

Policy Panel Meeting

**Grand Jury Room, Town Hall, High Street,
Colchester, CO1 1PJ**

Wednesday, 02 March 2022 at 18:00

The Policy Panel considers strategies, policies and legislative changes identified by Cabinet that may require review and improvement, and seeks Cabinet's agreement as to whether and how they should be examined, and reviews issues at the request of Portfolio Holders.

Information for Members of the Public

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Colchester Borough Council

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Policy Panel – Terms of Reference

- (1) To consider strategies, policies and legislative changes identified by Cabinet that may require review and improvement and to seek Cabinet's agreement as to whether and how they should be examined.
- (2) To review issues at the request of a Portfolio Holder and to make recommendations back to the Portfolio Holder for decision.

COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL
Policy Panel
Wednesday, 02 March 2022 at 18:00

The Policy Panel Members are:

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Councillor Chris Pearson | Chairman |
| Councillor Sam McCarthy | Deputy Chairman |
| Councillor Peter Chillingworth | |
| Councillor Pam Cox | |
| Councillor Mark Goacher | |
| Councillor Chris Hayter | |
| Councillor John Jowers | |
| Councillor Martin Leatherdale | |
| Councillor Lesley Scott-Boutell | |

The Policy Panel Substitute Members are:

All members of the Council who are not members of the Panel.

AGENDA
THE LIST OF ITEMS TO BE DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING
(Part A - open to the public)

Please note that Agenda items 1 to 5 are normally dealt with briefly.

1 Welcome and Announcements

The Chairman will welcome members of the public and Councillors to the meeting and remind those participating to mute their microphones when not talking. The Chairman will invite all Councillors and Officers participating in the meeting to introduce themselves.

2 Substitutions

Councillors will be asked to say if they are attending on behalf of a Committee member who is absent.

3 Urgent Items

The Chairman will announce if there is any item not on the published agenda which will be considered because it is urgent and will explain the reason for the urgency.

4 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillors will be asked to say if there are any items on the agenda about which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest which would prevent them from participating in any discussion of the item or participating in any vote upon the item, or any other pecuniary interest or non-pecuniary interest.

5 **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The Councillors will be invited to confirm that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2022 are a correct record.

Policy Panel Minutes 12 January 2022

7 - 16

6 **Have Your Say! (Hybrid meetings)**

Members of the public may make representations to the meeting. This can be made either in person at the meeting. Each representation may be no longer than three minutes. Members of the public wishing to have a statement read out by an officer on their behalf may register their wish for this by e-mailing democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk by 12.00 noon on the working day before the meeting date. A written copy of the representation, which must be 500 words or fewer, will need to be supplied.



There is no requirement to pre register for those attending the meeting in person.

7 **Verbal update on Covid-19 Commemoration plans**

8 **River Strategy**

17 - 36

The River Colne is a significant natural asset that runs through the heart of the Borough. This report sets out existing activity and projects associated with the river in addition to providing information to help inform a panel discussion on opportunities that exist to enhance the contribution the river makes to biodiversity, recreation, regeneration, and wellbeing.

9 **Mitigations which the Council can make regarding loss of Universal Credit uplift and financial inequalities**

37 - 50

This report provides an update to mitigations provided to residents by the Council

10 **Work Programme 2022-23**

51 - 52

This report sets out the dates of the Work Programme for 2022-2023 for the Policy Panel and gives the Panel an opportunity to consider what subjects for which it may wish to request Cabinet approval for the Panel to consider in the 2022-23 municipal year. Cabinet may also wish to consider what subjects it might want the Policy Panel to consider during 2022-23.

11 Exclusion of the Public (not Scrutiny or Executive)

In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the public, including the press, from the meeting so that any items containing exempt information (for example confidential personal, financial or legal advice), in Part B of this agenda (printed on yellow paper) can be decided. (Exempt information is defined in Section 100I and Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972).

Part B
(not open to the public including the press)

POLICY PANEL

12 January 2022

Attendees: Councillors Chillingworth, Cox, Goacher, Hayter, Jowers, Leatherdale, McCarthy, Pearson and Scott-Boutell.

Substitutes: None.

Also Present: Councillor Dundas, Councillor B. Oxford

35. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Debby Bloomfield addressed the Panel pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) to speak concerning the Council's plans for Covid-19 commemorations and the Panel's previous considerations regarding this subject. Mrs Bloomfield explained that she had lost two family members during the pandemic and felt upset and insulted by what was being put in place to honour those who had been lost. Mrs Bloomfield gave the view that the Council had not supported residents during the pandemic and that planting trees as a commemorative act was disrespectful. Mrs Bloomfield complained that the Council had not asked the bereaved what they had wanted and had not listened. Families had not been able to see their relatives and had had to live with loss. More money had been allocated to the Jubilee celebrations than to Covid commemorations.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

36. Verbal update on Covid-19 Commemoration plans

Andrew Weavers, Monitoring Officer, expressed his sympathy for the loss that Mrs Bloomfield had suffered and then presented the latest update on this subject. The Monitoring Officer explained that the Council was trying to address people's wishes and wanted to help people to commemorate their loss in a sensitive way.

The act of commemoration originally planned to occur in Charter Hall had been rearranged and, in partnership with the Mercury Theatre, Garrison and other partners, would now take place at the Mercury on Saturday 26 March 2022. The Mercury were staging the event for free and their staff were also volunteering on the day. There would be no entry fee charged for those attending. The event would be produced by the Mercury, with faith and community groups, for people to remember their loves, lives and losses during the past 2 years. It would also be livestreamed, and work is underway to see if BBC Essex could cover or stream the event. Community events will also be held during the day to remember and recognise the

work done by key and emergency workers through the past two years. The Monitoring Officer welcomed the views of the Panel on the plans being put in place.

The Panel noted that it had previously voiced concerns regarding plans for tree planting and that the Chairman had written, on the Panel's direction, to explain its displeasure at the situation.

Councillor Dundas, Portfolio Holder for Strategy and Leader of the Council, highlighted that the Panel had made recommendations to Cabinet in September 2021, which Cabinet then approved subject to the removal of the word 'celebration' from those recommendations. The Leader queried whether the wording of the recommendations truly reflected the intended views of the Panel. Regarding the four matters raised by the Panel, all were progressing, and the Leader was happy for the Panel to put forward recommendations now if it wished to do so.

The Leader clarified that the tree planting work being carried out was not related to Covid commemorations but was from the Woodland Trust tree planting budget. This did not stem from a decision taken by Cabinet.

The Leader emphasised the difficulties faced as to when commemoration would be appropriate, and the importance of careful consideration as to timing, given that the pandemic had not yet ended. The Chairman agreed and stressed that communication across the Council was vitally important, including between its committees and the Cabinet.

A Panel member explained that her understanding was that this subject was to have been brought back to the Panel for consideration and for recommendations to be made. The Castle Park planting had been paid for from a Woodland Trust planting budget, but it had been thought by Panel members that this had dovetailed into the provision of a blossom circle for Covid commemoration. The Panel member noted that suggestions had been made, at a previous meeting, that a list of sites for commemoration be rolled out, and expressed dissatisfaction that only a small budget had been provided and only one central site identified. The blossom circle for Kings Head Meadow had already been advertised and was being installed.

It was suggested by one Panel member that funding should be found to allow the roll-out of memorials across the Borough, with consultation of residents carried out and community input, both in parished and non-parished areas. It was argued that communities needed places which residents could easily reach and use for quiet reflection. Concern was raised that people might not want to come to an event at the Mercury, but would prefer to have quiet reflection instead.

The suggestion was made that a consultation should be carried out, potentially on the Council's website, to ask residents across the Borough what they wanted to have happen. This might pick up whether there was a strong wish for there to be commemorative events and sites held and/or installed in wards across the Borough.

It was noted that local ward councillors had not been consulted about the blossom circle being installed at Kings Head Meadow.

Rory Doyle, Assistant Director (Environment), clarified that the blossom circle was a National Trust initiative, putting an emphasis on contemplation and reflection. The plan for this blossom circle to be installed in Colchester was already in place and going ahead pre-pandemic. This was meant to exemplify blossoming communities and was felt to have a synergy with the community spirit shown during the pandemic. The Assistant Director pointed out that, owing to its size, the scale of a blossom circle limited the number of viable sites where one could be installed.

The Panel were informed that planting had continued across the Borough's wards and that consultation had been carried out with ward councillors and communities. If specific themes were wanted by different communities, it was confirmed that this was something the Council could address.

Panel members agreed that residents' opinions should be sought, as had been previously recommended by the Panel, and that two-way communication was needed for this process. It was queried whether the Panel could again recommend that consultation be carried out, and whether one option would be to seek views via the local newspaper. Views were given that the Council had not done enough and that a bigger, specific, budget should be set for this work, and that it was premature for commemorative activities to go ahead. It was further argued that if commemoration plans could be put back, then more time would be available for consultation and consideration, including of alternative sites for commemoration, such as Trinity Church in Colchester Town Centre.

Councillor John Jowers detailed the personal memorial that his family had arranged to commemorate their lost relatives, with permission gained to plant a memorial tree at Cudmore Grove.

The view was given by a Panel member that members could use their locality budgets to help communities within wards, which could and would find appropriate ways to carry out remembrance in line with local wishes. Another member suggested that more funding should be requested to go to community groups and parish councils to assist with this.

Officers were asked whether the Mercury had sufficient size, scale and ventilation to be an appropriate venue for an event/act of commemoration. One Panel member argued that this event was too early and should not be the 'final' event and requested that the budget and spending plans be re-examined.

The Leader had read the Panel's original recommendations and noted that much of what had been discussed at this latest meeting had not been covered by them. There had been a recommendation made for a community celebration event and, in the Leader's view, that did not seem to be the current view of the Panel. It was suggested to the Panel that significant thought should be given to any commemorative sites. The Leader explained that there were numerous potential sources for funding and that, if the Council ascertained what was wanted, there would be ways to bring those things to pass by working with communities.

