

Extract from the draft minutes of the Cabinet meeting of 13 October 2021

598. Colchester's Bid for City Status

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

Councillor Laws introduced the report to explain that this was the fifth time that Colchester had applied for City Status, and it had narrowly missed out in 2012. Colchester had historically been recognised as a city. Its Roman name meant City of the Victorious, and it was listed as one of 12 cities in the Domesday Book. It had many of the assets that were indicative of a city, such as a University, significant arts and cultural organisations, major tourist and heritage attractions. Whilst many of the benefits of City Status were intangible, it was a recognition of Colchester's values of being open to business, open to the future and open to diversity and tolerance. It could put Colchester on the international tourist map. There would be great business benefits and make Colchester more attractive to large and medium sized business and government departments looking to relocate. It was well supported by the Colchester MPs and partner organisations. It would give Colchester the status it deserved.

Councillor Fox attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Cabinet indicated his support for the bid for City Status, but to stress the need for wider public engagement. It was important that the bid enjoyed support beyond the "great and the good" and key stakeholders, and he did not consider enough had been done to win this support since he last addressed Cabinet on this issue. One possible way to engage and gain this support would be to set up an online petition which local residents could sign to demonstrate their support for the bid.

Councillor Laws accept that more could have been done, but there were both budgetary and time constraints. However he was happy to look at what more could be done to secure engagement. As the bid would be referred to Full Council to endorse, all Councillors would have an opportunity to demonstrate their communities' support for the bid.

Councillor Willetts attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Cabinet to seek clarity on the area that would be served by City Status, should the bid be successful. There was no clear definition of where the boundaries of the town of Colchester were. It was understood that the bid presented considerable opportunities for the town centre. However the outlying villages such as Aldham and Fordham were only loosely connected to Colchester and residents rarely visited. These communities felt that the old Lexden and Winstree Rural Council had better understood their needs. The Town Deal had identified Colchester town as the central areas where there was significant deprivation. Many of the villages were considerably less enthusiastic about the prospect of City Status, and the Portfolio

Holder should consider the area to be considered as a city should the bid be successful.

Councillor Laws explained that he would consider the comments with officers working on the bid and look at how the engagement process could seek to address these issues. The concerns raised could also be addressed through the use of appropriate signage to reflect how people felt about their communities.

Councillor G. Oxford attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Cabinet in support of the bid for City Status which would give Colchester the status it deserved and had held historically.

Councillor Barber attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Cabinet. Whilst he was open to persuasion, he did not currently support the bid for City Status, He felt that the residents he represented were comfortable with the identity of Colchester as a town. City Status would not help address the issues that Colchester faced, would not result in extra powers or opportunities and was not prestigious of itself.

Councillor Laws explained that he recognised that some residents had doubts or were ambivalent. But he felt that there were clear benefits to being a city although it was appreciated that many of the benefits were intangible.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The process to deliver Colchester's bid for City Status, the plan for engagement and the timescale required be noted.
- (b) Authority to agree the final wording of Colchester's application for City Status be delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Economy, Business and Heritage.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL that it endorses and supports Colchester's bid for City Status.

REASONS

City status will enhance Colchester's image and reputation and provide support for a more confident recovery from the economic impact of the pandemic. However, there is a strict deadline for submission of the bid and there is an opportunity to engage with a variety of groups and individuals to seek their support, both for the bid and for the key messages about Colchester it contains.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

City status is an honour conferred by Her Majesty the Queen. In the last 20 years there have been four opportunities to apply: the Millennium, 2002 Queen's Golden Jubilee, the 2012 Queen's Diamond Jubilee and next year Her Majesty will confer City Status to celebrate her Platinum Jubilee. There are no alternative options.