

Policy Panel Meeting

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

Wednesday, 21 September 2022 at 18:00

The Policy Panel provides legislative, improvement and policy advice to Cabinet and Portfolio Holders on issues that may affect executive functions. The Panel considers issues at the request of Cabinet and Portfolio Holders and must seek approval from Cabinet on whether and how issues proactively identified by the Panel are examined. The Panel also considers initiatives for review from members of the public.

Information for Members of the Public

Access to information and meetings

You have the right to attend all meetings of the Council, its Committees and Cabinet. You also have the right to see the agenda (the list of items to be discussed at a meeting), which is usually published five working days before the meeting, and minutes once they are published.

Dates of the meetings are available here:

<https://colchester.cmis.uk.com/colchester/MeetingCalendar.aspx>.

Most meetings take place in public. This only changes when certain issues, for instance, commercially sensitive information or details concerning an individual are considered. At this point you will be told whether there are any issues to be discussed in private, if so, you will be asked to leave the meeting.

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Access

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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, 21 September 2022 at 18:00

The Policy Panel Members are:

Councillor Lesley Scott-Boutell
Councillor Chris Pearson
Councillor Kevin Bentley
Councillor Phil Coleman
Councillor John Jowers
Councillor Jocelyn Law
Councillor Rhys Smithson

Chairman
Deputy Chairman

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 3 August 2022 are a correct record.

Policy Panel Minutes 3 August 2022

7 - 14

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 or by joining the meeting remotely and addressing the Council via Zoom. Each representation may be no longer than three minutes.

Members of the public wishing to address the Council remotely may register their wish to address the meeting by e-mailing democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk by 12.00 noon on the working day before the meeting date. In addition a written copy of the representation will need to be supplied for use in the event of unforeseen technical difficulties preventing participation at the meeting itself.

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

7 City Status - Meaning and Opportunities

A verbal update on the work to celebrate the gaining of city status, and the opportunities it entails.

8 Cost of Living Crisis – Council Response

15 - 38

This report is for the Policy and Public Initiatives Panel to consider the planned response of the Council to the cost-of-living crisis to date.

9 Work Programme 2022-23

39 - 40

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.

10 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

3 August 2022

Attendees: Councillors Scott-Boutell [Chairman], Bentley, Jowers, Law, Pearson and Smithson.

Substitutes: Councillor Chuah for Councillor Coleman.

50. Minutes of Previous Meeting

Owen Howell, Democratic Services Officer, noted that the minutes as produced did not include a record of the approval of minutes from 2 March 2022 and 25 May 2022. A new minute 47 was proposed to cover this.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2022 be confirmed as a correct record, subject to addition of content to reflect the approval of minutes of meetings on 2 March 2022 and 25 May 2022.

51. City Status – Meaning and Opportunities

Andrew Weavers, Monitoring Officer, gave the background to city status being awarded as part of the Platinum Jubilee, with letters patent being prepared to confirm this and due to be received at a special Full Council meeting on 12 September. The letters would be received, and the name of the Council would then be changed to 'Colchester City Council'. All rights and privileges of the Borough Council would be preserved and transferred to the new City Council, which would encompass the same geographical area as the Borough. The first Alderman of the new City Council, former-councillor Peter Chillingworth, would then be appointed and a civic reception held to thank partners who helped in the bid for city status. A Royal visit was likely to occur in the Spring, and the Council was liaising with the Lord Lieutenant's office.

A working group had been formed across all services to maximise the benefits and community involvement in and from city status.

Karen Turnbull gave a presentation laying out the bid which Colchester had submitted to apply for city status, the main areas of opportunity which were being explored, partnership working locally and to learn from the experiences of other cities which had recently gained city status, and the work being done by officers.

Councillor Doctor Pam Cox, Portfolio Holder for Culture and Heritage, presented the Administration's theme for developing Colchester, 'Our City Through Time'. This involved making the most of local historic assets, celebrating the area's different eras by holding themed events, and looking to the future, to include the 'Colchester Future Generations Commission.' An example of the events being explored was to hold a full civil war battle reconstruction to mark the Siege of Colchester, potentially

involving the Business Improvement District and likely to cost around £15,000.