The Leader suggested a one-to-one meeting with the Chairman to ensure that recommendations made matched the Policy Panel's intentions. The Chairman thanked the Leader, Mrs Bloomfield and the Monitoring Officer.

The Monitoring Officer emphasised that the Mercury event would be a commemorative event, rather than a memorialisation. The Council had been approached by Hunnabals, on behalf of their clientele amongst the bereaved, who had requested this. The event had been planned based on the wishes of bereaved residents who had not been able to come together at the times of their loss.

37. Update on Platinum Jubilee Activities

Andrew Weavers, Monitoring Officer, presented the update on planned Jubilee activities and community engagement options. The Jubilee bank holiday weekend would commence on Thursday 2 June 2022, and a gun salute would be carried out in Castle Park for the Queen's official birthday. A Jubilee beacon would also be lit at 9:45pm. The Council will support street party organisers by providing community advice packs. Community events would be catalogued to help show what events would be held.

A Panel member requested that the Council expedite circulation of its street party advice packs. The Monitoring Officer was asked why the £50k refurbishment of the Castle Park bandstand had been included within Jubilee preparations. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that this refurbishment had been allocated to ready it for an Army band to play within it for the Jubilee and that quotations for the work had been received which were for less than the £50k total mentioned. The past use of the bandstand was summarised, and its refurbishment welcomed by Panel members, with one member arguing against renaming the band stand and noting that it was an Edwardian construction and had its own history which should be respected.

Views were given by Panel members regarding the need to ensure that events be community-led and not set as Council events. Some examples of planned events were given by the Panel.

The Monitoring officer was asked what the Council would do in the event of Operation London Bridge [the plan for what will happen in the United Kingdom after the death of Queen Elizabeth II] needing to be triggered before the Jubilee.

The Chairman requested that a timeline of planned events and actions be provided for members.

RESOLVED that: -

- (a) The Panel have noted the details in this report and considered the proposed activities.
- (b) The Panel agreed that members should promote Jubilee activities with their own parish councils and/or community groups and encourage community participation.

38. Business case for an in-house grounds maintenance delivery model

Councillor Martin Goss attended and, with the consent of the Chairman, addressed the Panel to raise his concerns about the situation regarding the delivery of grounds maintenance services. Councillor Goss gave the view that there was political will to bring the service in-house, expressing his surprise at the content of the report and its recommendations. Councillor Goss posited that capital costs of providing these services would be easier to meet than the ongoing revenue costs associated with them. Individual problems with the current service provision were raised, including with mowing along the verges of the Via Urbis Romanae and the habit of staff working for the current service provider, idverde, of neglecting to carry out litter-picking before grass was cut, which had generated complaints from residents. Councillor Goss raised concerns regarding the extension of the existing contract as no key performance indicator targets seem to have been set and, whilst retendering the contract would be a lengthy process, idverde's equipment was reaching its end-of-life stage. Councillor Goss argued that bringing the service in-house would give staff pride in it and improve working conditions, terms of employment and better control over work schedules. More multi-skilled operatives could be hired and the service made more adaptive to the needs of local areas. Members were urged to come together and approve the bringing in-house of the grounds maintenance service.

A statement had been provided by Councillor Mark Cory, who gave his apologies for not being able to attend, and, with the consent of the Chairman, was read to the Policy Panel. Councillor Cory described his disappointment that the service was not being recommended for bringing in-house at this time and voiced his hope that Cabinet would build upon the environmental work of the previous administration, which included rewilding, and take forward the Council's environmental ambitions. Councillor Cory gave the view that the proposal to extend the current contract would go against the Council's environmental principles and employment standards. This included not having enough provision to enhance biodiversity. Bringing the service in-house would bolster the Council's work on social value and working conditions, allowing for locally sourced workers and materials. Councillor Cory asked how, given the contract could not be changed, the Council could address these points, ensure that social value is provided, and the environmental and ecological principles of the Council met.

Councillor Beverley Oxford, Portfolio Holder for Communities, agreed that Cabinet wanted to bring grounds maintenance back in-house, but that there was not time to do so before the current contract ended. There was currently insufficient space for vehicles and staff at the Council's sites, and funding needed to be set to address this and buy the necessary vehicles. The extension of the current contract was recommended, so as to allow time to work up viable plans for an in-house service.

The Chairman suggested that a recommendation be made that an annual review of performance be held during this extension, which received the Portfolio Holder's support.

The Portfolio Holder cautioned that care was needed in creating and managing green spaces, and agreed that littering remained an issue with communications continuing to attempt to reduce its scale.

Rosa Tanfield, Group Manager (Neighbourhood Services), gave a summary of the work conducted by the Policy Panel on this issue since early 2020. The idverde contract was for 2016 to 2023 and was worth over £10m. The future service delivery options had been examined by the Policy Panel, including in-house, outsourced and mutual models. The four objectives used by the Policy Panel in their deliberations, and detailed in the report for this item, were highlighted.

The method used for creating the business case was explained, including work done to look at different options, with assistance from experts from the Association for Public Service Excellence.

The assumptions made in the business case were explained, such as the expectation that this would be a 'like for like' move of services from outsourced to in-house, with around 50 idverde staff members moving to direct Council employment and that safe and legally compliant operations would be ensured by the creation of a number of new roles focused on this. A review would be carried out after 18 months to evaluate performance and identify any necessary changes.

The Group Manager explained that the 'Community Asset Based' objective aims would not be deliverable from the start of operating a new in-house model, but that these would be pursued once the service had transferred and after the initial phase of in-house operations commencing. Similar was said about the objective for 'Exemplary Management of the Environment.' It was explained that the in-house model would give the Council greater control over budgets, however it would also necessitate a significant investment by the Council at a time when its budget is already under strain. Minimal transformative effects to the service were predicted, due to the 'like-for-like' emulation of the current service provided.

The Group Manager summarised the current facilities and operational situation, risks relating to this and the challenges of providing what would be needed for in-house operations. This included an expected need to manage greater volumes of green waste, in excess of the amount for which the Council is currently licensed and in excess of the capacity of the Shrub End site. The Panel were urged to note the capital and revenue costs associated with mitigating and overcoming these risks and challenges. Commercial gains were expected to be possible from this service in the long term, but would not be initially possible.

It was assumed that operations could be conducted from Council sites and that around 29 vehicles and specialist machinery would be required. The potential to move to using electric vehicles, looking to meet Council plans to transfer to the use of electric vehicles by 2030, was discussed.

The reasoning for the recommendation of a three-year extension to the idverde contract was further explained. The Government had been carrying out consultation on its planned Environment Bill, which would have a direct impact on Neighbourhood Services, especially food waste and recycling collections, expected to come into force around 2023-24. It was expected that there would be a short-term drop in performance and morale when the service transitioned to the in-house model, which was a normal effect of such changes and would be closely managed.

Whilst transferring grounds maintenance to be carried out in-house was achievable, the challenges were summarised. These included an increase in service costs with significant investment and no savings expected, cost implications regarding the operating of a fleet of vehicles, capacity at the Shrub End site needing to be extended, and some of the aims set out for the service not being fully met. The Group Manager explained the ways in which an extension of the existing contract could be used to ease the transition to in-house provision.

The Chairman thanked the Group Manager for her report and reminded the Panel that this session was not confidential and that members should be mindful of this when discussing contractual questions. The Chairman proposed that future examinations of the current grounds maintenance contract should include confidential sections where commercially sensitive questions could be asked and answered.

Initiating the Panel's discussions, a member expressed support for an in-house service, and the greater control it would give to the Council, even if this should mean an increase in the cost of service provision. The view was expressed that there was no time to conduct this transition without an extension of the existing contract and that a three-year extension would allow the necessary time, and members suggested that Policy Panel should receive annual updates on how this was progressing, alongside reviewing performance of idverde in its extended contract. One view given by some Panel members was that the extension should be a rolling set of three one-year contract extensions, rather than a single three-year extension. One member cautioned that three years of extension may not give sufficient time to fully prepare for in-house operations.

A request was made for the recommendation at 2.2 (recommending that officers continue planning for an in-house service) be strengthened to further emphasise the aim to bring the service in-house.

The Panel highlighted that Chelmsford City Council had experienced service improvements through bringing their grounds maintenance back in-house. It was suggested that the Council could engage with Chelmsford City and Tendring District Councils to gain their views and advice. The Group Manager was asked if local service agreements could be made with Essex County Council and Parish Councils, including bidding for County Council contracts in order to gain income from an in-house service.

The Panel discussed the likely effects of the expected Environment Bill, especially upon local authorities which would face challenges from it in the long term.

A Panel member asked what current measures were used to review idverde's performance and what work was being conducted to identify an appropriate site for in-house facilities and officers to be accommodated. Another member noted that the Shrub End site had been operating at maximum capacity for a significant time and asked why a bigger site had not been sought sooner.

Regarding the length of the contract extension and its terms, the Group Manager explained that the contract allowed for an extension of up to three years. The contract included strong mechanisms to allow for the review and discussions of

performance. Key Performance Indicators, rectification notices and joint inspections all formed part of the Council's contract management.

The Panel were informed that the Shrub End site was not currently over capacity, but that more space would be needed if the Council was to accommodate a transfer of 50 staff and 30 vehicles. Finding a new site was one option, and there was a need to look at staffing numbers and fleet size to assess what would be required. Rory Doyle, Assistant Director (Environment), explained that the Shrub End site was a waste transfer station and that the expected Environment Bill would have a significant impact on it. Many variables would affect what facilities would be needed. Timing was key, especially as development work would continue around the new Waste Strategy.

One member was concerned at the lack of a reporting function for members who had problems to report. The Group Manager explained that funding had been secured by the ICT Team to develop a system to be used for managing casework and reporting issues. 'Responder Two' would allow an improvement in casework management, address issues and improve the reporting path for residents and elected members. There would be an app for elected members to manage and review reported issues. The Council were looking to advertise the finished system to seek clients amongst other local authorities which might wish to purchase it.

