

# Scrutiny Panel

## Tuesday, 28 January 2020

**Attendees:** Councillor Tina Bourne, Councillor Beverly Davies, Councillor Chris Hayter, Councillor Mike Hogg, Councillor Sam McCarthy, Councillor Lorcan Whitehead

**Substitutes:** Councillor Dennis Willetts (for Councillor Kevin Bentley), Councillor Lewis Barber (for Councillor Paul Dundas)

**Also Present:**

### 246 Minutes of Scrutiny Panel meeting 10 December 2019

*RESOLVED* that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.

### 247 2020/21 Revenue Budget, New Strategic Priorities and the Medium-Term Financial Forecast

Councillor David King, Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources, Paul Cook, Interim Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer, and Darren Brown, Finance Manager (Business Partner) presented the report covering the proposed 2020/21 Revenue Budget, New Strategic Priorities and the Medium-Term Financial Forecast. The Portfolio Holder provided an overview of the approach employed to drafting the budget. The Budget was designed to be ambitious in its aim of providing the necessary resources for allowing the Council to deliver on its priorities. £10million had been allocated as an initial sum towards this work. Scoping work had been carried out and £500k allocated to fund feasibility studies into proposed measures toward achieving the Strategic aims of the Council.

Sustainability was a key consideration. The Council was a lean organisation, but it had to be accepted that if more was to be expected of officers, then the appropriate resources would need to be made available. The Budget took a long-term view and the report presented much detail on the current position, and as much as possible on future expectations. Examples included £30m funding sourced for the Northern Gateway, funding for High Street improvements and the Council's response to the declared Climate Emergency.

Planning was being conducted out to 2030 but much information regarding future developments could not be known at this time. Additional information was provided on New Strategic Priorities and on projects such as the new Town Deal bid, where amplified

resources expended increased the chance of a successful bid.

It was noted that Council Tax income was important, but that it was also important to note that local Council Tax support was in place to help those residents who needed it. The rise proposed for the Borough Council's portion of Council Tax was below inflation but necessary in order to provide the resources necessary for planned actions. If the increase had been set in line with the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), a Band D property would incur a £237 per month charge by the Council, rather than the proposed £195 per month.

It was explained that the report and Budget had been drafted in the context of the 2020-21 Local Government Finance Settlement. It had been recommended that the contribution to meet the pension scheme deficit should be paid in advance from reserves, as this was calculated to save the Council £200k in comparison to alternative payment options. Staff who had moved to the Council's commercial companies, under TUPE Regulations, included some who were part of the local government pension scheme, but it was confirmed that this would not have an effect on the Budget.

The Capital Programme was summarised and included new schemes, the New Strategic Priorities, the Town Deal bid, the '100 Homes' project and the improvement of Colchester's CCTV network. Reserve levels would be maintained at a prudent level.

It was noted that the Treasury Management Strategy included prudential indicators, and the borrowing and investment strategy for 2020-21.

A Panel member raised concern that the Strategic Priorities identified in the report gave no indication as to an order of importance/priority. The member expressed the view that this would make it easier to scrutinise the Budget and judge as to whether funding allocations towards each priority were appropriate. Another Panel member further argued that it would be helpful to see details to show what levels of funding were allocated towards measures to further the Strategic Priorities.

The Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources clarified that the Council was at the commencement of the feasibility studies into the New Strategic Priorities and so it was not possible to give greater information on prioritisation at this time. He welcomed the Panel to provide further scrutiny and oversight on the Strategic Priorities once the feasibility studies had concluded and more information was available. A more informed view would then be possible of the positive effects of individual projects on the different Strategic Priorities.

The Panel questioned if the mention of working with Essex County Council (ECC) on a new Transport Strategy showed a change in approach at the Council, possibly away from the Transport for Colchester Plan. The Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources informed the Panel that Councillor Kevin Bentley, ECC Cabinet Member for Highways

and Resources, had met with representatives of the Council to investigate opportunities for vital partnership working to improve the public realm and transport infrastructure. An agreement was needed to lay out how this working would proceed, building on effective work within the Local Highways Panel (LHP).

