

CABINET

25 January 2023

Present: - Councillor King (Chair)
Councillors Cory, Cox, Fox, Goss, Luxford Vaughan*,
Nissen, J. Young

Councillor Luxford Vaughan attended remotely and did not vote on any of the items.

Also in attendance: Councillors Laws, Pearson, Scott-Boutell, Spindler, Smith, Sunnucks, Willetts

712. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 16 November 2022 be confirmed as a correct record.

713. Have Your Say!

Nick Chilvers addressed the Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) about the work of the Council's commercial companies. They had a diverse portfolio of services and projects and only generated a modest profit. Not all of what they did was well understood and there was concern about how their work was overseen. There was considerable churn of board members and senior officers. Scrutiny by the Council was light touch and not rigorous. The Council needed to do better in terms of informing the public of the function and work of the companies. It would be better if the companies concentrated on doing a smaller number of tasks but doing them well and allowing others to take on more risky projects.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, explained that the companies did generate a profit, provided social benefits and were an integral part of the Council. In terms of governance and scrutiny, this operated in a culture of collective respect. This was robust, particularly when matters were considered in private session, and was as open and transparent as it could be.

Cabinet members also stressed that the fall in direct government funding meant that the Council had to be more enterprising in order to generate income. The work of the companies was being reviewed and it was possible that they may do less in the future and their accountability would be improved. However they remained a vital part of the Council family and had delivered important gains to the borough, including social housing and improved leisure opportunities.

Trevor Orton addressed the Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1). He had been seeking improvements to the town centre since 2015. He thanked the new Leader of the Council for his work and support which had led to some

improvements but some issues remained and it was time for these to be tackled. He expressed his disappointment that the Chief Executive had not been able to join the Leader, Zone Warden and himself on a tour of the city centre as she had been on leave. More effort needed to be made to communicate to residents about the work of Council and the identity of its leadership.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, explained that the Chief Executive had a wide range of responsibilities, including the city centre, and was hugely resourceful, dedicated and hard working. Progress was being made and recurring issues were being addressed. It was proposed to amend the budget to include a dedicated budget for maintenance and repairs in the city centre.

Steve Kelly addressed the Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) to express his concerns about health issues, including gene therapies and excess death rates. These were relevant issues for the Council and had been raised in Parliament. The provision of vitamin B, which would be simple and cheap, would reduce cancer deaths. The Council should investigate this and provide information to residents so they could make an informed choice.

Councillor J. Young, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities, explained that the Council's approach was evidence and data driven. It was working with the NHS to develop a neighbourhood policy which would enable it to better determine the needs of the community and provide better information as to where to direct services and resources.

Councillor Sunnucks attended and with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Cabinet as Shadow Portfolio Holder for Resources. Whilst he was grateful for the information that the administration had shared with him, he had not been provided with all the information he had requested and he was concerned that the Council accounts for 2021-22 had not yet been published. This meant the Council was in breach of its statutory obligations. The accounts were necessary to properly assess the budget and in particular the Treasury Management Statement. Other Councils in Essex had published draft accounts.

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, highlighted that the accounts referred to covered the period when the Conservative Group had led the Council administration. The publication of the accounts had been delayed by the poor performance of the auditor, BDO. This was an issue right across the local government sector. There was no impropriety. The accounts would be published when the audit process was complete. Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, explained that the desire to see the accounts was understood and the administration was committed to the principle of transparency. The administration was looking again at what information it could release conditionally. At the meeting of the Scrutiny Panel on 24 January 2023 he had offered to commission an independent external review by CIPFA of the Council's Treasury Management Statement and Strategy.

Councillor Pearson attended and with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Cabinet. He had been concerned that wheeled bins had not been rolled out across the whole of the city and the impact this had on recycling rates, the cleanliness of the city and the health and wellbeing of the operatives. He was pleased to see the budget proposals indicated that consideration was being given to providing wheeled bins across the city.