In addition to exploiting the cultural and historical assets of Colchester, plans for improving 'green' and 'blue' infrastructure were outlined, including opening up the River Colne to greater recreational use and making Colchester a greener place to live whilst supporting new energy provision options, agri-tech innovation and new technology, including in building new green housing. The Future Generations Commission would work to involve young people in questioning what made a good, commercially successful green city.

Badging/branding would be needed for the new city and the Council was looking to work with the other Essex cities, to promote each other jointly. Portfolio Holder for Culture and Heritage expressed a preference for keeping the Centurion logo and argued that a logo change should not be rushed. Councillor David King, Leader of the Council, stressed the need to engage all generations and ensure that the project must be fun for all. The current situation facing people was tough, but the gaining of city status would be used to provide positivity and healing, following the pandemic. It was also proposed that the opportunity be taken to generate income and local prosperity in order to improve quality of life and wellbeing. The Leader asked for councillors to help in this and to give their thoughts on how best to achieve the Council's aims. A Panel member noted that Colchester was given Borough status by Richard III and that the new city should remember and acknowledge its history.

The Panel discussed the content of the presentations given and were in agreement that the start of the celebrations should be set as 12 September, on the day that the letters patent would be formally received by the Council. It was stressed that all areas and communities should be involved, including those who found it difficult to come into the centre of Colchester. A request was made for the next Policy Panel meeting to invite residents to give their ideas, including specifically those relating to city status. One Panel member suggested that the letters patent be taken around the Colchester area for display to different communities and it was stressed that the officer working group's work would be directed by elected councillors. The Panel's members suggested opening up the proceedings to be held on 12 September, possibly to hold a large event in the High Street, including a procession with escort, music performances, street partying and performance art. The Portfolio Holder suggested that options could include a street party, with displays and performances on the High Street.

The need for good communications and advertising was discussed, including reaching and consulting with people across the Colchester area, parish councils and rural communities. The Monitoring Officer, in answer to questions, explained that Party Group Leaders had been consulted on a new name, with a consensus reached on 'Colchester City Council'. The issuing of letters patent would cost the Council £1,764, and these would be precious documents. The Council may potentially commission a replica for display purposes, and possibly copies for sale. The Panel was assured that only Colchester would be receiving its letters patent on 12 September, ensuring maximum publicity. A Panel member suggested that the extraordinary Council Meeting should be held away from the Council chamber, at a location that would allow more residents to attend. A concern was raised by one member that 12 September would not leave enough planning time for a large-scale event, and that an enlarged Christmas fair and celebration may be a better option.

Renaming and rebranding needs were discussed and Councillor Bentley explained that any replacement of existing brown signs with new versions would need to be requested from Essex Highways, by 'Visit Essex'.

Panel members urged for people to be encouraged to take part in celebrations on 12 September, noted the entrepreneurial talent across the Borough and considered how to mobilise this talent and to use it to attract business and investment in the future. A suggestion was to consider a City economic improvement zone, especially given the proximity to London.

It was further considered how to include residents from across the Borough, including those who would find it difficult to get to Colchester itself. Members suggested that local celebrations should be considered, and that parish, town and school councils should be asked to be involved in planning festivities.

It was suggested by a Panel member that this would give an opportunity to look for new opportunities to twin Colchester with towns and cities in continental Europe. It was noted that existing twinning relationships should continue to be strengthened.

The potential for celebrating the history of the Colchester area was discussed, including the Gosbecks Archaeological Park and Mersea Island. Caution was urged that the Council must be mindful of budgetary implications of any plans.

Policy Panel asked for further details regarding the officer working group, including how it was being set up and how it would seek input from partner organisations and residents. The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Heritage gave assurance that she would be involved in this working group and that there would be further work done to ascertain how elected members and others would be involved. The Leader of the Council explained that the Council would seek as many ideas as possible, and would aim to gain cross-party support, assigning reasonable resources to any work and looking to invest in ways to improve quality of life and achieve lasting benefits for residents in both urban and rural areas.