The Panel asked if the LHP had a budget allocated for 2020-21. The Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources, and Councillor Mark Cory, Leader of the Council, gave assurances that there remained a commitment to continue with the LHP and committed to provide an answer as to what funding was allocated for 2020-21.

More detail was requested on this and on the proposed strategic review of the Waste and Recycling service. Richard Block, Assistant Director – Corporate and Improvement Services, explained that the last service review was carried out in 2017. Since then, recycling performance had significantly improved and was good, but it was agreed that a new review was warranted, to keep the service fit for the future, lower sickness levels, ensure workplace health, address growth in the Borough and make best use of assets and resources.

It was asked if the Council planned to continue to fund allocation of Police Community Support Officers within the Borough, with the Panel noting that the £305k already allocated was due to end this year. The Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources confirmed that the Council maintained a good relationship with Essex Police and continued to work towards shared priorities. The Finance Manager (Business Partner) confirmed that £330k had been allocated, from New Homes Bonus income in 2018-19, to fund additional policing in the Borough.

An update was requested on the proposed elephant sculpture and public realm improvements planned as part of the 'Fixing the Link' project to better link Colchester Railway Station and the Town Centre. The Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources informed the Panel that the project had been delayed but was expected to commence imminently. Spending has commenced and the intent is to ensure the project succeeds, including better lighting, more CCTV and more-attractive landscaping.

Panel members discussed the commitment to renewal of community assets, as detailed in the report, and elucidated a wish to receive further updates on this once feasibility work has produced further information. The positive reception which had been given to discussion of the potential for a new Youth Zone was noted. A Panel member argued that, should this go ahead, existing youth groups should be included and helped, and not ignored. The Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources agreed to provide more detail, when possible, and explained that wide consultation would be needed for projects such as Youth Zones, which would entail a significant capital expenditure to set up, and a significant revenue cost to run. Work on such projects was being carried out by local authorities responding to developing needs and reductions in existing provision.

The Panel expressed a wish to conduct pre-decision scrutiny of the draft asset-based community strategy, once produced. The Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources welcomed further discussion of this with the Scrutiny Panel in the future.

The Panel considered the number of changeable variables involved that affect the setting and pursuit of Strategic Priorities. A key variable was the changing of public opinions and views. It was posited by a member that this meant Strategic Priorities would need to be flexible, and that setting a fixed order of Priorities would cause significant difficulty in responding to changes in variables and in the Priorities themselves.

It was argued that the Council's Strategic Priorities overarch the day-to-day work of the Council, guiding operational behaviour, and that this makes them more difficult to scrutinise than the performance indicators for operational performance. This was given as being particularly true where working with partner organisations. The Council was noted as building effective working relationships with partners, which takes time but leads to better ways to progress towards strategic goals. The Panel asked as to what mechanisms were in place to assess the deliverability of Strategic Priorities and the projects working to further them. The Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources noted that the Strategic Priorities were important parts of a greater whole. He summarised the elements considered within the deliverability assessments used by the Council and stressed that resources, skills and knowledge were necessary in order for the organisation to do this effectively.

To meet the challenge of achieving the Strategic Priorities, key elements included the effective use of delivery boards, appointments to posts and progress reporting.

The Panel requested details of the '100 Homes' project, which had been allocated £20m. Councillor Adam Fox, Portfolio Holder for Housing, explained that the project was for the purchase of 100 residential properties, which would then be transferred into the control of a Council-owned commercial subsidiary company. The properties would be rented out and profits paid back to the Council as a dividend. A report on the project would be taken to Cabinet on 29 January 2020 to detail the process of purchasing the properties. This was seen as an opportunity to increase social housing capacity, outside the Housing Revenue Account, by buying back and refurbishing former Council stock which had been lost through 'Right to Buy' sales, and was an approach being utilised by other local authorities. The properties would then be available to house people on the housing waiting list.