Councillor Goss, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services and Waste, indicated that whilst he personally supported wheeled bins, no decisions had been taken yet and there were 6,000 properties which were unsuitable for wheeled bin. However, a review of the Waste Strategy was being undertaken in conjunction with Essex County Council, who seeking to raise recycling rates to 75%. As part of the review, methods of waste collection were being looked at.

714. Colchester Strategic Plan 2023-26 – A City Fit for the Future

The Chief Operating Officer submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Scott-Boutell attend and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Cabinet to welcome the way residents had been engaged in the preparation of the Strategic Plan and the weight given to their views. It was pleasing to note that particular efforts had been made to listen to hard to reach groups and to those in rural communities. These issues had been examined by the Policy Panel and the Panel was grateful that Cabinet members had attended and listened to their views.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, thanked Councillor Scott-Boutell and the Policy Panel for their work which had made a valuable contribution with test and challenge. The Strategic Plan 2023-26 would set out a framework under which annual delivery plans would sit. This approach had been endorsed by the LGA Peer Review. The annual delivery plans would be closely tied to the budget and to resource allocations. This would enable the Cabinet to be held to account for its performance. The Plan included a new objective “Delivering Modern Services for a Modern City” but this could only be done if the Council changed the way it worked.

Cabinet members endorsed the Plan stressing the input received from the public and across the Chamber. Communication with the public would be vital to engage and demonstrate that the Council had listened to their views in setting its priorities. It was important that Cabinet kept in mind the results of the public engagement, which had demonstrated residents desire to see regeneration of the city centre.

RESOLVED that the Strategic Plan 2023-26 be agreed.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL that the Strategic Plan 2026 be adopted and included in the Policy Framework.

REASONS

To enable the Strategic Plan 2023-26 to be agreed and adopted.

The Strategic Plan provides a springboard to maximise the opportunities and benefits of Colchester being granted city status. In the future this will also be supplemented by a long-term vision for Colchester created with others across Colchester to ensure the benefits are fully harnessed.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The current Strategic Plan expires at the end of 2022-23 so a new plan is required to reflect future challenges and opportunities. This needs to be adopted by full Council as the absence of a relevant Strategic Plan would create a significant risk of the Council failing to identify and deliver on its core priorities.

715. Budget 2023-24 and Medium Term Financial Forecast 2023-24 to 2027-28

The Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member together with the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel at its meeting of 24 January 2023.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, explained that the following three principles had underpinned the work on the budget:-

- To face up to the challenge and secure the long term financial future of the Council.
- To secure the services that residents valued most and protected the most vulnerable.
- To recognise that the best decisions were those made together with others.

The process had been very challenging and all the options considered had been difficult. Not taking the difficult decisions and relying on reserves would likely lead to bankruptcy. In view of comments made by Groups and the Scrutiny Panel some amendments would be proposed, and the administration would continue to listen, refine and respond.

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, introduced the report. Stability was key to the budget proposals. Several external factors had made this the most challenging budget process he had been involved in. These included the legacy of Brexit and the pandemic, the mini budget and the impact of inflation. The budget setting process had been as open as it could be and had included budget workshops, meetings with Alumni and discussions at Governance and Audit Committee. The Scrutiny Panel had also made a number of helpful recommendations. It was accepted that in these difficult circumstances, there would need to be a reduction in some services. The emphasis was on doing less but doing it better. It would focus support on services that residents had identified as most important: environment, town centre and neighbourhoods. It would ensure stability for the period of the MTFP and ensure growth and investment in well run services. It supported the hardest hit and those impacted most by the Cost of Living Crisis. There would be more working with parishes and partners to deliver services.

Inn terms of the Treasury Management Strategy and Statement, the comments made were welcomed. The format was based on advice from industry experts, LINK and the CIPFA Code had been followed. The figures it contained relating to the capital programme may be amended in due course following the completion of the review of the capital programme. Treasury management training for members had been scheduled for 30 January.

He thanked Paul Cook , Section 151 Officer, and his team for their work in preparing the budget proposals in such difficult circumstances.