The Panel discussed the need to make recommendations and expedite their consideration by Cabinet. The Panel also expressed a wish to remove the last two words from recommendation 2.2 [the words being 'if agreed'] and the addition of a recommendation for an annual update to come to the Panel to review the grounds maintenance service provision and the progress on preparing to move the service in-house.

RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that: -

- (a) The contract with the current contractor, idverde, be extended on the same terms. There is provision within the current contract for an extension of 3 years (only) if the Council decides up to 72 months from the commencement date. The last date for extension notice is 1st April 2022;
- (b) Officers should continue with plans for an in-house service meeting the objectives agreed, for commencement at the end of the contract extension agreed in 2.1 above;
- (c) An annual update be provided to the Policy Panel on progress of plans towards bringing the grounds maintenance service in-house, with confidential sections to allow discussion of commercially sensitive matters, where necessary.

39. Work Programme 2021-22

The Panel requested that the meeting scheduled for 2 March 2022 include an update on Covid-19 commemoration plans and activities, and an update on the Council's mitigations on financial inequality.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme be approved, with the addition of an update on Covid-19 commemoration plans and activities, and an update on the Council's mitigations on financial inequality, both to be scheduled for the meeting on 2 March 2022.

2 March 2022

| | | | |
|---------------------------|--|---------------|----------------|
| Report of | Assistant Director Environment Assistant Director Place & Client Services | Author | Various |
| Title | River Strategy | | |
| Wards affected | Lexden and Braiswick, Castle, Greenstead, Old Heath and the Hythe, Wivenhoe, Mersea and Pyefleet, Rural North | | |

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The River Colne is a significant natural asset that runs through the heart of the Borough. This report sets out existing activity and projects associated with the river in addition to providing information to help inform a panel discussion on opportunities that exist to enhance the contribution the river makes to biodiversity, recreation, regeneration, and wellbeing.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To recommend to Cabinet that work commence to develop a new Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Colchester and that development of the strategy be incorporated within a Panel work programme for the 2022/23 municipal year. A key element of the strategy development to include consultation with stakeholders.
- 2.2 To recommend to Cabinet that options be explored working alongside key partners to identify and lever in external funding to accelerate wetland restoration projects as part of the Woodland and Biodiversity Programme of work.
- 2.3 To recommend to Cabinet that the Council collaborates with the Land Use and Green Infrastructure Essex Climate Action Commission with a view to the Council being a partner to the proposed Essex Climate Focus Area and that future updates are taken to Environment & Sustainability Panel for consideration.
- 2.4 To recommend to cabinet that an options paper on fishing rights for the River Colne be developed with stakeholders and presented to the relevant portfolio holder for agreement.

3. Action Required

- 3.1 To note the information provided and consider the recommendations set out within this report.

4. Background Information

- 4.1 The river Colne rises at Steeple Bumpstead in Braintree district and flows south east through Halstead and Wakes Colne to Colchester, where it becomes tidal before joining the Blackwater Estuary. The headwaters of the catchment, north-west of Colchester town are predominantly rural in nature, giving way to a more urban environment downstream at the town itself. The river has three distinctive character zones (see plan attached at Appendix 1).
- 4.2 Upper Colne (Rural River): In this stretch the river flows through a rural landscape from west of Wakes Colne for about 9km until it reaches the A12 and the outskirts of urban Colchester. This countryside is important for its natural and historic environment, as well as providing the attractive landscape setting for both local villages and rural communities, such as Ford Street and Chappel and Colchester town itself. It also provides important agricultural, tourism and recreational opportunities. Popular with cyclists and walkers the area includes a section of the Essex Way and the impressive Chappel railway viaduct, popular pubs and visitor attractions such as the East Anglian Railway Museum (which also hosts highly popular events such as the Chappel Beer Festival and Thomas the Tank Engine Days) that create local employment and help support local economies and communities.
- 4.3 Urban River (Mid-Colne): In Colchester town itself, the rich historic environment and river landscapes provide the basis for visitor attractions and experiences for visitors, such as the multi-award-winning Colchester Castle Museum, Castle Park (which is a Registered Park and Garden), as well as enhancing the quality of life for local residents. Through the town, the river forms a natural corridor and amenity. There are riverside walking and cycle routes which could be extended giving traffic free routes for both commuting and leisure trips, and with links to the Town Centre, Wivenhoe, and the Rowhedge Trail. The Colchester Orbital, a circular trail around town, crosses the river in Cymbeline Meadows to the west of the town as well as near the University of Essex in The Hythe. The Borough's historic town centre is the focal point for visitor attractions, such as Colchester Castle as well as leisure and cultural attractions facilities such as the Mercury Theatre, Colchester Arts Centre and Firstsite visual art gallery. In addition, as a regional centre Colchester town is a hub for shopping and entertainment and has a thriving social economy with three cinemas, pubs, cafes and restaurants. The town centre is also the key focus for development opportunities and challenges, including on the riverside. The Hythe area, to the east of the town, is a former commercial harbour which includes some rundown and underused industrial land in East Colchester. In the past few years, the eastern area of Colchester has experienced a period of significant change and growth. The area provides good access to Hythe Station but much of the Hythe area is in flood zone 3 and the river can form a barrier to movement.
- 4.4 Colne Estuary (Lower Colne): The open character of the Colne estuary is largely an undeveloped and rural landscape with a rich, diverse and irreplaceable natural asset in terms of its natural and cultural heritage. The ecological importance of the Colne Estuary is reflected by the variety of international and European designations covering them i.e. Ramsar sites, Special Protection Areas (SPA) and the Essex Estuaries Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive. The Colne Estuary is also protected as part of the larger Colne, Blackwater, Roach and Crouch Marine Conservation Zone. There are also a number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Wildlife Sites designated around the estuary. The River's estuary is home to a number of sizeable communities and visitor destinations in Rowhedge and Wivenhoe, extending round to coastal communities such as West Mersea, which is world-famous for its oyster cultivation (Colchester Natives and Rock Oysters which could have potential for Protected Geographical Indication status). There are a number of diverse considerations

and land uses which all need to be managed in an integrated way within this zone. These include internationally important habitats, landscape character, land and water-based recreation, fishing, birding and archaeological and heritage assets. Obligations to protect the natural and heritage assets must be balanced against the need to satisfy the wider socio-economic aspirations of both residents and visitor communities. Climate change, including sea level rise presents increasing pressure on the management of estuary habitats and coastal communities along the Colne estuary fringe. The Coastal Protection Belt which covers some of the lower estuary, is designed to shape which developments can be accommodated in these sensitive environments. A new coastal path is currently being planned by Natural England around the whole of England's coastline which includes the edge of the Colne estuary.

- 4.5 Whilst the Council has ownership of the riverbed within its area the Council has limited ownership of land around and adjacent to the River Colne and its estuary, with the majority being in private ownership and some owned and used by the Ministry of Defence. This can give rise to potential difficulties when considering new or expanded activities, construction or work upon and aside the river. It has also meant that regeneration work and provision of new amenities has mostly been through conditions set on developers as part of the planning system, rather than proactively carried out by Colchester Borough Council.
- 4.6 Mooring agreements and licences are administered within Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd and the Environment Service. In some cases, there are well established moorings for which no agreements are in place, due to the length of time for which the mooring point has been in use and the riparian rights that have been established.
- 4.7 Activity around the River Colne is supported by a number of strategies and policies which are outlined at Sections 6 and 7. As a significant natural asset and key feature of the Borough, the river is relevant across a broad policy and strategic framework including environment, sustainability, economy, regeneration, health, wellbeing, culture and heritage.
- 4.8 Discussions have taken place in the past about the need for a standalone River Strategy. Given the wide range of activity and projects being delivered or proposed across a range of strategic themes the need for a standalone strategy was deprioritised upon adoption of the Strategic Plan 2020-23. As set out below under the current strategic themes of 'Tackling the climate emergency and leading sustainability' and 'Creating safe, healthy and active communities' a new Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy for Colchester will be developed and will include the river as a key element within the strategy.
- 4.9 The river is also included in programmes such as 'We are Colchester' which brings links between the riverside walking routes and the Town Centre closer, Colchester Orbital, which runs along the river in several places and the Woodland and Biodiversity project where wetland restoration forms a key part of the vision.

5. Green and Blue Infrastructure

- 5.1 Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) is defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) as 'A network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity. ' It includes important public and private areas in an urban and rural context where 'green' is vegetation and 'blue' refers to water i.e., rivers, canals, ponds or lakes.

- 5.2 The Borough Council previously developed a Green Infrastructure Strategy in 2011 however this is now dated and requires review as the Borough has changed significantly over the last decade.
- 5.3 Development of a new GBI Strategy is in the early stages of planning as part of the Council's wider Transformation programme. Whilst yet to be developed a new strategy will likely need to:
- Identify and provide an assessment of the green and blue infrastructure network;
 - Set out the key drivers and 'needs' for GBI in the borough;
 - Identify areas of deficiency in terms of quality, value and accessibility;
 - Identify priority areas and areas of opportunity. To include improvements to existing GBI and new GBI; and
 - Set out mechanisms for delivery. To include priority projects, actions and partnership working.
- 5.4 Whilst Officers have undertaken some early planning the development of a new GBI strategy is scheduled to take place in 2022/23 and it is envisioned that the work will form part of a Members Panel work programme in the new municipal year.

6. Planning Context

- 6.1 The planning context set out below highlights the key policy drivers which may be relevant to considering opportunities for the river and wider GBI. It highlights key National Planning Policy References, the Adopted and emerging Local Plan Policy and Neighbourhood Plans as relevant. This is not exhaustive but highlights the key framework which may be important.