The Portfolio Holder for Culture and Heritage informed the Panel that a range of options to celebrate city status were under consideration. The Leader of the Council expressed a wish to improve opportunities for local performers and artists and explained that the Business Improvement District would look at adapting its planned marketing, with the potential for a 'festival of light' to be held to celebrate Colchester.

A Panel member suggested asking all elected members to nominate their local community assets. The Leader of the Council requested that Cabinet be given time to take on the points raised at this meeting, look at what could be done and then report back to 'share, show and tell.' Rory Doyle, Assistant Director (Environment), suggested that an update be provided to Policy Panel later in the municipal year. The Leader of the Council agreed and offered to provide an update at each Panel meeting for the rest of the year. A member of the Panel welcomed this and requested an expanded plan of action be provided to the Panel, with opportunities at future meetings to look at how progress was being made.

RECOMMENDED to CABINET that Cabinet considers the comments and ideas put forward by the Policy Panel regarding the celebration of city status, and that

celebrations formally commence on 12 September 2022.

52. New Voter ID Requirements

Andrew Weavers, Monitoring Officer, introduced the subject, explaining that the Elections Act 2022 laid out requirements relating to the showing of photographic ID by electors wishing to vote at polling stations. A 2014 report on election fraud by the Electoral Commission had reported that no problems had been identified, but that a potential risk of personation had been raised. A report on election fraud, produced by Lord Pickles in 2016, had noted that allegations and prosecutions for personation were rare but that there was the potential for personation offences to occur. In 2018 and 2019 the Government had run pilot trials for the use of photo ID by electors, assessing that the results were positive and that it should be made mandatory for voters to show photo ID before being issued with a ballot paper.

The Monitoring Officer gave relevant statistics. In elections held in 2020 and, there had been no cases of personation/voter fraud. In 2019, which included the last general election, there had been six cases of personation recorded, with a total number of votes cast in the general election being around 32million.

The Elections Act 2022 had gained Royal Assent on 28 April 2022, directing requirements for photo ID to be introduced in April 2023, from which point all electors would need to produce an approved form of photo ID when voting at a polling station. Residents without an approved form of photo ID would be able to apply for free ID from the Electoral Registration Officer. It had been expected that the system for applications would go live in January 2023, however the secondary legislation/ regulations, needed in order to provide details of how the system would work, had yet to be approved.

It was thought that there were at least 2,780 electors in Colchester without photo ID. Approved forms of ID included passports, driving licences and the identity documents issued by the Electoral Registration Officer. The plan would be for people to be able to apply for ID up to 5pm on the day before polling day. This would be extremely challenging for the elections team.

If the presiding officer at a polling station had reason to believe that an ID document was not valid for the person producing it, then a ballot paper could not be issued. Such instances would then be recorded. Voters in such a situation could try again with alternative ID, if they wished to do so.

There was as yet no detail available as to how the system of providing free ID documents would work. What was known was that applications would need to be made online and that the ID documentation would likely need to then be posted to applicants. Regulations would be needed to cover the timing of applications, content and information in the ID documentation, the form taken by the ID, security markings, expiry date etc. It was possible that the imposition of photo ID requirements would need to be delayed if the Government did not produce the necessary secondary legislation. Timescales were short for this to happen with enough time for local authorities to work out the details as to how to implement what was required of them.

A Panel member raised concern over the Elections Act 2022 and their view that this

was a disproportionate measure to address a very small issue. The member compared the requirement of photo IDs to be shown by electors to historic attempts in the United States to carry out disenfranchisement of parts of the electorate, such as the 'Jim Crow laws'. A further argument was given that in elections across the globe where widespread electoral fraud was alleged, the alleged fraud did not relate to the specific offence of personation. The member expressed a concern that the requirement for voters to show photo ID would disproportionately disenfranchise voters from ethnic minorities who might be less likely to have photo ID. A further concern was raised as to how the Council would be able to prove the identity of people applying for the free photo ID from electoral registration officers, that would need to be provided by local authorities, and the Panel member urged the Council to highlight any problems with the plans as they currently stood.