Cabinet members also endorsed the proposals stressing how the challenge of delivering a

budget in these circumstances could deliver innovative solutions and thanking the Chief Executive for her work in transforming the Council which had played a key role in delivering modern services for a modern city and allowing a balanced budget to be delivered.

Councillor Willetts, Chair of the Scrutiny Panel, attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Cabinet. Scrutiny of the budget was the most important piece of work undertaken by the Scrutiny Panel and considerable time and effort had been devoted to it. He would not address the resolutions of the Panel, which were largely technical, except to highlight that there was a difference of opinion in respect of the Treasury Management Strategy and whether it was possible to have a credible Strategy without a balance sheet as its foundation. However, the commissioning of independent advice on the Strategy was welcomed.

The Panel had made a number of recommendations to Cabinet. The budget was well prepared, balanced and in broad terms followed the priorities of the Strategic Plan. It had recommended that the equality impact assessments be tightened up and further consideration be given to the impact on different ethnic communities, and of the impact on the health of operatives of the suggestion different containers be allowed to be used for garden waste. There had been a lack of clarity as to whether a Treasury Management Statement could be used to support a budget without a balance sheet, and over the use of reserves, so it was recommended training be provided to members.

The Panel had also had some concerns about the assumptions made regarding the proposals to charge for garden waste collections and the impact this may have. In view of proposed reduction in the provision for Neighbourhood Services there appeared to be a conflicting policy objective. It could fall to Neighbourhood Services to deal with the impact of the charging for garden waste services and to take any necessary enforcement action. This conflict needed to be resolved. Finally, the Panel considered that greater consideration needed to be given to the pay settlements in future years in the MTFF. The proposed settlements for 24/25 onwards seemed very optimistic, as stagflation took hold it was likely that pay settlements in excess of these levels would be sought.

Councillor King and Councillor Cory welcomed the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations, and noted their view that the budget was essentially sound. The administration would continue to revisit the assumptions in the budget and would be bringing forward amendment to the proposals that would address some of the recommendations.

Councillor Scott-Boutell attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Cabinet to welcome the open nature of the budget setting process and the use of budget workshops. These had been welcome opportunities to share ideas and make suggestions. The development of the Alumni meetings had also been a welcome addition to the budget process. The next challenge would be ensuring residents understood the proposals and understood that the Council was still listening.

Councillor Laws attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Cabinet. The impact of the war in Ukraine also needed to be acknowledged as a factor in the challenging economic landscape. The open approach to the budget setting process was welcomed and the Conservative group comments in respect of the accounts were offered in a positive way. There was no allegation of impropriety. However other authorities had

made draft accounts available and it was entirely legitimate to request this. The open conversation on waste collection was also welcomed and further consideration needed to be given to the introduction of wheeled bins, although consideration needed to be given to issues of residual waste.

Councillor Goss, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services and Waste, welcomed his comments and emphasised the need to consider the health and well being benefits to operatives of wheeled bins and that hybrid methods of collection were more expensive.

Councillor Fox, Portfolio Holder for Local Economy and Transformation, emphasised that the way Councils were funded had changed fundamentally and were now expected to stand on their own feet. The budget proposals would provide stability and allow the Council to deliver modern services to a modern city, notwithstanding the challenging economic circumstances. The thanks to the Finance Team were echoed and it was important that staff were continued to be paid fairly and that the Council maintained its living wage commitments. The Council would continue to deliver a wide range of services, and unlike some other Council, there were no proposals to close any facilities.

Councillor Cory explained that it was proposed to amend the recommended decision by adding the following additional decisions, which were aimed at maintaining neighbourhood services by increasing the prospective income from the early stages of charging for garden waste. It also provided a budget for repairs and maintenance for the City Centre, and to make a recommendation to Council to provide for 100% premium Council Tax charge to be levied on second homes, with effect from 1 April 2024.