6.2 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The policies that are relevant to the river and its use within NPPF 2021, include:

- Paragraph 20d provides for the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure.
- Paragraph 98 identifies the role of open spaces in providing benefits for nature and climate change
- Paragraph 124 identifies the role of well-designed, attractive and healthy places.
- Paragraph 130 requires that developments are visually attractive and sympathetic to local character including landscape setting.
- Paragraph 131 identifies the role trees contribute to character
- Paragraph 153 identifies the need for plans to take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to climate change, taking into account long term implications for flood risk, coastal change, water supply, biodiversity and landscapes.
- Paragraph 161 identifies the approach to minimising the impacts of development on flood risk outlining the sequential approach for the location and suitability of uses in areas likely to flood
- Paragraph 174 seeks protection of valued landscapes, the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and its wider benefits and providing net gains for biodiversity.
- Paragraph 190 recognises the wider social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits the conservation of the historic environment can bring.

- 6.3 At the same time the NPPF recognises:

- The importance of economic growth along with barriers such as adverse environments (paragraph 81 and 82)

- That there is a role for sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside (paragraph 84).
- That access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is recognised as important for the health and well-being of communities (paragraphs 92 and 93)
- Tranquil areas and the effects of noise or light pollution are a potential issue (paragraph 185)

6.4 In the context of much of the river particularly around the Estuaries being nationally / internationally designated sites for environmental and wildlife reasons the following references in the NPPF are also relevant;

- Paragraph 180 – the principles which apply to development within or close to SSSIs seeking a sequential approach for development which may have adverse impacts as well as the need for mitigation where necessary and
- Paragraph 180 b) the exceptional approach to development where it can be demonstrated that these benefits clearly outweigh the impacts
- Paragraph 182 advising the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply where a plan or project is likely to have significant effect on areas designated under the European habitats regulations including Ramsar and SAC. The GBI may need to be subject to a Habitats Regulation Scoping Opinion to determine whether the plan / “strategy” has any likely significant effects.

6.5 Core Strategy Adopted December 2008 as amended by the Focused Review (2014) - It is to be noted that the Local Plan context will be updated as soon as the new Local Plan is Adopted (which will be before the GBI is completed). The current plan is The Adopted Local Plan (Focussed review 2014) which sets the vision, objectives and spatial strategy, as well as policy, up until 2021, including major regeneration areas through which the River Colne runs. The policies in the Adopted Local Plan that are of relevance include:

- ENV1 Environment emphasises the importance of protecting and enhancing unallocated greenfield land outside settlement boundaries.

Core Strategy Development Policies DPD (Adopted October 2010, amended 2014) 3.7

- Policy DP1: Design and Amenity emphasises the importance of respecting and enhancing the character of the context and surroundings, as well as the site.
- Policy DP23: Coastal Areas: Approach to development within the Coastal Protection belt managing development according to its need for a coastal location and minimising and mitigating against any impacts on the coast environment.

6.6 Colchester Borough Council Local Plan 2017-2033 Publication Draft (CD4.1) and (Track Changes Modified Section 2 Local Plan October 2021 (CD 4.6) - The Emerging Local Plan (2017-2033) is currently awaiting the inspector's report following consultation on the modifications to the plan. It is anticipated that this will be Adopted and provide the most relevant Planning Policy context before the GBI is completed. It sets out the vision, strategy, objectives and policy for planning and delivery across the borough through to 2033. The emerging allocated sites are identified in the proposals plan. The policies in the Emerging Local Plan that are of relevance include:

- Emerging Policy ENV1- Environment supports the conservation and enhancement of Colchester's natural and historic environment, countryside and coastline, and is the main policy in the emerging Local Plan that is of relevance to environmental issues. It recognizes the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, including the open and undeveloped stretches of coastline of the Coastal Protection Belt.

- Emerging Policy ENV2: Coastal Areas identifies that within the Coastal Protection Belt development will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that it requires a coastal location and is located within the developed area. The aim is to protect the character of the Coastal Protection Belt by preventing urban sprawl into the more open and undeveloped areas.

6.7 Neighbourhood Plans

- *Wivenhoe Neighbourhood Plan* – this plan was approved at referendum in May 2019 and includes key policies relevant to the River Colne. The plan area incorporates a section of the north bank of the Lower Colne within Colchester Borough.
- *Eight Ash Green Neighbourhood Plan* – ‘Made’ by Colchester Borough Council in December 2019, it covers part of the river in the Upper Colne
- *West Bergholt Neighbourhood Plan* – Plan ‘made’ by Colchester Borough Council in October 2019, it covers part of the river in the Upper Colne.
- *West Mersea Draft Plan* is scheduled to go to referendum on 17th March 2022 which will hopefully be agreed at that time to enable adoption. It’s location at the confluence of the Colne and Blackwater estuaries is key to the tidal section of the Colne and the wider European designations (Ramsar and SAC)

7. **Existing Initiatives, Projects and Opportunities**

- 7.1 ‘We Are Colchester’ - partnership between Colchester Council, Essex County Council, businesses and other groups, was launched in 2020, and successfully bid for £18.2 million from the government’s Town Deal scheme. Although the funding does not address the river environment directly; it does enhance the Borough’s walking and cycling infrastructure, taking a crucial step to bring a link between the riverside walking routes and the Town Centre closer
- 7.2 Active Travel - Access to and along the Colne area is fundamental to residents and visitors enjoying the river and acting as a transport link to other destinations, for example the town centre, Colchester Institute and University. The Colchester Cycling Delivery Strategy SPD identifies the Rowhedge Trail (Rowhedge Trail to Hythe) and Wivenhoe Trail (Wivenhoe Quay to Middleborough area) as quiet mainly off-road routes. The section between East Bay and Hythe is currently being promoted as part of the Town Deal and LCWIP4 route. The public right of way (PROW) which runs either side of the Colne from Colne Causeway Bridge to Hythe Bridge are identified for reinstatement as currently they break the link in the existing walking and cycling network. Developments on land which will open up access to and/or enhance the Colne areas should be encouraged. Contributions through s.106 can provide support for enhancing cycling and walking routes along the river as has been the case for improving the Rowhedge Trail which has received around £100,000 in contributions to make the route more accessible for people living in Rowhedge to access the Hythe Station, University and the town centre via a direct and off-road route, provided by the developments in Rowhedge. S.106 contributions have also been secured from the student accommodations for improvements to the Wivenhoe Trail and other walking and cycling routes in the vicinity of and giving access to the river Colne. S.106 will continue to be required to provide for and encourage more people to use the area for active travel, heritage interpretation and CCTV potentially, where these are identified as being relevant to any development proposed.
- 7.3 Colchester Orbital –The Colchester Orbital is a circular route around town, connecting some of its most important and beautiful green spaces and off-road pathway networks.

The route follows public rights of way, links with cycle paths wherever possible and follows or crosses the riverside in several places. Opportunities exist to enhance the route of the Orbital along the riverside.

- 7.4 England Coast Path – The new National Trail around England’s coast is being delivered by Natural England. It delivers new rights to enjoy the coast within the coastal margin, including in the Colne estuary, as well as infrastructure such as signs and gates.
- 7.5 Woodland and Biodiversity Project – The Woodland & Biodiversity Project aims to create a legacy of a greener place for Colchester in the future. To ensure that this aim is met, the project has a focus on three intrinsically linked areas:
- Communities - To add value to the health and wellbeing of our communities and support the development of deep-rooted connection.
 - Wildlife - To develop, enhance and diversify our wildlife within Colchester.
 - Environment - Reduce the environmental impact of the Council and influence others to follow our lead.

Wetland restoration is a key ambition of the project with the project team working to develop a programme along the River Colne corridor, river valley, and catchment. Unfortunately, the Project was unsuccessful with an application to the Government’s Green Recovery Fund, in partnership with En-Form and Abberton Rural Training. However the intention is to continue to work with these partners and others to source the funding to delivery of the wetland restoration element of the project.

- 7.6 Management of Duckweed - Areas of the River Colne suffer with duckweed at certain times of the year. The Council’s Park Rangers actively monitor duckweed levels on the river throughout the Spring and Summer to manage and keep growth to a minimum.

The Rangers operate the weir at middle mill at least once a week during the summer to break up the rafts of weed and flush the weed through and out over the gates at East Bay. This is obviously weather dependant: when we have significant rainfall, it can be opened for longer periods and on extra occasions. During long dry spells it can only be opened for shorter periods before it must be closed to allow the water level to rise again. During extended dry periods we have found that we can't send enough water down to allow the automatic gates at East Bay to open so the weed tends to build up there until the water level is sufficiently high enough to trigger the gates.

Aware that the presence of duck weed causes concern to the public, a [webpage](#) with frequently asked questions has been created and signage is installed on site.

- 7.7 Fishing access rights - The lease for a section of the river has recently changed and now falls within the Council’s control. Officers are now considering the options and impact of allowing fishing to all or parts of the river. This will be developed with stakeholders and recommendations presented to the Portfolio Holder for agreement.

Currently fishing is only permitted in dedicated fishing lakes including High Woods Country Park and Salary Brook. Further consideration could be given to allow fishing within the boundaries of Castle Park utilising the existing locations where the fishing platforms are (although these would need replacing) as well as Kings Head Meadow towards the old outdoor swimming pool site onto Cymberline Meadows.

Fishing permits are issued digitally, and the team monitor them on their daily patrols (Highwoods Country Park). Resource would be needed to monitor and enforce fishing permits in other areas of the river.

A balance would need to be struck between managing the wildlife and users - an independent study of the suitability of the areas would be recommended.

- 7.8 Fieldgate Quay Repair - The Council owns the section of quayside known as Fieldgate Quay which forms part of a former commercial harbour located on the tidal section of the River Colne at The Hythe.

In November 2020 Officers were notified of a collapse to a section of steel piled river wall caused by a failure of the wall anchor system and the corrosion of sheet piles from which the wall is largely constructed. The sheet piles bowed and protruded out into the river. The section of quay behind the failure point subsequently subsided including the collapse of the public right of way running alongside the wall between Rowhedge and Colchester Town which has remained closed since.