The Panel asked for officers' views on how future funding gaps may be addressed, given the difficult time being experienced by local government. The Interim Head of Finance highlighted that Table A1 of Appendix A of the report showed a comparison between the financial forecast if government funding was maintained, and if it was reduced. It was

expected that savings would be sought across a wide range of areas, including fees and charges and partnership spending. Finding additional savings would be demanding, but within the capability of the Council.

The Panel noted that the Council had not been included in past pilot schemes for reforming Business Rates and asked for views as to what Government may be planning for the future. The Interim Head of Finance confirmed that a number of discounts had been announced and that a fundamental review of local government funding, expected for 2021, had been delayed. The Government has, however, affirmed its commitment that local government should move to being fully funded from business rates in the future. The expected 'Fairer Funding Review' was highlighted and was expected to assess the needs of local authorities. New proposals were expected from the Government for 2021-22 and at this stage it was not possible to know whether the Council would benefit from this.

A member of the Panel queried wording in the report relating to the NEGC Project and the release of funding from the Council into NEGC Ltd. The member contended that the wording of the report, in comparison to Appendix C, was looser and did not rule out NEGC funding if the Planning Inspector rules that the Council's emerging local plan must change. It was argued that it would be sensible not to release this funding until the Planning Inspector approves the Council's local plan. It was further argued that, whilst the report talked of a postponement of the latest issuing of funds to NEGC Ltd, it was more accurate to say that the Council had voted to reject Cabinet's proposal that the funding be issued.

In response, the Portfolio Holder for Business and Resources committed to look at the language used and to ensure consistency in this and confirmed that a flat rejection of the Local Plan by the Planning Inspector would necessitate a rethink and the seeking of a new approach. The Panel noted that Full Council had already directed that a 'Plan B' proposal be worked upon in case the existing Local Plan was not judged to be acceptable by the Planning Inspector.

The Interim Head of Finance was asked to explain if the priorities guiding the Treasury Management Strategy were the same as those given in the previous year. It was explained that prudential limits for borrowing were set each year and that figures did change over time. Elements do, however, remain the same as prudential indicators stay the same.

A Panel member enquired whether the Council was taking best advantage of the low rates of borrowing offered by the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb). The Interim Head of Finance elucidated the Council's approach, which was to only borrow when necessary, rather than to overborrow ahead of need, even when interest rates were low. PWLB rates have risen by 1% and, although this still represents good value, other good options for borrowing are sought when this becomes necessary. The Portfolio Holder for

Business and Resources expanded on this to say that the Council used cash balances held to ensure service delivery, with debt carried being within prudential limits. Prudence was balanced with borrowing in order to make progress towards the Strategic Priorities.

*RESOLVED* that:?

- (a) The Panel will further scrutinise the Council's proposed New Strategic Priorities in greater detail once feasibility studies have been carried out and more detailed costings available.?
- (b) The Panel will carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the emerging asset-based community development strategy.?

*RECOMMENDED* to CABINET that:?

- (a) A report be provided to the Scrutiny Panel on the Council's proposed New Strategic Priorities, once feasibility studies have been carried out and more information and detail is available. This report should, if possible, identify what allocations of funds are being made for work towards achieving each priority.?
- (b) More information be provided on the Council's approach to the new Transport Strategy and proposed review of the Waste and Recycling Service, including financial implications, where possible.

## **248 2020/21 Housing Revenue Account Estimates and Housing Investment Programme**

Darren Brown, Finance Manager (Business Partner), summarised the report and explained that the current Government policy looked for increases in social housing rent levels of CPI+1%. Following four years of 1% rent reductions per year, the Council's Asset Management Strategy was to be reviewed again in 2020, in light of the proposed increase in rent levels. The Panel's attention was drawn to one-off costs, such as that of the project to replace the Capita Housing Management system, which was reaching its end of life. It was confirmed that this had been put out to tender and that there was reasonable certainty that the amount allocated for this project would be sufficient, and include for some staffing costs and a contingency amount.

The predicted HRA debt profile was highlighted, with the expectation that this would increase at the start of the 30-year financial model and then reduce in later years.