2.7 To amend Appendix D to adjust the technical reconciliation and proposed savings measures in Table D4 as follows:

3. Remove Neighbourhoods Discretionary Services reduction savings of £300k

8. Garden Waste income - increase from £200k to £600k.

26. Remove Review of Tree Maintenance SLA with ECC saving of £50k

Add an additional item:

Table D5 (new 18) City Centre repairs and maintenance response service at a cost of £50k

To make any consequential amendments to Appendix J in light of the above changes.

2.8 To recommend to Council that it adopts the provisions contained in section 75 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill once enacted which will permit the Council to apply a 100% premium council tax charge to be levied on second homes in the city with effect from 1 April 2024.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) The 2023/24 Revenue Budget and revised Medium Term Financial Forecast as set out in Appendix A of the Section 151 Officer's report be approved.

(b) To note the Local Government Act 2003 Section 25 budget resilience statement and forecast level of balances set out in Appendix B of the Section 151 Officer's report be noted.

(c) The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2023/24 to 2027/28 as set out in Appendix C of the Section 151 Officer's report be approved.

(d) To *RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL* the 2023/24 revenue budget requirement of £25.285m.

(e) To *RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL* Colchester's element of the Council Tax at £211.59 per Band D property being an increase of £6.12.

(f) £400k capital grant funding from the Right to Buy retained receipts reserve as set out in Section 10.7 of the Section 151 Officer's report be approved.

(g) To amend Appendix D of the Section 151 Officer's report to adjust the technical reconciliation and proposed savings measures in Table D4 as follows:

3. Remove Neighbourhoods Discretionary Services reduction savings of £300k

8. Garden Waste income - increase from £200k to £600k.

26. Remove Review of Tree Maintenance SLA with ECC saving of £50k

Add an additional item:

Table D5 (new 18) City Centre repairs and maintenance response service at a cost of £50k

To make any consequential amendments to Appendix J in light of the above changes.

(h) To *RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL* that it adopts the provisions contained in section 75 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill once enacted which will permit the Council to apply a 100% premium council tax charge to be levied on second homes in the city with effect from 1 April 2024.

(i) The recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 24 January 2023 be accepted.

REASONS

To balance the 2023/24 budget and revise the Medium Term Financial Forecast.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were proposed.

716. Local Government Association Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan

The Chief Operating Officer submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member together with the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel at its meeting of 16 January 2023.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, explained that the Council's executive leadership team had sought a Peer Review from the Local Government Association (LGA) to help it reshape the Council in order to meet the

demands it was now facing. A Peer Review was an independent assessment by an external team of officers and Councillors. The Review Team had made a series of key recommendations and the Action Plan set out how these would be delivered. The Peer Review Team would return to review and assess progress in July 2023.

Councillor Willetts, Chair of the Scrutiny Panel, attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Cabinet to explain the recommendations made by the Panel. The Panel had considered that although the Action Plan was an effective plan, it could be improved in several places. Recommendation 3 needed to be defined and more clarity given between this recommendation and recommendation 1. It was considered that this recommendation was concerned with the heavy work required to make City Status a success and this needed further definition. Recommendation 4 needed to include a reference to the role of Councillors as local leaders and to explain what would happen once the mapping of partners and anchor institutions was complete. Recommendation 5 needed to highlight the linkages between the Strategic Plan and the budget, whilst recommendation 6 needed to highlight the importance of the Boundary Commission review, which was the lynchpin to this work.

Councillor King welcomed the Scrutiny Panel recommendations which were very helpful. The first year of City Status work was designed to give some breathing space for discussions with the boards of anchor institutions and ambassadors as to how the full benefits of City Status could be realised.

Councillor Cox, Portfolio Holder for Heritage and Culture, indicated she agreed with the Panel's analysis of division of responsibilities around City Status, and that many of the issues raised would be addressed through the Economic Strategy.

RESOLVED that

- (a) the Peer Challenge Action Plan be approved as the Council response to the key recommendations made the following the Peer Challenge.
- (b) the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 16 January 2023 be accepted.