Subsequent monitoring of the full Fieldgate quayside was undertaken and movement was detected in a different location with piling beginning to deflect away from the quay.

An outlet pipe serving the sewage treatment works operated by Anglia Water is located in close proximity to the section of failed sheet piling. The outlet is part of a significant separate concrete construction set back from the river wall and is in sound structural condition with no evidence to suggest the failed steel piling is compromising the outlet structure.

The proximity of the failed and deteriorating quayside to a site occupied under a long lease has significantly restricted engineering options for remediation. As a result the Council, advised by Norfolk Property Service and Breheny Civil Engineering, have explored a replacement like for like sheet piled solution to the failed section of river wall. To progress works, consent from the Marine Management Organisation was applied for and notice of this application is proceeding.

Recent changes in circumstances means the adjacent site previously occupied under lease will now likely revert to the Council as Freehold owner. Control of the site affords the Council the opportunity to reassess options for remediation and consider alternative engineering solutions previously not considered feasible. Importantly, and subject to necessary permissions it will enable the Council to reopen and divert the footpath earlier than planned (the current footpath closure notice expires in August 2022).

There are further sections of steel piled quayside reaching, or at the end, of its intended design lifecycle. Use and access requirements to the river, particularly within the former commercial harbour area are evolving meaning like for like replacement of steel piling may not be the best option and needs to be considered along with the associated environmental and economic implications. Aside from the immediate necessary repairs and reopening of the footpath the longer term strategy for replacing sections of steel piled river wall will be developed through the proposed GBI strategy work.

- 7.9 The Climate Focus Area - The Essex Climate Action Commission was set up to advise on tackling climate change. In July 2021 the Commission published its 'Net Zero: Making Essex Carbon Neutral report'. The report identifies that we have a nature crisis as well as a climate crisis. The report also recognises the risks from flooding are projected to

double across Essex over the next 30 years. The Commission recommends that 75% of schemes to increase flood resilience pursue nature-based solutions.

Nature-based flood solutions accumulate carbon and enhance biodiversity as well as reduce flood risk. They create large areas of Natural Green Infrastructure, improve wetland habitat, and act as a sponge, allowing water to percolate more slowly into groundwater and rivers, improving both water conservation and water quality.

Through the Commission a Land Use & Green Infrastructure Special Interest Group has been established and has developed recommendations for a Land Use & Green Infrastructure Climate Action programme, covering both the whole County and a proposed Climate Focus Area (CFA) within the County. It is recommended that the catchments of the Blackwater and Colne Rivers are the CFA covering approximately 30% of Essex. Whilst this area covers five Boroughs within Essex, Colchester has the largest geographical area within the proposed CFA and stands to benefit from the opportunities this may present. Being part of the CFA will help to develop and support Colchester's own GBI strategy development process with potential for new investment and accelerated approaches to pilot projects.

- 7.10 Anti-social behaviour - The Council receives numerous reports from Brightlingsea Harbour Master, Essex Marine Police, and members of the public regarding anti-social behaviour (ASB) on the Blackwater Estuary around Mersea Island and the River Colne. The ASB most frequently reported is that of speeding watercraft, which are regulated by speed limits.

Byelaw signage is located on all slipways in Mersea and information is provided on the Council website. A leaflet has also been produced.

A voluntary body called Colne Watch based at Wivenhoe, report ASB problems to the Essex Marine Police and provide photographic evidence which the Police collate and use to take enforcement action.

Speeding craft can cause numerous issues, not least:

- Impact and risk to local wildlife, ecosystems, and biodiversity in and around the waterways
- Erosion of the water banks, impacting the integrity of the river
- Risk to injury and life of others using the waterways, such as swimmers

The Essex Marine Police have approached the Council, to explore the implementation of a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) to help regulate the speed limits and ASB in the Blackwater Estuary and the River Colne. A PSPO means that the Council could undertake on the spot fines, creating an immediate impact on those causing the offence at the time, instead of the lengthy and court process currently experienced. Officers are now in discussion with the Marine Police and other stakeholders to implement a PSPO which covers the Blackwater Estuary and River Colne and it is anticipated that the PSPO will go out to consultation during 2022.

- 7.11 Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) – River Catchment projects, including the Essex Water Vole Recovery Project and RIVERSEARCH training volunteer surveyors; Fingringhoe Wick Nature Reserve, EWT's first wildlife reserve and visitor centre overlooking the Colne Estuary; The Living Seas project including coastal clean-ups and shore search surveys.

Opportunities exist to work in partnership with Essex Wildlife Trust to develop priorities to improve the ecological quality of the river and its setting.

- 7.12 Visit Essex - The official marketing and tourism promotion agency for Essex aiming to encourage short breaks, challenge negative perceptions of the county, raise the profile of Essex as a visitor destination and create a 'sense of place'.
- 7.13 River & Waterways Safety Audit - A water safety consultant has completed an audit of rivers, waterways and open water on Council land or for which the Council has responsibility or owe a duty of care, ranging from streams and ponds in Country Parks, to the River Colne flowing through Castle Park and the Hythe Quay, and West Mersea floating pontoon. This was undertaken to ensure legal compliance and suitable safety provisions are in place to help prevent drowning and water related incidents across the Borough.

The UK Drowning Prevention Strategy aims to reduce accidental drowning fatalities in the UK by 50 per cent, by 2026. A central objective of the UK national strategy is to ensure that water risks are assessed, and with the necessary safety provisions which the audit is to provide the Council reassurance or detail recommendations to improve safety.

A draft report has been provided to the Corporate Health and Safety Officer and will be reviewed as necessary within the relevant teams. As a summary, most areas were concluded as being managed suitably and to continue with risk assessment processes such as maintaining fence lines which help prevent unauthorised access. Some areas have recommendations identified for improvements such as signage, improving natural barriers by adjusting maintenance programmes or planting new greenery or trees. Installation of additional life saving devices was recommended in key locations along the Hythe Quay. Once the final report is available, a recorded action plan will be used to document and monitor progress and included in the Council's usual health and safety management and reporting processes.

- 7.14 The new Economic Strategy for Colchester (2015-2021) - aims to create a place which is vibrant, prosperous, thriving and welcoming for residents, businesses and visitors alike. It recognises the importance of promoting our Place, and in particular of tourism to the Borough. Tourism and hospitality are core sectors for the Borough's economy: creating new jobs; raising and retaining skills; protecting and promoting our heritage and open space assets; and creating, supporting and retaining businesses in the supply chain.

The new Economic Strategy is also likely to include a priority to support businesses to decarbonise. Such work to tackle the climate emergency has a direct impact on our management of the river in the future with sea-levels forecast to rise.

8. Risk Management Implications

- 8.1 There are no specific risk management implications to this report.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 There are no specific direct financial implications to this report however the report sets out the key contribution the river makes to the local economy, tourism and local prosperity. Current projects and activities set out in this report are delivered within existing budgets and in many circumstances projects and initiatives lever in external funds, grants and contributions. Additional projects or new initiatives would require additional budget and resource for delivery.

10. Strategic Plan References

- 10.1 This report is relevant to a number of key themes within the Strategic Plan 2020-23 including; 'Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability'. 'creating safe, health and active communities' and 'celebrating our heritage and culture'.

11. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 11.1 There is a wide variety of uses and natural processes that take place on and around the river, with many opportunities for enhancement as well as some conflicting interests with leisure, development and business uses. Management of the river for these different uses will have to consider the implications they could have on the environment, including impacts on flood risk, existing habitats and biodiversity, carbon sequestration and water quality amongst others

Balancing these issues for wildlife, the environment and people is a complex challenge and the end result must also protect those natural processes that maintain the health of the river.

12. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 12.1 There are no human rights implications to this report. There are equality and diversity implications regarding use of the river insofar as the river should be as accessible as possible to all members of the community to benefit from the associated positive wellbeing outcomes.

13. Consultation

- 13.1 The Council works alongside a diverse array of local stakeholders day to day in relation to the river and activities that take place in and around it. Consultation with the community is a key component of existing projects and local stakeholders will be a core element of the GBI strategy development.

14. Publicity Considerations

- 14.1 There are no direct publicity considerations at this time, however these may arise in relation to specific actions which may be recommended by the Panel to Cabinet.

15. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 15.1 The River Colne is a key natural asset and an integral part of Colchester as a 'place'. Accordingly, it has a significant role to play in (re) connecting people and communities with place and a sense of pride in what makes Colchester special. Creating attractive and healthy places to live, work, invest and spend leisure time is key. The river is a hub for outdoor pursuits and provides a platform for mass participation to combat physical inactivity across the local population.

The Council carries out enforcement action and works with partner organisations in order to ensure all legal restrictions and regulations to safeguard community safety are complied with by river users.