Another member of the Panel disagreed and stated that local authorities had to get on with carrying out preparations for the system to go live, with numbers of allegations of personation offences from past years being 266 in 2018, 315 in 2020, and 525 in 2019. The Panel member claimed that voters, election agents and candidates had been convicted of electoral fraud over past years. The Monitoring Officer acknowledged that the figures given for allegations were correct and, in response to a question regarding personation/electoral fraud in Colchester Borough, informed the Panel that there had been no allegations or convictions for such offences in the past decade.

The Panel noted that other countries have functioning requirements for photo ID to be shown when voting. The Monitoring Officer clarified that the concern being highlighted by officers was that the Council did not currently have the necessary details from Government as to how the new requirements would need to be implemented, and that the longer it took for the details to be laid out, the more difficult it would be for local authorities to put in place the necessary measures to carry out their duties to provide photo ID in advance, and to check ID at polling stations. It was vital that detail be provided as to how electors would access the scheme for providing free photo ID for electoral purposes.

The Panel asked questions regarding the pilot schemes where photo ID requirements had been trialled, including a pilot in Braintree. The Monitoring Officer explained that the Braintree pilot had been a 'mixed ID' model, including the showing of photo ID and/or proof of name and address. The Electoral Commission statistics showed that 203 people had been refused a ballot, with 73 of those returning with an accepted photo ID. Around 0.3% of electors who presented themselves at a polling station had been denied a vote due to lack of identification documentation.

The Panel discussed the distinctions between voter ID requirements and ID card schemes. Different views were exchanged regarding voter ID and ID cards, with several Panel members arguing that the real concern was the short time scale involved and the pressure on the elections team to be able to be prepared for the new requirements, with one Panel member suggesting that this scheme could be being implemented prematurely, potentially to trial it before it would have to be used in a general election.

Questions were asked as to what changes would apply to postal and proxy voting, whether there would be government funding to cover the cost of the new

requirements on the Council and whether necessary resources, including more staff at polling stations, would be in place. A Panel member argued that the Council should lobby for a change in deadline for voter ID applications, giving the view that 5pm on the day before polling day would be unworkable. The Monitoring Officer explained that the ID requirements did not affect postal voters, but that postal voters would now need to reapply for postal voting every three years, rather than every five years, and that proof of ID would be required when applying/reapplying. The deadline for submitting applications for free photo ID was laid down in the Elections Act and would require statutory amendment if it were to be changed.

Concerns were raised by a Panel member that the lack of time for implementing the new requirements would limit how these could be advertised and risked disenfranchising residents who may not hear about them. Worries were also voiced regarding the potential digital exclusion of electors, if the scheme for issuing electoral photo ID relied upon an online application system, and the financial exclusion of electors who may not be able to afford to have photos of the requisite quality taken [such as in photo booths]. The Monitoring Officer gave assurance that a communications strategy was being developed to publicise the voter ID requirements well in advance of the 2023 elections, but that this could not commence until Government provided specific details of the requirements laid out in the Elections Act. It was currently expected that the only way to apply for election photo ID would be online via the central government portal, which could cause issues as it was not currently linked to any council systems.

Polling station staffing and resource implications were under consideration. This would include the need to provide private spaces for electors who wished to show their ID in private. It was confirmed to the Panel that any Police presence at polling stations would not entail any financial ramifications for local authorities. Discussions would continue with the Chief Executive of the Council to ensure any necessary increase in resources would be affected.

The Panel agreed that it should receive updates on this subject as the situation progressed, which could be considered under the Work Programme item.