REASONS

To ensure the Council responds appropriately to the key recommendations made by the Local Government Association Peer Challenge and in turn support the continuous improvement of how the Council is operated.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

To approve alternative actions to respond to the key recommendations of the Peer Challenge.

717. Half Year April - September 2022 Performance Report, KPIs and Other Performance News

The Chief Operating Officer submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, explained that the Key Performance Indicators would be reviewed going forward so that they reflected new priorities and resources.

RESOLVED that performance against Key Performance Indicators be noted and it be noted that where Key Performance Indicators had not been met that appropriate corrective action had been taken.

REASONS

To review half year performance for 2022 – 2023 and ensure robust performance management of key Council services.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to Cabinet.

718. Half Year April – September 2022 Performance Report 2020-2023 Strategic Plan Action Plan

The Chief Operating Officer submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

RESOLVED that satisfactory delivery against the Strategic Plan Action Plan be confirmed and that the Council has made satisfactory progress in meeting its strategic goals.

REASONS

To ensure the Council has robust performance management of delivery against key strategic goals.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to Cabinet.

719. Have Your Say on the Future of Colchester

Minute 59 of the Policy Panel meeting of 30 November 2022 was submitted to Cabinet, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

RESOLVED that Cabinet focus on the importance of obtaining views from young people [under 18], and residents who were digitally excluded.

REASONS

Cabinet had taken the views of the Policy Panel into account in the engagement with

residents that had informed the new Strategic Plan.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

It was open to Cabinet not to agree the recommendation from the Policy Panel.

720. Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2023-24

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

Councillor Smith, Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee, attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed Cabinet. The Governance and Audit Committee had looked at the draft scheme and supported it. It was important that the Council did all it could to support those hit hardest by the cost of living crisis. The support this scheme provided to those most in need was vital.

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, explained this a valuable benefit in kind. All residents had to pay some element of Council Tax but the scheme provided support of up to 85% to the most vulnerable. Whilst the Scheme had an impact on Council funding at all levels, it helped maintain high Council Tax collection rates.

RESOLVED that:-

The following elements be included within the Local Council Tax Support scheme 2023/24:

- Increase the maximum entitlement to 85% for working age claimants.
- Disregarding certain crisis payments paid to taxpayers (Local Welfare Provision)
- Disregarding emergency increase in national welfare benefits

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL that the Local Council Tax Support scheme 2023/24 be approved and adopted.

REASONS

To provide more financial support to low-income households throughout the City.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Not to make any changes to the scheme for 2023/24.

721. Report of Urgent Decision taken under Rule 22 of the Cabinet Procedure Rules

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

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, explained that whilst there was a financial impact from the decision to increase the pay award mid-year, this had been budgeted for this year and was now included in the Medium Term Financial Forecast.

RESOLVED that note the decision taken by the Leader of the Council in respect the revised pay award 2022/23 under the urgency provisions in Cabinet Procedure Rule 22 be noted.

REASONS

A decision taken under Rule 22 of the Cabinet Procedure Rules must be reported to the next meeting of Cabinet.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to Cabinet.

722. Colchester's New Economic Strategy 2022-25

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

Councillor Fox, Portfolio Holder for Local Economy and Transformation, introduced the report. The New Economic Strategy built on the previous Strategy. Whilst economic circumstances were challenging, there was an expectation that the Council would boost the local economy. It reflected the Council's priorities of having an inclusive economy, the commitment to raising pay levels through championing the Living Wage and improving infrastructure. The Strategy set out how Colchester would compete for talent and investment to help tackle inequalities and improve residents' lives by improving skills and increasing job growth. Working with partners and business and local authority partners would be key in delivering the Strategy. Decarbonisation was also an important theme of the Strategy.

There were several programmes and initiatives in place to support the Strategy including the Town Deal projects, grant schemes from the Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural Prosperity Fund, the Colchester Skills Programme, the Digital Strategy and the Levelling Up project.

Thanks were expressed to Karen Turnbull, Economic Strategy Specialist, for her work in developing the Strategy.