16. Health and Safety Implications

16.1 See paragraph 7.13

Appendices

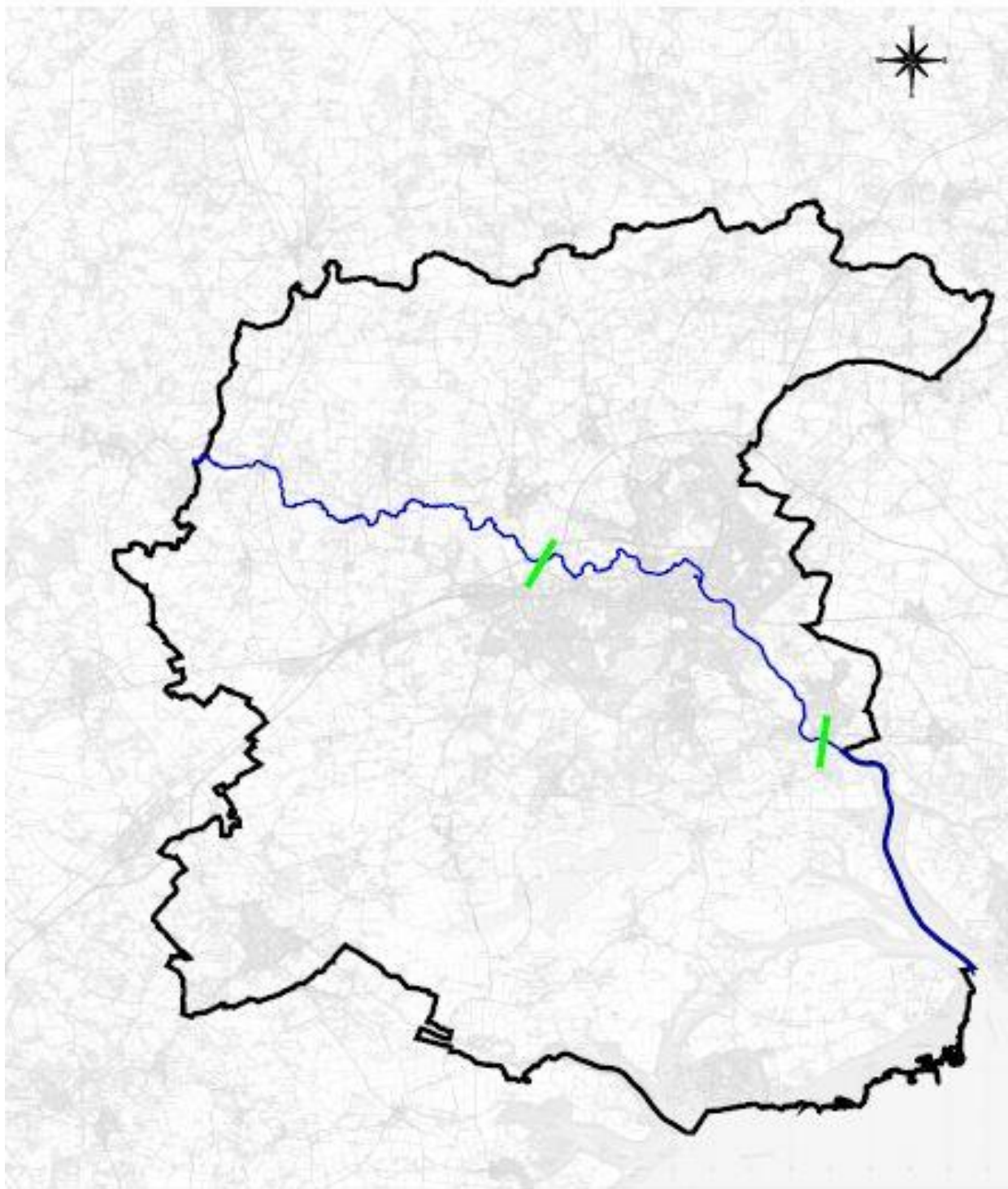
Appendix 1 – Map depicting three ‘character zones of River Colne

Appendix 2 – Maps displaying areas of environmental interest in and around the Colne, specifically:

- Environment Agency Floodzones
- Environmentally Sensitive Areas
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- RAMSAR Areas (Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat)
- Special Areas of Conservation

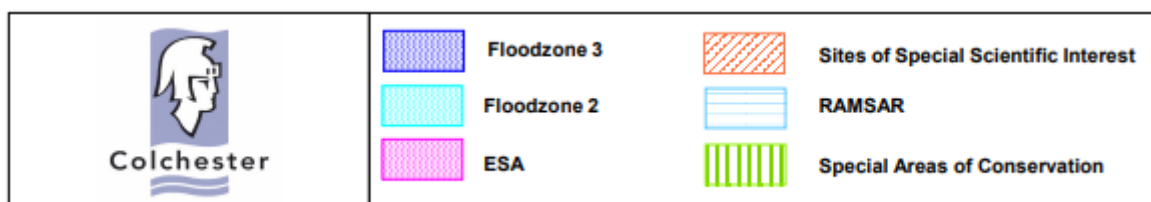
Appendix 3 – Stakeholder list (not exhaustive)