53. Work Programme

Rory Doyle, Assistant Director (Environment), informed the Panel that the Leader of the Council and Cabinet had already encouraged public engagement and were keen to promote the Panel's work and encouraged people to raise ideas. The Strategic Plan was due to end in 2023 so there was work to be done to create a new Plan, with Policy Panel having a role to help shape the new Plan. It was suggested that the Panel might want to look at new ways to conduct engagement and noted that there would be other paths for engagement, and that items on the Work Programme could also attract resident views and engagements.

A Panel member suggested that an update item on city status should be added to the agenda for each meeting. It was also suggested that a more detailed item should come to the Panel regarding voter ID requirements, in November if possible, or January if the necessary detail is released later in the year by government.

The possibility of holding Panel meetings in locations across Colchester was



discussed, with the limitations and challenges that this would bring regarding accessibility, broadcast, and the need to provide induction loops for people with aural conditions. It was argued that meeting in different locations would potentially help with engagement, including with newcomers to the Borough. A Panel member advocated giving as much notice as possible to members of the public, to give more opportunity for members of the public to prepare and order their presentations and suggestions. Differing views were expressed as to the usefulness of a 'roadshow' approach to Panel meeting locations, with some arguing that it was better to use the Town Hall as the central location and fine-tune the meeting process to see how this could be improved.

The Leader of the Council agreed with the Panel that it would make sense to seek ideas relating to the Council's strategic priorities, and look to do this in a specific agenda item for this purpose, which would be less restrictive than the formal 'Have Your Say' item on each meeting agenda. The Leader offered to work with members to find ways to collect, exchange and discuss ideas more informally.

Officers were asked if there could be a way for people to drop in/submit suggestions to the Council, and with a way to direct that suggestions should focus on the Council's priorities. Officers were also asked to explore ways in which information and opinions from Parish, Town and Community Councils could be gathered and captured. It was noted that CALC [Colchester Association of Local Councils] could be contacted to see if it could assist in seeking views from the local councils which it represented.

Regarding the expected report on Cost of Living Crisis/Financial Inequality, due to come the Panel on 21 September 2022, a Panel member emphasised the need to dig into detail and hear about effects and mitigations across all demographics, arguing that the Panel should ask people to give their views and experiences relating to this specific subject.

RESOLVED that the POLICY PANEL directs officers to consider ways for the Panel to engage more with residents, craft a proposal reflecting the content and spirit of this meeting's discussions, and submit this to the Panel for consideration.

	Policy Panel	Item 8
21 September 2022		
Report of	Assistant Director, Customer Assistant Director, Communities	Author Sam Preston and Michelle Tarbun
Title	Cost of Living Crisis – Council Response	 07966237492
Wards affected	Not applicable	

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 As residents recover from the impact of Covid-19, a new crisis has emerged affecting the cost of living for everyone exponentially. Inflation, increased interest rates and rising fuel costs are pushing our resident's basic costs to unaffordable levels. The crisis is disproportionately affecting those on the lowest incomes and is likely to worsen existing inequalities across the borough.
- 1.2 The Council has committed to making its response to the cost-of-living crisis a major priority going forward. An immediate and evolving plan of activity has been designed to support residents as much as possible, working with systems partners.
- 1.3 A significant communications campaign has been launched, targeting groups that potentially would not have required support or assistance in the past. The aim is to ensure that all residents know that there is help if they need it and making it as easy as possible to access that help. A new cost of living support area has been launched on the Council's website and the team are working on a video showing the vast range of support services available.
- 1.4 Teams within Customer and Communities are re-focusing their work to support residents, providing financial assistance, providing support to improve energy efficiency, using enforcement to ensure private rented properties are of a decent standard, helping people to access food and other items they are unable to afford.

2. Action Required

- 2.1 For the Policy and Public Initiatives Panel to consider the planned response to the cost-of-living crisis to date.

3. Reason for Review

- 3.1 As a key priority for the Council, Policy and Public Initiatives Panel requested an overview of work carried out and plans going forward.

