

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