Planned workstreams in the Housing Investment Programme were noted, including the restarting of the sheltered housing refurbishment programme, starting with Elfreda

House.

Councillor Adam Fox, Portfolio Holder for Housing, answered questions on the £6.5m allocated for acquisitions and explained that this did not relate to the '100 Homes' project, but to a separate use of Right to Buy receipts to buy back former Council housing stock. It was forecast that this would comprise of 31 or 32 properties at an average price of £200k. Owing to property market fluctuations, it was not possible to give a precise forecast as to how many properties it would be possible to acquire.

The view was expressed by the Panel that the '100 Homes' project looked to be a reasonable way to attempt to reduce numbers on the housing waiting list, at an acceptable level of risk to the Council. The Portfolio Holder for Housing explained that funding for this would be sought from pension investment funds, and a new limited-liability corporation was envisaged to oversee the project. It was confirmed that Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) would play a role in managing and maintaining housing stock purchased, as well as fulfilling their role in allocation of properties via the Gateway to Homechoice system.

A Panel member queried whether any engagement exercises had been carried out to survey Council tenants' views as to the proposed rent changes. The Portfolio Holder for Housing informed the Panel that the Council's rent levels and charges were reviewed at the end of 2019 and had been available for scrutiny and challenge by elected members and members of the public.

A challenge was faced by the Council regarding the past need to reduce investment in the Council's stock of housing, as necessitated by four years of mandatory and cumulative reductions in social housing rent levels. This had included the suspension of the sheltered accommodation refurbishment programme. The proposed rent increase was vital to allow for increased investment in Council properties and extra information was being provided to tenants to explain this. The tenant Board Members of CBH had supported the measures proposed and tenants would experience an improved service as a result.

Councillor Tina Bourne, former Portfolio Holder for Housing, explained that the four years of government-dictated rent reductions had led to a loss of over £140m in the 30-year Asset Management Strategy in place at the time and that tenants had experienced an unavoidable reduction in services as a result, including a reduction in planned maintenance, and an extension of the lifetimes of kitchens and bathrooms. She posited that it was now necessary to increase investment in planned maintenance and noted that the four years of rent cuts had contributed to a number of registered providers being forced out of business.

It was queried whether tenants' views on the concomitant increases in rent and in investment in assets could be assessed by examining future complaint and compliment

levels and comparing these to previous years. The Portfolio Holder for Housing confirmed that tenants had shown that they were aware that services had been reduced, following on from the past years of rent reductions.

A Panel member asked if it would be possible to conduct a survey to produce data on tenant views, for the Panel to scrutinise, before the rent increase went ahead. The Portfolio Holder for Housing responded to emphasise the commitment to tenant engagement at CBH which, in addition to ongoing engagement work, included representation on the Company's Board and a biennial comprehensive surveying of the views of a large percentage of tenants and leaseholders. The Portfolio Holder for Housing suggested that the Scrutiny Panel may wish to scrutinise the role played by tenant engagement at CBH as a subject for a future meeting.

The Panel asked if there was any further detail which could be given on future possibilities for work on the Council's housing stock to move the Council towards carbon neutrality. The Portfolio Holder for Housing gave assurance that CBH had been working with the Conservation and Environmental Sustainability Task and Finish Group on this issue. The Council had a good record of working to reduce carbon emissions and increase its environmental sustainability. Retrofitting of existing Council properties to improve their energy efficiency would be expensive, but there were opportunities to reduce emissions, such as the Northern Gateway Heat Network project. New build properties would also be built to be energy efficient, and the Council was evaluating different options, including the Passivhaus standard for energy efficiency, as used by Norwich Council.

*RECOMMENDED* to CABINET that consideration be given as to ways in which to assess how the proposed increase in rent levels, and the increase in investment in the Council's properties, affects satisfaction levels of the Council's tenants.?

## **249 Climate Emergency Action Plan**

Councillor Mark Cory, Leader of the Council, and Rory Doyle, Communities Group Manager, provided an overview of the Action Plan and explained that, following scrutiny by the Panel, it would be presented to Cabinet for approval and then presented to Full Council. A budget for the work carried out to produce the Plan had been set and further funding would need to be allocated in order to implement the actions laid out within the Plan.