4. Background Information

4.1 *Cost of living crisis*

"The cost-of-living crisis needs an immediate response, from every level of Government, with partners and at pace. This Cabinet will prioritise support for those faced with terrible choices, between food or warmth or other essential needs, working with communities and

through our community partners to build community wealth. This will include working with partners, strengthening the capacity of the Council's high performing welfare support team and leveraging resources to provide targeted help for those in extreme difficulty, acknowledging rising demand for help and support for the most vulnerable." – Cabinet Vision and Priorities 8 June 2022.

4.2 ***Cabinet approved a three-point plan, as follows:***

1) Crisis Support:

- With rising demand and falling donations, we will intervene immediately to **support foodbanks in Colchester** and continue to work with partners to ensure demand is met and premises are secure.
- We will deliver a targeted and personalised **communications campaign**, with a high-profile **social media** strategy designed to avoid hardship and private sector rent arrears/eviction.

2) Increase help available:

- Establish a **Crisis Coordinator** role to identify those in greatest need and navigate holistic support from across the system to provide early help to avoid extreme hardship
- Focus on **maximising income and benefits** for those in greatest need and often new to the benefits system, exercising discretion where possible
- Strengthen our influence with **system partners** to increase impact, through joint funding, the new Alliance Director role and locally through **neighbourhood teams**

3) Prevent further hardship

- Maximise the benefits of the Local Delivery Plan in promoting **exercise, good health and wellbeing**
- Seek out innovative local solutions to help people find an **affordable home**
- Support residents suffering with **fuel poverty** to access energy efficiency and active travel options to reduce their energy costs and help tackle the climate emergency.
- Secure wider opportunities, from the Town Deal and Levelling Up funding, to achieve a step change in **tackling inequalities** including community wealth building and inclusive economic growth supporting training and employment opportunities

The Council has progressed quickly, working with Partners, with this work and an overview of the support available is included below.

5. **Our Teams**

5.1 ***Financial & Employment support***

Officers provide help and support for customers financial wellbeing including:

- Budgeting advice
- Signposting for debt advice and energy saving advice
- Direct financial assistance to help with housing costs, council tax costs and energy costs
- Full benefit checks and support completing applications
- Benefits appeals

- CV writing, interview skills and other employment support
- The team are currently distributing the Household Support Fund and the Discretionary Council Tax Rebate. They are offering support for residents in completing the online form providing bank details.
- The Financial and Employment Support Team, work with a wide range of partners to reach people within communities, currently there are outreach sessions in:
 - Job Centre Plus
 - C3 Church
 - YES
 - STAR Group
 - Community 360
 - Greenstead Local Housing Office
- From mid-September drop-in sessions will also take place at:
 - Tollgate Foodbank
 - Abbey Fields Medical Centre
 - St Margaret's Community Café
 - Shrub End Depot
- They also work with various charities and community groups, attending events and providing information on how to access support. Including:
 - Second **Welcome Event for Ukraine refugees** - 30 August in the One Colchester Hub space. Relaxed event for Ukraine hosts and guests to come together for food, music, support and advice from many partners including our own Welfare Benefits team and the DWP so financial, employment and benefit advice and assistance could be given on an individual basis.
 - **Essex Anchor Network Jobs Fair** – 9 September 2022
 - **Colchester Anti Loo roll Brigade Festival** – 10 September 2022
 - **Event with Independent Age** – date TBC
 - Drop-in Session at **Colchester Hospital** for staff and patients – date TBC

5.2 ***Council Tax and Corporate Debt***

If a customer is experiencing financial difficulties, it is important that they contact the Council Tax or Corporate Debt Teams as quickly as possible. Officers can help customers with suitable payment arrangements if required and can refer directly to the Financial and Employment support teams if necessary.

5.3 ***Housing Benefit***

The team work to assess benefit claims as quickly as possible, to ensure people get the money they are entitled to. They are also currently contacting residents who may be eligible for Council Tax Support but have not yet applied.

The Local Council Tax Support Scheme is being developed for 2023/24 and consultation will start shortly with proposals to increase the level of support provided by the scheme to those eligible.

