint for production and use, and judge which were most sustainable and least damaging to the environment.

Approval was expressed for the 10.1% reduction in Carbon Dioxide emissions, but concern was also raised that the Council was only two-thirds of the way towards achieving its target of net zero emissions by 2030. A request was made for more environmental SPDs to be produced, and more details requested on environmental training for councillors, partnership working with the County Council, and on whether there were enforcement powers which the Council could use to control or restrict emissions and vehicles producing high levels of emissions. Panel members suggested that producing an overarching Climate Change Policy would underline the Council's commitment to reaching Carbon neutrality, and communicate to the public the importance of active travel and lowering emissions.

A Panel member suggested that a Member Champion could be appointed for the field of Climate Change, working with Portfolio Holders and officers to ensure decision making takes place with consideration duly given to the Council's emissions. The Panel considered whether the Council should commit to never taking decisions which would damage the environment.

Councillor Bentley, who was also Leader of Essex County Council, gave a brief description of the Active Travel Scheme and the funding involved, and argued that a Council transport champion would help to advertise the Scheme and increase

uptake. It was emphasised that the work being done was to educate, inform and persuade people, not to dictate to them regarding their travel options. It was noted that action against climate change was everyone's responsibility, but that many people did not know what they could do to help improve the situation and that the Council could act to persuade people to change their travel behaviour, to the extent that they could do so. Councillor Bentley argued that the UK must show leadership in tackling climate change, that the current generations might be the last which could act to reverse changes, and that the Council should have a policy to guide its efforts and clarify its targets and methods to achieve them.

The Panel discussed the current 'no idling' policy, with the Leader explaining that the Council was looking at how to inform, persuade and, if necessary, enforce the policy. Panel members urged caution when enforcing, and to seek effective ways to engage with and persuade people, working alongside the County Council.

A Panel member urged the Climate Emergency Officer to seek the latest survey data collected by colleagues at Essex County Council.

The Panel considered the potential benefits of having an efficient, reliable, low-cost public transport system, looking at examples such as 'Transport for London.'

The Climate Emergency Officer gave assurance that he had noted the views and suggestions given and his view that the Panel was indicating that it wished to see a simple overarching policy on addressing climate change. The implementation date for the new environmental SPDs was imminent and the Climate Emergency Officer explained that he would investigate what powers the Council held to control emissions. Regarding engagement with the public, there was a section covering resident engagement and surveying in the upcoming action plan. A County Council app was about to go live to help people seek ways to reduce their emissions and energy usage, leading to savings on energy bills.

Rosa Tanfield, Group Manager (Neighbourhoods), summarised the conversation held regarding the ways the Council and individuals could change their behaviours, and highlighted the number of local groups which were working with an environmental focus, dealing with issues such as fuel poverty and active travel, and which the Council was supporting where possible.

The Deputy Leader posited that the Climate Emergency Declaration already laid out what was needed, and that actions being taken were widespread and ongoing, with a clear target of carbon neutrality by 2030. The Deputy Leader argued for officers to focus on work necessary to meet this target, rather than on policy development. Counter arguments were heard from some members of the Panel, including that the Climate Emergency Declaration was not a policy, that it was important to clarify what the target was (e.g. was it for carbon neutrality within the Council or for the whole area of Colchester) and that a simple policy would set a framework and codify targets. It was argued that the County Council's policy could be used as a template, allowing a policy to be quickly drafted. A Panel member suggested that the drafting of a policy might entail more work to set out something that was already embedded in the Council's culture. Rory Doyle, Strategic Director, noted that the Panel did not seem to have a consensus as to whether it wished to recommend that a formal overall policy be drafted.

The Leader praised the work done by officers to make progress, including to get two-thirds of the way to the target of 'zero carbon by 2030'. The Leader asked that the Panel acknowledged this work, and support the work of Cabinet and the Environment and Sustainability Panel, which would look at what gaps there might be in the Council's approach and how best these could be addressed.

RECOMMENDED to CABINET that Cabinet work with the Environment and Sustainability Panel to identify if gaps remained in the Council's approach towards meeting its targets relating to fighting climate change and, where identified, to identify how best to address them.

67. Work Programme 2022-23

A reminder was requested as to the scope of the item which the Panel was due to consider regarding the Grounds Maintenance contract. Rosa Tanfield, Group Manager (Neighbourhoods), explained that the Panel had previously recommended to Cabinet that the current contract be extended for three years, with annual updates to be provided to the Panel over the course of those three years.

RESOLVED that the Panel notes and approves the work programme for 2022-23.