It was highlighted that Friends of the Earth had named the Council as one of the best-performing (in the field of environmental sustainability) in the UK, and that the targets set relating to this sustainability had been met and exceeded. The target for carbon emissions had been met before time, and emission of other pollutants such as



glyphosate herbicides, had been terminated or reduced. The Action Plan sets out a target for the Council to become carbon neutral by 2030.

The involvement of the Carbon Trust in informing the Plan was highlighted, and the report's appendices showed a range of information on the Council's carbon emissions and their reduction over recent years. The heating of properties was picked out as the biggest cause of emissions, and the error identified in the calculation of commercial fleet emissions was explained, with assurance given that the Council had still met its reduction target, even with the higher level of fleet emissions than had been originally calculated.

The recommendations within the Plan were explained and future work noted, including work to reduce Scope 3 emissions [emission sources which are outside the Council's direct control, but over which the Council has some influence]. Engagement with stakeholders and partners was judged to be vital in order for the Plan to succeed. In answer to questioning, it was explained that this included emissions from CBH and Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd. Scoping work was underway to explore ways to reduce emissions from the Council's wholly-owned commercial bodies.

Planning was a key area in which to achieve improvements across the Borough and, along with the Council's approach to waste management, key to mitigate local drivers of climate change and improve community resilience.

The Panel agreed that the majority public view now appeared to be that climate change needed to be addressed. Concern was raised that no budget allocations had been proposed for the different elements of the Action Plan. The Communities Group Manager was asked to indicate when costings would be made public for the elements of the Plan. It was argued that costings data was necessary in order to show deliverability of the actions within the Plan.

It was highlighted that energy usage for Leisure World was included within the report, but without any comparison to similar leisure centres, thus making it impossible to compare its relative efficiency. In answer, the Leader of the Council agreed that almost all swimming pools and leisure centres present challenges to reducing energy usage and carbon emissions, and it was possible that a new-build leisure centre would be needed in the future. Options were available, and the Communities Group Manager informed the Panel that he would be visiting an extremely carbon-efficient new leisure centre, built to the Passivhaus Standard by Exeter City Council and would discuss this with local officers. Similarly, any move to refurbish or replace the Council's Rowan House offices would be expected to cause a reduction in carbon emissions.

The management of fleet contracts was an issue and investigations were to be held to show how, when fleet leasing contracts came to an end, the negotiation of new contracts could insist upon measures which lower fleet emissions.

The Leader of the Council informed the Panel that the Council had carried out two Carbon Management Plans successfully and that the costs of achieving improvements were well understood. An officer had now been appointed who would lay out and show the costs relating to the measures proposed.

The Panel agreed that Climate Change was a crucial issue and that a cultural shift would be necessary for both officers and the public in order to fully address it. Modal shift would need to be promoted within the Council and would need to reflect how the Council then attempts to instil a change in behaviours of members of the public. More information was requested on the use of 'car clubs', and assurance was requested that plastic covers were not being used to protect new trees being planted.

The Leader of the Council confirmed that the tree covers being used were not plastic and were biodegradable. He further agreed that car clubs should be encouraged and incorporated within organisations' travel plans. The Communities Group Manager expanded on this to stress the potential to embed climate-protecting measures in the minds of members and officers of the Council. An air quality project was ongoing and had examined ways to drive behaviour changes.

The Panel discussed the part that Planning Services would need to play in mitigating the impact of development on the climate and considered whether policy reforms could help the Planning team to support work to focus on environmental sustainability and conservation and lay out requirements to be met by planning applications. The Leader of the Council informed the Panel that Karen Syrett, Planning and Housing Manager, had briefed the Task and Finish Group on a range of possible ways to approach this issue. The approaches which could be instigated would depend upon what Government policies and legislation comes forward. Work would be necessary to ensure that local authorities were permitted to refuse low-quality developments with poor environmental ratings. It was noted that there would be merit in the Task and Finish Group working with the Local Plan Committee to examine possibilities.