RESOLVED that the new Economic Strategy 2022-25 for Colchester be approved.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL that the Economic Strategy be adopted as part of the Council's Policy Framework.

REASONS

With Colchester recently honoured with city status as part of The Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations, Colchester's new Economic Strategy is timely.

Colchester is a hot spot for innovation and investment. Employment levels are high and businesses have proved their resilience. However, the combined impact of the pandemic, the UK's departure from the EU, the situation in Ukraine and climate change are presenting unprecedented economic challenges.

This Strategy aligns strongly with partners and their strategies to coordinate our efforts to support an inclusive economy. It charts a course to take Colchester's economy forward in partnership:

- supporting the economy to survive and thrive.
- enabling Colchester to compete for future talent, investment and influence; and
- improving people's lives and tackling inequalities through gaining and improving skills, encouraging jobs growth, influencing health and transport choices; and delivering more effective digital connectivity and improved personal and commercial prospects from this.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

To not adopt the Economic Strategy. There are however clear risks to not having a robust evidence based strategy in place such as not achieving local priorities, not being able to evidence and articulate Colchester Borough Council's wider vision for the economy and not providing a strong focus to our partners about their contribution to meeting our priorities and helping economic recovery.

723. Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd Annual Report for 2021-22

Minute 336 of the Governance and Audit Committee meeting of 30 November 2022 was submitted to Cabinet, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, thanked the Governance and Audit Committee for its work in scrutinising the work of the commercial companies, which was valued. It was anticipated that the review process would put the companies on a firmer footing and the recommendations were accepted.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Greater details be provided to the Governance and Audit Committee with regard to the maintenance of the fibre broadband network.
- (b) Detailed projections be provided to the Governance and Audit Committee in relation to the proposed solar panel site at the Northern Gateway development.
- (c) An explanation be provided for the delays in the production of accounts, and confirmation that the accounts would be referred back to the Governance and Audit Committee to review,

(d) More information be provided to the Governance and Audit Committee in respect of the potential risks and rewards associated with the Turnstone development.

(e) Details with regard to the level of investment and expected returns associated with the fibre network itself be provided to the Governance and Audit Committee.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

It was open to Cabinet not to agree to the recommendation from the Governance and Audit Committee.

724. Housing Revenue Account Estimates 2023-24

The Chief Operating Officer Director submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor J. Young, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities, introduced the report and the associated report on the Housing Investment Programme. The proposals in the reports delivered on the priorities set out in the Asset Management Programme. This included maintaining the housing stock to the Decent Homes standard. Elements of this included the commitment to achieving an EPC rating of C by 2030 and the submission of a bid for £1 million from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. There was an emphasis on tenant safety and the campaign for acquisition and new build to increase the provision of social housing continued. Work on Elfreda House continued and should be completed in the next financial year. Increasing regulation and the impact of inflation meant that the Council needed to be more efficient in its approach. Social housing rents had previously included utility costs. In view of the above inflation increase, these were now capped at 50% of costs which demonstrated the commitment to helping those most in need.

Government and regulatory policies had had a negative impact on the HRA Business Plan and the long term viability of the HRA would need to be looked at going forward.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) The HRA revenue funded element of £9,507,300 included within the total management fee for Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) be approved (set out in paragraph 5.14 of the Chief Operating Officer's report).

(b) Dwelling rents as calculated in accordance with central Government's rent policy be approved (set out in paragraph 5.7 of the Chief Operating Officer's report).

(c) The HRA revenue funded element of £9,507,300 included within the total management fee for Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) be approved (set out in paragraph 5.14 of the Chief Operating Officer's report).

(d) It be noted that the revenue contribution of £3,304,000 to the Housing Investment Programme (HIP) was included in the budget (paragraph 5.29 of the Chief Operating Officer's report).

(e) The HRA balances position in Appendix B of the Chief Operating Officer's report be noted.