Appendix 1

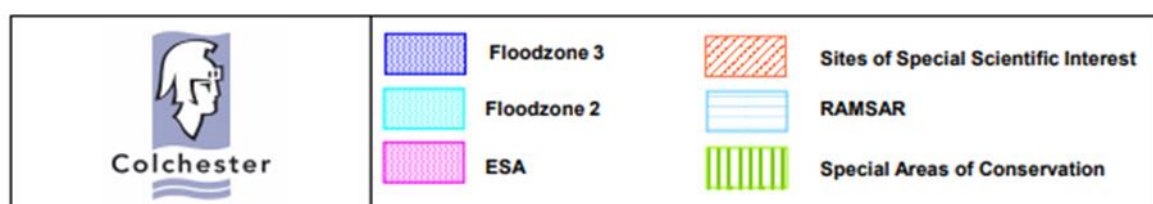


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Appendix 2



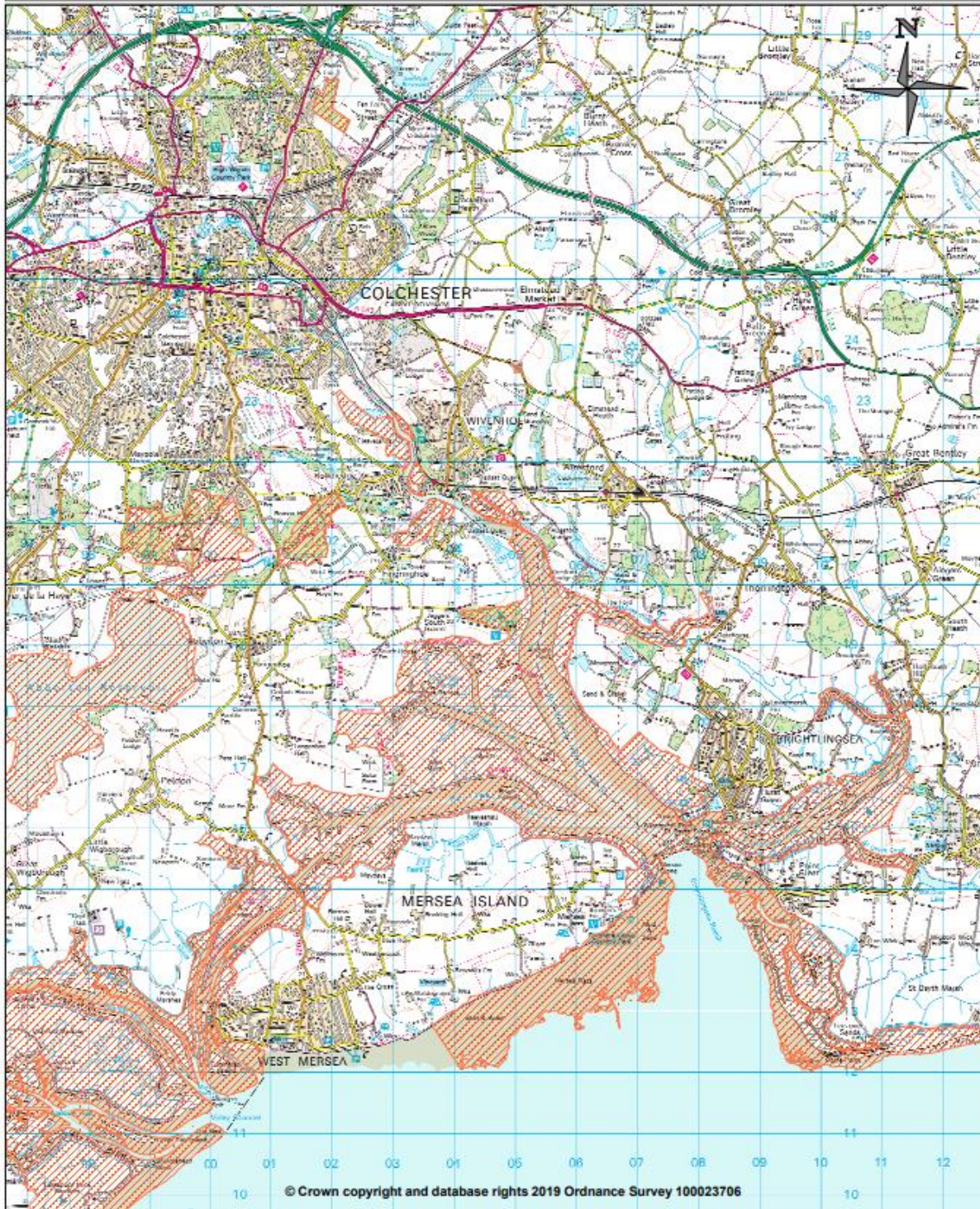
Colne River



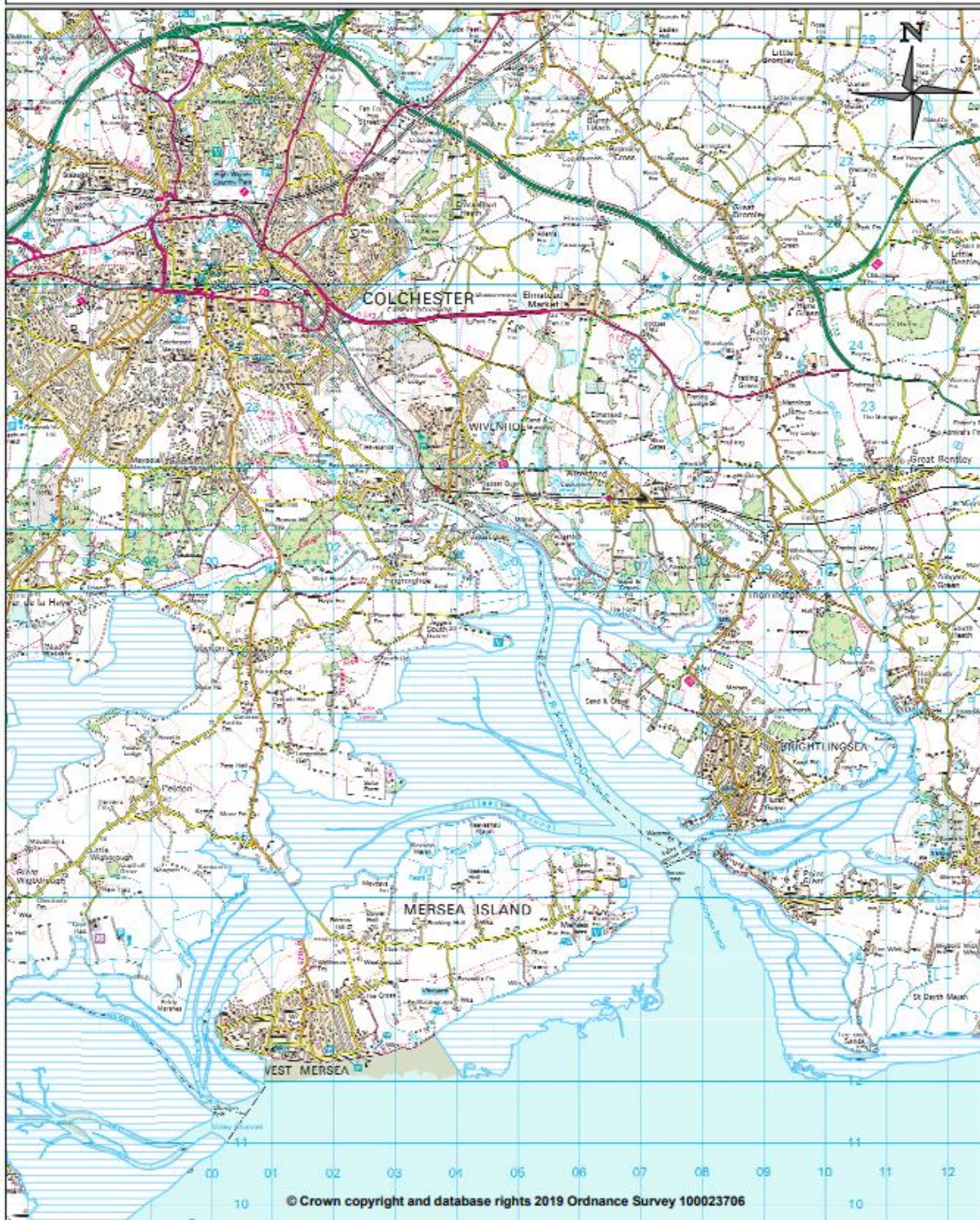
Colne River



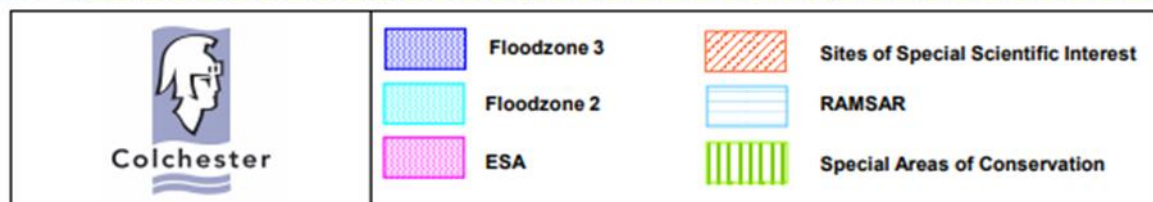
Colne River



Colne River



Colne River



Appendix 3

Key Stakeholders (not exhaustive)

- ECC - PROW and Transport and Sustainability colleagues
- Essex and South Suffolk Community Rail Partnership
- Hythe boat owners
- Anglian Water
- Essex Marine Police
- River Watch
- Town & Parish Councils
- Brightlingsea Harbour Master
- Colne Watch
- Brightlingsea Yacht Club
- Brightlingsea Coastal Rowing Club
- Rowhedge Coastal Rowing Club
- Wivenhoe Canoe and Kayak Club
- Essex Wildlife Trust
- Royal Society Protection of Birds
- Wivenhoe and Rowhedge Ferry
- Environment Agency
- The Waterside Committee in West Mersea
- Commercial Fishermen
- Oystermen
- Charterboat Skippers
- Dabchicks Sailing Club
- West Mersea Yacht Club
- Waterside Business
- Wivenhoe Sailing Club
- Wivenhoe Coursairs Rowing Club
- Colchester Canoe Club
- Adjacent land owners in East and West Mersea (some allow access onto the water for Private Water Craft Use)
- Seaview Holiday Park
- Colchester Cycling Campaign
- Colchester University
- Walk Colchester
- Ramblers Essex
- Beach hut owners
- Mersea Harbour Protection Trust
- West Mersea Lifeboat
- Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator
- Brett Aggregates (responsible for structures in the river)
- Waldegrave Holiday Park
- Essex County Council Youth Camp
- Coppers Beach Holiday Park
- Fen Farm Campsite
- Historic England designated heritage assets
- Essex Gardens Trust – Castle Park

| | | | |
|----------------|--|--------|---------------------------------|
| Report of | Assistant Director – Customer | Author | Jason Granger ☎ 07889 445614 |
| Title | Update - Mitigations which the Council can make regarding loss of Universal Credit uplift and financial inequalities | | |
| Wards affected | All Wards | | |

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the Government announced an uplift to Universal Credit and Working Tax credits worth £20 a week. Initially planned to last for a year, the policy was extended by six months in the March 2021 budget. The uplift ended from 6 October 2021.
- 1.2 On 24 November 2021 a [report](#) was presented to the Policy Panel describing how the Council can support residents who no longer received this uplift and help reduce wider financial inequalities.
- 1.3 This report provides an update to mitigations provided to residents by the Council.

2. Action Required

- 2.1 The panel is invited to consider, review and comment on the Council's mitigations to date as detailed in **Appendix A**.
- 2.2 The panel is invited to note the following recommendations have also been completed:
 - The report of 24 November 2021 has been circulated to all elected members
 - An all-member briefing is to be held on 16 March 2022 to provide further information on how the Council is supporting residents
 - Cabinet considered and agreed the minute from the Policy Panel at its meeting on 26 January 2022.

3. Reason for Review

- 3.1 The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in significant Government support for residents, businesses, and communities. Many of these support schemes have, or are, being withdrawn. This could lead to a rise in financial inequality.
- 3.2 The Council, alongside key partners, can offer practical support to residents adjusting to the withdrawal of support with the intention of preventing hardship and financial inequality.

4. Background Information

- 4.1 **Appendix A** is a presentation by Assistant Director – Customer that details the practical support that has, and is, being provided by the Council to help residents navigate changes to Universal Credit and the wider financial implications of the Covid-19 pandemic.

5. Standard References

- 5.1 This is an update to the report of 24 November 2021. There are no particular consultation or publicity considerations, or equality, diversity and human rights; financial; health, wellbeing and community safety; health and safety or environmental and sustainability Implications.

6. Strategic Plan References

- 6.1 The Council's Strategic Plan sets out 15 priorities, one of which being: 'Tackle the causes of inequality and support our most vulnerable people' This report details Council interventions aimed to help mitigate financial inequalities with Colchester.

7. Risk Management Implications

- 7.1 This report outlines support provided to residents as national government Covid-19 support schemes are withdrawn. The support is intended to mitigate any resulting financial inequalities.

Appendices

- **Appendix A** is a presentation by Assistant Director – Customer that details the practical support that has, and is, being provided by the Council to help residents navigate changes to Universal Credit and the wider financial implications of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Update: Mitigations the Council can make regarding loss of Universal Credit uplift and financial inequalities

Policy Panel – 2 March 2022



Colchester
Borough Council

Leonie Rathbone – Assistant Director, Customer
Jason Granger – Group Manager, Customer



Fuel price crisis-
Average bill to
increase by £693



Ongoing impact
of Covid

Covid isolation
affecting economy

Employment market
dramatically changed

Skills gaps



Residents

Pay rises fail to keep
up with cost of living

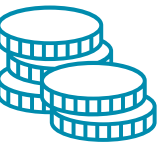


Backlog of eviction
cases in court system

Post-Christmas
debt

UC £20 uplift
removed

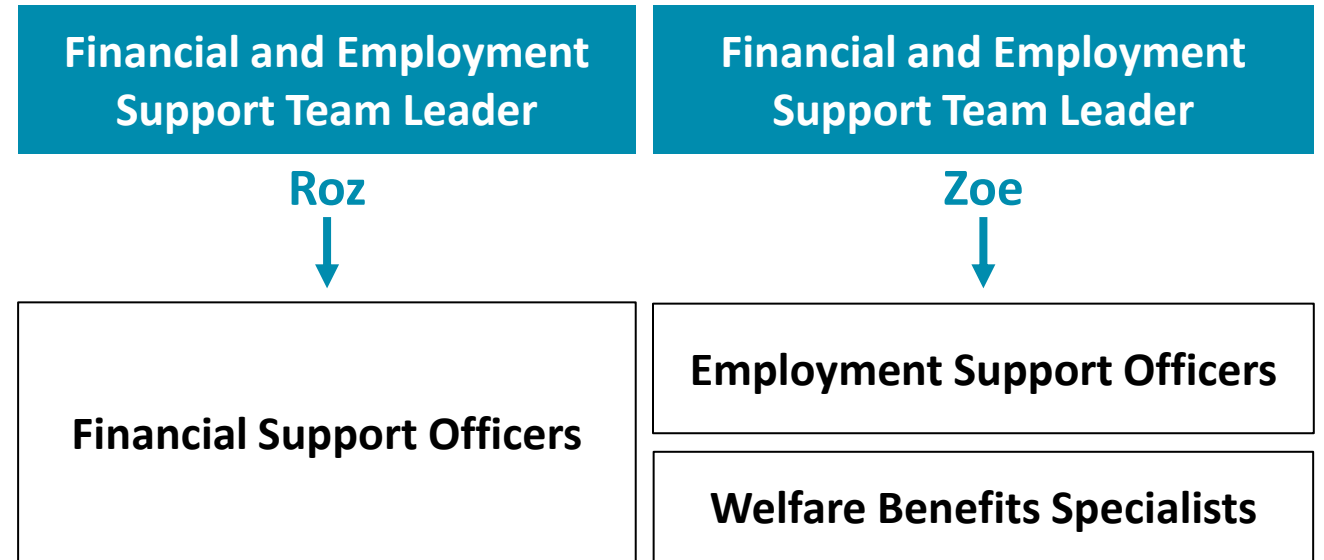
Inflation 5.8% in
2021



How the Council provides support

Our Financial and Employment Support Team offer a range of free, confidential financial and employment support to all residents in Colchester, including:

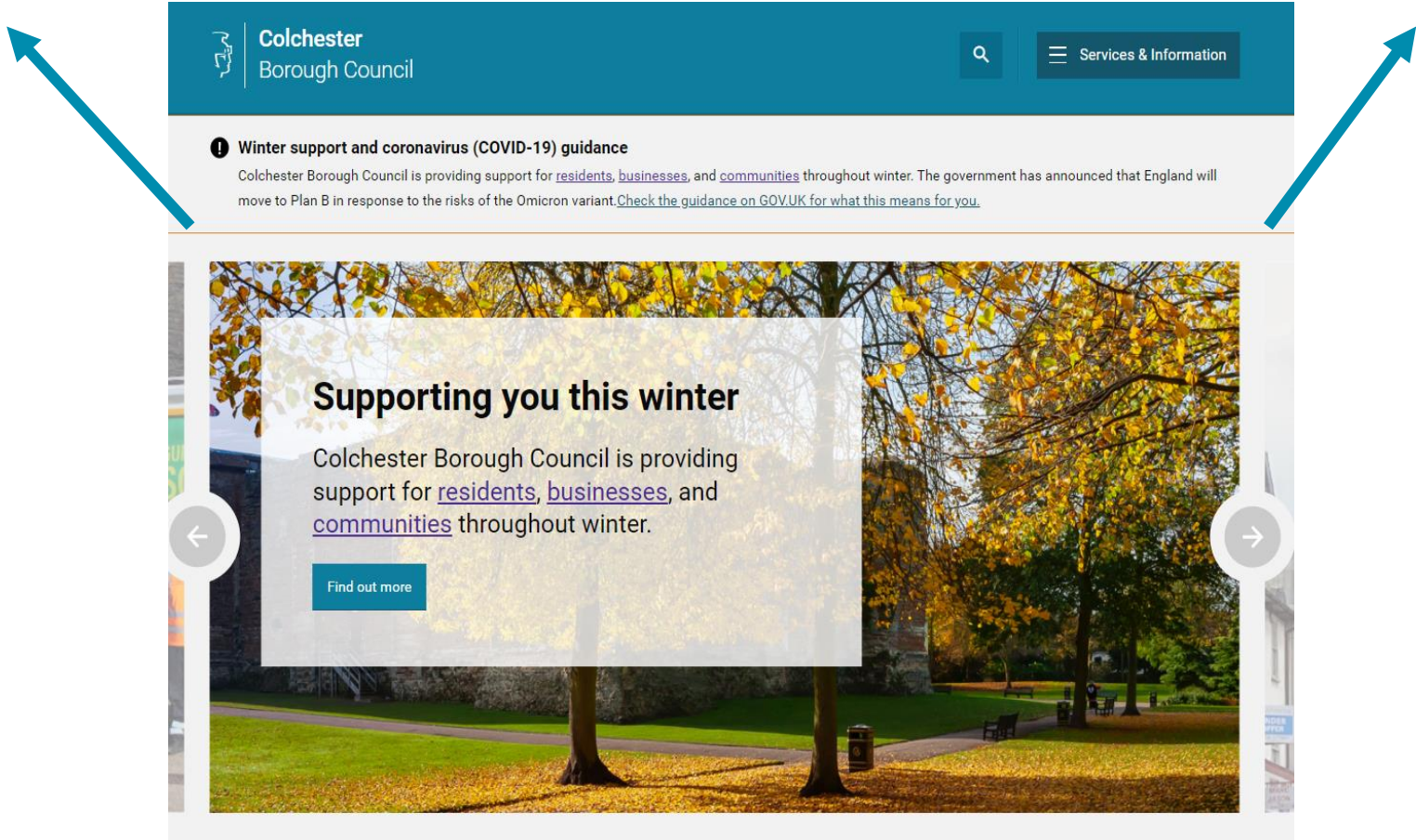
- Assess personal finances and budgeting
- Help paying rent arrears
- Support paying Council Tax
- Accessing wider Benefits
- Employment and Job Search
- Accessing food
- Help paying energy bills
- Money and Debt advice



Accessing Support - CBC website

! Local support and coronavirus (COVID-19) guidance

Colchester Borough Council is providing support for [residents](#), [businesses](#), and [communities](#). The government has announced that England has returned to Plan A. You should continue to protect yourself and others. [Find further guidance on GOV.UK.](#)



Accessing Support - In-person / Phone

Team

Welfare Benefit Specialists

Financial Support Officers

Employment Support Officers


Locations

Greenstead Local Housing Office

One Colchester Community Hub

Job Centre Plus – Chapel Street

Job Centre Plus – Headgate

 01206 505855

Working across the system

Bringing together the distribution of direct payments to residents

Influencing National Context

- LGA
- DCN
- DWP

Local

- CBH – support for vulnerable renters
- ECC – Essential Living Fund / Household support fund / Data share / Levelling up
- DWP – co-location – 'same customer' principle
- CBC – Communities Team and Voluntary Sector

Update - New or increased funding

Some funding pots finish by 31 March 2022

- Financial support whilst self-isolating (CBC)
- Household support fund (£9.4mM):

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------|
| Essential Living Fund (ECC) | Community Hubs (CVSs) / Citizens Advice | CBH / CBC |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------|

- Low income private renters fund (CBH administering £191k)
- Help paying energy bills - households to receive up to £350 of government support:

| |
|--|
| Council tax bands A-D, £150 payment April 2022 |
| Domestic electricity customers, £200 off their energy bills October 2022 |
| Discretionary Fund To support vulnerable people on low incomes that do not pay Council Tax, or that pay Council Tax in Bands E-H |

How CBC have helped residents from April 2021/22

Residents



| | | |
|---------------------------------|------|--------------|
| Test and Trace Support Grants * | 4273 | £2.1 million |
| Welfare Benefit gains | 497 | £715k |
| Discretionary Housing Payments | 599 | £396k |
| Exceptional Hardship Payments | 130 | £18k |
| Household Support Fund | 95 | £12k |
| Employment Support | 200 | |

* From September 2020

Wider work – building resilience

The Alliance - £2m investment by Health Alliance to tackle inequalities – Communities to update Members of this wide reaching work in coming months – more to follow

Anchor programme - CBC is working with Anchor institutions across Essex to improve skills and offer job opportunities for residents. Critical to long term stability and changing life chances

Business Support – Since April 2020 CBC has distributed £65m in vital Covid support grants to local businesses – quickly and efficiently. Helping businesses survive the pandemic and continue trading

Towns Fund / Levelling up – £18m awarded to CBC for economic regeneration of Colchester to deliver long term growth. £3.8m awarded to Essex to support vulnerable families in their communities and help them build a brighter future

Case example

Example of multiple support provided to resident

Dear Cllr [REDACTED]

Referral re : [REDACTED]

Thank you for passing on this referral with regards to financial support for [REDACTED].

I have been in contact with [REDACTED] and would like to update you on the support that has been provided.

- A Discretionary Housing Payment has been awarded to support with rental arrears and ongoing rental shortfall
- A Household Support Fund payment has also been awarded to support towards a new washing machine, clothing and items of specific need for her baby
- A referral was made to C360 who supplied a Coop voucher to exchange for goods
- A food bank referral was made for a parcel to be delivered
- We have escalated the Universal Credit issue with the Manager at Job Centre Plus and have requested they contact [REDACTED] direct

I hope these measures will relieve some of the financial worry that [REDACTED] is experiencing at present.

[REDACTED] has been provided my personal contact details should she need any further advice or support.



Questions?

Policy Panel

Item
10

2 March 2022

| | | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------|--------|-------------|
| Report of | Assistant Director, Environment | Author | Owen Howell |
| Title | Work Programme 2022-23 | | ☎ 282518 |
| Wards affected | Not applicable | | |

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the dates of the Work Programme for 2022-2023 for the Policy Panel and gives the Panel an opportunity to consider what subjects for which it may wish to request Cabinet approval for the Panel to consider in the 2022-23 municipal year. Cabinet may also wish to consider what subjects it might want the Policy Panel to consider during 2022-23.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 The Panel is asked to note the dates of the Panel's Work Programme for 2022-2023 as set out below and to consider if it wishes to request Cabinet approval for work items to be added.

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 This function forms part of the Panel's Terms of Reference and, as such, no alternative options are presented.

4. Background Information

- 4.1 The Policy Panel's Work Programme will evolve as the municipal year progresses. Items can be added to the Work Programme by request of Portfolio Holders and/or Cabinet requesting policies, strategies or other issues to be reviewed.

5. Standard References

- 5.1 There are no specific references to publicity or consultation considerations; or financial; equality, diversity and human rights; community safety; health and safety or risk management implications.

6. Strategic Plan References

- 6.1 Policy review is integral to the delivery of the Strategic Plan's priorities and direction for the Borough as set out under the four themes of growth, responsibility, opportunity, and wellbeing.

Policy Panel Work Programme 2022-23

| |
|--------------------------|
| 15 June 2022 |
| |
| 3 August 2022 |
| |
| 21 September 2022 |
| |
| 23 November 2022 |
| |
| 11 January 2023 |
| |
| 1 March 2023 |
| |