A Panel member recommended that the approaches of the local authorities in Leeds and Kirklees be examined, where planning policies were used to ensure the provision of electric vehicle (EV) charging points for new build properties. A range of councils had also installed rapid- and fast-charging stations in their municipal car parks. The Leader of the Council agreed to speak to Kirklees Council to gain further information on the approach adopted by that authority but cautioned that differences between councils would need to be taken into account when comparing approaches.

A member of the Panel queried what powers local authorities held with regard to insisting that new residential developments provide EV charging points. The Leader confirmed that the Planning and Housing Manager and her team had provided information to the Conservation and Environmental Sustainability Task and Finish Group

about a range of possible approaches the Council could take in the future, although this would depend upon the Government taking forward legislation in this area. The Council would lobby local MPs to support legislation to give planning authorities the power to ensure that new developments proposed were designed to a higher environmental standard than is currently required. Current legislation and regulations did not allow for this to be required.

The Leader of the Council emphasised the need for new developing communities which were environmentally sustainable, and noted this as being one of the main elements of the NEGC project, which he hoped would be carbon neutral.

The Panel stressed the need to be mindful of measures to combat climate change throughout the full suite of Council policies and procedures and ensure that these support the aims of the Climate Change Action Plan. The Communities Group Manager agreed that there were complex links between different strategies and policies, explaining that the Action Plan had sought to set out as much as possible in one document.

It was noted that not all of the actions within the Plan were for distinct actions, with some being more generalised points directing expected behaviours and actions. The Panel recommended that SMART objectives be set for each action [Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound]. The Leader of the Council explained that time would be needed to allow for expansion of the actions within the Plan, as the Task and Finish Group had had limited time to compile the actions, following the collection and assessment of evidence. The Plan contained tangible actions as well as actions to set out further workstreams. It was confirmed that work was underway to set out timescales and targets for completion of actions and funding had been allocated to support this.

*RECOMMENDED* to CABINET that:?

(a) SMART [Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based] objectives be set for actions within the Climate Change Action Plan.?

(b) Clarity be sought by Cabinet as to whether the Council may insist on requirements for developers of new residential properties to provide charging points for electric vehicles.

## **250 Colchester Positive Parking Review: Parking Strategy Pre-Consultation Draft**

Councillor Mike Lilley, Portfolio Holder for Communities, Wellbeing and Public Safety, and Richard Walker, Group Manager of the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP), introduced the draft Strategy and explained that much of the detail depends upon future

Government policy and legislation. Priorities for the Strategy included lowering emissions and reducing negative effects on the environment, whilst supporting improvements for the Town Centre. It was noted that Colchester provided cheaper public parking options than other shopping and visitor destinations in the Region, such as Chelmsford and Ipswich.

Examples of action to instigate changes in consumer behaviour included higher charges for parking between 7am and 9am, to incentivise the use of Park and Ride. Offers on parking were summarised as examples of ways in which parking management had been used to try to better equalise traffic flows in Colchester throughout the day.

The Group Manager summarised the past highlights from the operation of car parking in the Borough and informed the Panel that the Positive Parking Review which had been carried out was only the second to be held in the UK. The role of consultees in driving changes to parking policies was described, the themes of the review were highlighted, and illustrations provided. Current work streams were also covered, including work towards possible future installation of EV charging points in car parks. Finally, the difficulties in managing public perception and expectation regarding parking was described.

A member of the Panel asked whether information was available to show the utilisation levels of the Council's car parks and whether there was any capacity unused. The Group Manager agreed to provide the data on this to the Panel Member, following the meeting, and explained that a key issue regarding capacity was whether car park provision should be built to accommodate the extreme peak times of usage, or to fit average usage levels. There was a balance to be managed between provision and utilisation, with a priority of keeping car use within the core of the Town Centre to a minimum. Current data indicated that car park usage was either staying constant or was increasing. Across the UK, around 150 local authorities had signed up to a positive parking programme and the outcome of this massive data gathering exercise would be available at around Easter this year.