(f) The Medium Term Financial Forecast (MTFF) set out at Appendix C of the Chief Operating Officer's report and the 30 Year HRA financial position set out at Appendix E of the Chief Operating Officer's report be noted

REASONS

Financial Procedures require the preparation of detailed HRA estimates for approval by the Cabinet, setting the new rent levels for the new financial year.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to Cabinet.

725. Housing Investment Programme 2023-24

The Chief Operating Officer submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) The Housing Investment Programme for 2023/24 be approved.

(b) The Capital Medium Term Financial Forecast (CMTFF) set out at Appendix A of the Chief Operating Officer's report be noted.

REASONS

Each year as part of the process to agree the Council's revenue and capital estimates the Cabinet is required to agree the allocations to the Housing Stock Investment Programme. These allow for work to be undertaken to maintain, improve, and refurbish the housing stock and its environment.

Members annually agree to accept a proposed 5 year Housing Investment Programme (HIP) in principle as the framework for procuring housing related planned works, improvements, responsive and void works and cyclical maintenance.

The proposed investment programme is linked to the Asset Management Strategy (AMS) and reviewed annually in the light of available resources and for each annual allocation to be brought to Cabinet for approval as part of the overall HIP report.

The Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) Board have considered the content of the Cabinet report submitted and is now seeking approval for the 2023/24 Capital programme.

The Chief Operating Officer's report seeks the release of funds under grouped headings as described in the AMS and supported by the Management Agreement dated 9th August 2013, which governs the contractual relationship between Colchester Borough Council

(CBC) and CBH.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were proposed.

726. Homes England Compliance Audit Report – social Housing Development

The Assistant Director submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member together with

RESOLVED that the contents of the Homes England Compliance Audit report.

REASONS

Homes England have given grant funding towards several of the Council's "New Council Housing programme" social housing developments. It is a requirement of the Homes England grant funding, and the Council's achieved "Investment Partner Status", that an annual compliance check is undertaken and that the findings are reported to the Cabinet. Homes England have selected a site at random, which has been audited, and the Council has met all of the funding obligations.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to Cabinet.

727. Waste and Recycling Services in Highwoods

The motion on waste and recycling services in Highwoods was submitted to the Council meeting on 1 December 2022 was submitted to Cabinet. It stood referred to Cabinet as the subject matter related to an executive function.

Councillor Jay had submitted a statement to the Cabinet, which was read by the Democratic Services Manager, as follows:-

As newly elected Councillor for the Highwoods Ward I have received a lot of feedback both via Facebook and Face to Face about the need for wheelie bins. As a resident I can only agree that recent consultations have been flawed with poor communication, no online option and subject to postal charges or hand delivery. There were no facts presented in terms of adopting the use of wheelie bins and its impact on recycling rates and costs. Residents need to make a considered and balanced decision if further consultation is offered to them.

Resident preference is for use of wheelie bins but I would like to see this reviewed as part of the wider review of waste strategy with proper consideration given to the issues in the Ward ; flats, narrow roads, lack of storage space due to local build designs, costs of any new equipment/vehicles so a costed and robust proposal with a decision which can be rationalised and communicated properly to all residents. I believe this should be a strategy decision and that further consultation would not be useful.

Councillor Goss, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services and Waste, had indicated that the issues raised would be looked at as part of the Waste Strategy going forward.

Councillor Fox, Portfolio Holder for Local Economy and Transformation, explained that Councillor Law was unable to attend and introduce the motion, but he welcomed the indication from Councillor Goss that the review of the Waste Strategy would look at these issues and he was sure Highwoods residents would be keen to engage with the review.

RESOLVED that the motion be approved and adopted.

REASONS

The Motion was consistent with the proposal to review the Waste Strategy.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

It was open to Cabinet not to approve the motion.

728 Progress of Responses to the Public

The Assistant Director submitted a progress sheet a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Progress Sheet be noted.

REASONS

The progress sheet was a mechanism by which the Cabinet could ensure that public statements and questions were responded to appropriately and promptly.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to the Cabinet.