

51. City Status – Meaning and Opportunities

Andrew Weavers, Monitoring Officer, gave the background to city status being awarded as part of the Platinum Jubilee, with letters patent being prepared to confirm this and due to be received at a special Full Council meeting on 12 September. The letters would be received, and the name of the Council would then be changed to 'Colchester City Council'. All rights and privileges of the Borough Council would be preserved and transferred to the new City Council, which would encompass the same geographical area as the Borough. The first Alderman of the new City Council, former-councillor Peter Chillingworth, would then be appointed and a civic reception held to thank partners who helped in the bid for city status. A Royal visit was likely to occur in the Spring, and the Council was liaising with the Lord Lieutenant's office.

A working group had been formed across all services to maximise the benefits and community involvement in and from city status.

Karen Turnbull gave a presentation laying out the bid which Colchester had submitted to apply for city status, the main areas of opportunity which were being explored, partnership working locally and to learn from the experiences of other cities which had recently gained city status, and the work being done by officers.

Councillor Doctor Pam Cox, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Heritage, presented the Administration's theme for developing Colchester, 'Our City Through Time'. This involved making the most of local historic assets, celebrating the area's different eras by holding themed events, and looking to the future, to include the 'Colchester Future Generations Commission.' An example of the events being explored was to hold a full civil war battle reconstruction to mark the Siege of Colchester, potentially involving the Business Improvement District and likely to cost around £15,000.

In addition to exploiting the cultural and historical assets of Colchester, plans for improving 'green' and 'blue' infrastructure were outlined, including opening up the River Colne to greater recreational use and making Colchester a greener place to live whilst supporting new energy provision options, agri-tech innovation and new technology, including in building new green housing. The Future Generations Commission would work to involve young people in questioning what made a good, commercially successful green city.

Badging/branding would be needed for the new city and the Council was looking to work with the other Essex cities, to promote each other jointly. Portfolio Holder for Culture and Heritage expressed a preference for keeping the Centurion logo and argued that a logo change should not be rushed. Councillor David King, Leader of the Council, stressed the need to engage all generations and ensure that the project must be fun for all. The current situation facing people was tough, but the gaining of city status would be used to provide positivity and healing, following the pandemic. It was also proposed that the opportunity be taken to generate income and local prosperity in order to improve quality of life and wellbeing. The Leader asked for councillors to help in this and to give their thoughts on how best to achieve the Council's aims. A Panel member noted that Colchester was given Borough status by Richard III and that the new city should remember and acknowledge its history.

The Panel discussed the content of the presentations given and were in agreement that the start of the celebrations should be set as 12 September, on the day that the letters patent would be formally received by the Council. It was stressed that all areas and communities should be involved, including those who found it difficult to come into the centre of Colchester. A request was made for the next Policy Panel meeting to invite residents to give

their ideas, including specifically those relating to city status. One Panel member suggested that the letters patent be taken around the Colchester area for display to different communities and it was stressed that the officer working group's work would be directed by elected councillors. The Panel's members suggested opening up the proceedings to be held on 12 September, possibly to hold a large event in the High Street, including a procession with escort, music performances, street partying and performance art. The Portfolio Holder suggested that options could include a street party, with displays and performances on the High Street.

The need for good communications and advertising was discussed, including reaching and consulting with people across the Colchester area, parish councils and rural communities. The Monitoring Officer, in answer to questions, explained that Party Group Leaders had been consulted on a new name, with a consensus reached on 'Colchester City Council'. The issuing of letters patent would cost the Council £1,764, and these would be precious documents. The Council may potentially commission a replica for display purposes, and possibly copies for sale. The Panel was assured that only Colchester would be receiving its letters patent on 12 September, ensuring maximum publicity. A Panel member suggested that the extraordinary Council Meeting should be held away from the Council chamber, at a location that would allow more residents to attend. A concern was raised by one member that 12 September would not leave enough planning time for a large-scale event, and that an enlarged Christmas fair and celebration may be a better option. Renaming and rebranding needs were discussed and Councillor Bentley explained that any replacement of existing brown signs with new versions would need to be requested from Essex Highways, by 'Visit Essex'.

Panel members urged for people to be encouraged to take part in celebrations on 12 September, noted the entrepreneurial talent across the Borough and considered how to mobilise this talent and to use it to attract business and investment in the future. A suggestion was to consider a City economic improvement zone, especially given the proximity to London.

It was further considered how to include residents from across the Borough, including those who would find it difficult to get to Colchester itself. Members suggested that local celebrations should be considered, and that parish, town and school councils should be asked to be involved in planning festivities.

It was suggested by a Panel member that this would give an opportunity to look for new opportunities to twin Colchester with towns and cities in continental Europe. It was noted that existing twinning relationships should continue to be strengthened.

The potential for celebrating the history of the Colchester area was discussed, including the Gosbecks Archaeological Park and Mersea Island. Caution was urged that the Council must be mindful of budgetary implications of any plans.

Policy Panel asked for further details regarding the officer working group, including how it was being set up and how it would seek input from partner organisations and residents. The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Heritage gave assurance that she would be involved in this working group and that there would be further work done to ascertain how elected members and others would be involved. The Leader of the Council explained that the Council would seek as many ideas as possible, and would aim to gain cross-party support, assigning reasonable resources to any work and looking to invest in ways to improve quality of life and achieve lasting benefits for residents in both urban and rural areas.

The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Heritage informed the Panel that a range of options to celebrate city status were under consideration. The Leader of the Council expressed a wish

to improve opportunities for local performers and artists and explained that the Business Improvement District would look at adapting its planned marketing, with the potential for a 'festival of light' to be held to celebrate Colchester.

A Panel member suggested asking all elected members to nominate their local community assets. The Leader of the Council requested that Cabinet be given time to take on the points raised at this meeting, look at what could be done and then report back to 'share, show and tell.' Rory Doyle, Assistant Director (Environment), suggested that an update be provided to Policy Panel later in the municipal year. The Leader of the Council agreed and offered to provide an update at each Panel meeting for the rest of the year. A member of the Panel welcomed this and requested an expanded plan of action be provided to the Panel, with opportunities at future meetings to look at how progress was being made.

RECOMMENDED to CABINET that Cabinet considers the comments and ideas put forward by the Policy Panel regarding the celebration of city status, and that celebrations formally commence on 12 September 2022.