The Panel discussed whether it might be possible to influence shop opening times in order to stagger road use and make it easier for full-time workers to access them. The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Wellbeing and Public Safety informed the Panel that exploratory work had been carried out to find possibilities to influence a change in shop opening times to better match shoppers' preferences and change traffic levels. It would be difficult to bring about such a change to opening times but could improve the usage of Colchester Town Centre. This was being discussed with the Colchester Business Improvement District.

In response to the Panel's questioning on traffic modelling, the Group Manager informed members that modelling had been carried out on specific subjects, such as to show the effect of the parking offers introduced for the Britannia Car Park, and that more wide-

scale modelling exercises had been conducted by the County Council.

A Panel member welcomed Recommendation 7, which would simplify payment and allow car park users to pay for the exact time for which they used a parking space. The member queried why the decision had been taken to use the current system of 'pay on entry'. The Group Manager explained that 'pay on exit' systems had been calculated to be ten times more expensive to run than 'pay and display' when the decision had been taken. Pay and display options had also been more reliable than the alternatives.

A Panel member expanded on earlier comments to say that modal shift away from car usage was an important priority and that, through minor changes to car parks, major changes in individuals' behaviour could be brought about, including a move from car use to public transport. It was asked how the Parking Strategy fitted in with the Climate Change Action Plan and related strategies.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Wellbeing and Public Safety agreed that the related issues all needed to be considered together when contemplating changes in policy or strategy. The simple solution would be to increase parking charges, but in isolation this would reduce spending in the Town Centre and cause additional negative consequences. The Panel were informed of ways in which the MiPermit parking system could offer incentives in synergy with Town Centre businesses, through deals and loyalty card schemes.

The Chairman stated that it appeared that slight changes to tariffs would not bring the beneficial results being sought, and that there was a need to improve green links and other alternatives to car use. The Chairman further argued that the Scrutiny Panel did not have the expert knowledge necessary to make substantive recommendations on the Parking Strategy at this point.

The Panel raised concern that Recommendation 3 appeared to suggest that CCTV surveillance would only cover parking spaces subject to a higher, 'gold standard' tariff. The Panel agreed that CCTV coverage should be as wide as possible and not reserved to 'premium' areas of car parks.

The Group Manager answered questions to confirm that the NEPP and County Council were considering whether it would be possible to use workplace levies on employers with large car parks at their corporate premises.

Action planned for the near future included a roll out of more CCTV to cover car parks, an increase in the number of disabled parking bays and an increase in the time allowed for using these, from three hours to five or six. The Portfolio Holder for Communities, Wellbeing and Public Safety also highlighted the need for a second park and ride scheme and informed members that improved cycle storage options were under consideration.

The Panel discussed the need for clarity as to the overall purpose and goals for this strategy and other related documents. Panel members discussed whether a broader document with a wider scope was needed, to lay out a holistic approach towards encouraging modal shift. It was explained that this Strategy had to be limited to focus only on car parks, and their effect on air quality and congestion, as most methods to drive modal shift of road use lay with the Highways Authority, but Panel members noted that it was possible for the Borough Council to influence highways use and that this could be done with the County Council. The Scrutiny Panel agreed to recommend that paragraph three of the Foreword of the 'Easy-read Summary' be deleted, as this gives an impression that the Strategy covers a wider scope of action than it does.

It was stressed that public expectations must be managed, and efforts made to educate the public about the trade-offs between congestion, air quality, car park usage and cost of parking. The positive effects of actions must be stressed.

The Panel agreed that no recommendation would be made on the proposed timetable, and that this should be left for officers to draw up.

*RECOMMENDATION* to CABINET that Cabinet:

- (a) Considers ways in which to influence shop opening times to ease congestion at current peak times.
- (b) Ensures that CCTV coverage is extended across all car parks.
- (c) Commissions a wider study and report on modal shift.
- (d) Considers pursuing devolution of the Park and Ride scheme.
- (e) Considers ways to manage expectations and provide education on the trade-offs involved between car park pricing, congestion and air quality.
- (f) Directs that paragraph three of the foreword to the 'Easy-read Summary' be deleted.

## **251 Corporate Key Performance Indicator Targets for 2020-2021**

The proposed targets were introduced and explained by Councillor Julie Young, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Performance and Deputy Leader of the Council, and Richard Block, Assistant Director (Environment).

The targets for K1B1 (Time in days to process Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Scheme new claims and changes) had both been tightened, as staff performance had been very good, even whilst welfare changes were introduced.

The target for K1H2 (Affordable Homes Delivered) had been increased by 40.

The target for K1W3 (Weekly Missed [Waste] Collections) had been changed from an integer to a percentage, to take into account the increasing numbers of properties and residents in the Borough. The Panel noted that the proposed target for 2020-21 was stated as 99.94% and that the KPI should either then be renamed to 'Number of weekly completed collections' or the proposed target be changed to '0.06%'

The Assistant Director answered questions on K1W1 (Residual Household Waste per Household) to explain that this target had not been made more challenging, as the target was already a stretching one and that great effort had been needed in order to meet it, whilst giving one of the best performances for a local authority. Ongoing efforts to educate and persuade the public to recycle would be maintained. The expected positive effects of the proposed strategic review of Waste Services were explained, as part of the Administration's drive to keep improving recycling rates.

The Panel noted the target for K1H3 (Full Homelessness Duty Owed). It was stressed that it was not desired for pressure to be put on officers to not accept full homelessness duty except where this duty could clearly be shown to not lie with the Council.

*RESOLVED* that the Panel had scrutinised the proposed KPI targets for 2020-21, noted the dates in the reporting timetable and was satisfied with these.

## **252 Colchester Borough Homes Performance Targets 2020/21**

The proposed performance targets for CBH were presented by Councillor Adam Fox, Portfolio Holder for Housing, Martin Buddery, Interim Client Services Manager, and Karen Loweman, Director of Operations for Colchester Borough Homes. It was explained that targets were set as part of the Medium-Term Delivery Plan agreed between the Council and CBH and an overview of the range of targets was given.

Regarding the target relating to acceptance of full homelessness duty, the Panel were informed that it had been hoped that Government direction would have been given, but that this had yet to be forthcoming. Likewise, there was not yet any benchmarking data or best practice guidance from the local government sector. The target of 30% had been set based upon last year's performance, as the first full year in which this area of performance had been measured.

The Panel questioned whether the target relating to 'Capital programme elements completed on time (%)' was reasonable, given that this had not been achieved in the past three years. The Director of Operations explained that this workstream was linked to the budget set for CBH and that it was important to carry out all works and use the allocated budget. It is expected that, with an increase in delivery of capital elements recorded, the target for 2019/20 will almost be met by year end.

Answering a question as to why no target had been set for 'Average days to re-let general needs properties' for 2020/21. The Portfolio Holder for Housing explained that this performance area had been focussed on, following the previous contractor withdrawing from the contract, and re-procurement becoming necessary. The Portfolio Holder for Housing informed the Panel that significant work had been carried out to improve performance in this area since then, and that CBH had made good progress and expected to be significantly closer to target performance by year end. The Council and CBH would look to see if the target could be stretched in future years, but more information was first needed to assess the current capacity for performance in this area first.

The Panel welcomed CBH's high performance in customer satisfaction, at 93.1% as of up to Q3 of 2019/20, and queried whether this data was compiled from all tenants or from a range of tenants who had experienced specific types of interaction with the Company. The Director of Operations clarified that the statistic was a cumulative percentage, drawn from a number of different types of the service area's interactions with tenants, which were then weighted in relation to the relative numbers of those interactions being carried out. In addition to this, CBH used the biennial STAR [Survey of Tenants and Residents] to ascertain satisfaction levels of a significant sample of tenants.

*RESOLVED* that the Scrutiny Panel had noted and were satisfied with the draft CBH performance targets for 2020/21 and did not wish to raise any recommendations to Cabinet on this item.

## **253 Work Programme 2019-20**

*RESOLVED* that the Work Programme for 2019/20 had been noted and approved.