5.4 ***Digital Access***

Supporting resident to get online to access the best financial deals and supply recycled IT kit free. The Digital Access team continue to work in the community in various spaces to assist residents to get online safely and make use of better deals on services and purchases, cheaper shopping etc.

5.5 ***Community Enabling***

The main connection between CBC and residents, community groups, faith groups. Provide advice and signposting.

5.6 ***Healthy Homes***

Work with vulnerable residents to adapt homes to keep people safe and warm in their own property rather than having to use the health and care system.

5.7 Private Sector Housing

Advice, inspection & enforcement in private rented properties. Service to assist Landlords and residents to make homes as safe as they can be.

5.8 Bereavement Services

Signposting to Social Care fund for financial assistance if people are struggling to pay for a funeral and also administer the CBC responsibility to arrange and pay for a cremation if there is no family or funds available.

6. Employee Support

The Financial and Employment Support Team will be holding drop-in sessions to ensure employees are accessing any benefits or financial support they are entitled to.

Employees also have access to the Employee Assistance Programme, Occupational Health Service and access to internal Mental Health First Aiders. In addition, they can access various discounts via Vine Extras, Colchester Leisure World and travel costs. Internal comms will continue to promote to all employees the support available.

7. Recent Actions and Next Steps

- Following a presentation to One Colchester, a One Colchester Cost of Living working group is being set up to co-ordinate a system approach.
- A meeting was held with Independent Age to build relationships and share support and advice available so we can work closer together to support older residents.
- Recruitment is underway to increase the level of resource in our team to cover fuel poverty, using ECC & CCG Inequalities Funding.
- The teams continue to identify and attend outreach opportunities to engage with harder to reach groups.
- Updates went to the Alliance Executive Group on 30 August & Community 360 Board on 3 September.
- Working with One Colchester to look at options for public warm spaces that offer a safe warm place for people to go. A review underway about what is already on offer and looks at gaps and possible new venues.
- Monthly update to all Members will continue and verbal updates to each Leadership meeting will begin in September.

8. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Implications

Although there are no particular references to equality, diversity and human rights. The work to support residents will be promoted as widely as possible, with a particular focus on groups that would previously not engage with or needed support from the Council and wider systems partners.

9. Standard References

There are no particular references to the Strategic Plan; consultation; community safety; health and safety or risk management implications.

10. Consultation

In this section show that consideration has been given to the timing and method of consultation. Also give an indication of what will happen to the responses.

11. Publicity Considerations

11.1 *Communications and Website*

Work is ongoing to improve and update the CBC website to ensure that the cost-of-living support and key contacts are prominent, clear & up to date. www.colchester.gov.uk/cost-of-living

Social media posts are being sent out regularly signposting residents to support and advice. Please feel free to repost so we can secure wider contacts.

We are currently focussing on school uniform support available as it is time to return following the summer holidays. [The Free School Uniform Project \(dnanetworks.org\)](http://The Free School Uniform Project (dnanetworks.org))

Stats on the CBC website hits and social media to follow in September briefing.

- 11.2 We are also working on a system wide video to demonstrates the support available in Colchester that can be used for staff in any organisation, Members for resident support, Town & Parish Council, system partners, social media etc. CBC are leading this, but system partners have been consulted on the contents. The costs of this will be picked up by the CCG funds detailed above. We hope to have a draft video by the end of September to start sharing.

12. Financial Implications

New Investments

We have secured £15k from the CCG Inequalities fund to assist with our outreach programme of work. This money will help with transport and event branding costs using our new City status logo. The Digital Access Team have also secured external funding for a Digital Access Point at Colchester Foodbank and Beacon House that will give easy access to all our cost-of-living support and contacts. We hope to have these in place by the end of September.

13. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

This work is aimed at supporting residents through the cost-of-living crisis. By providing support, advice and financial assistance we hope to help residents cope with increasing costs whilst staying warm and healthy.

14. Background papers

Enclosed copy of presentation slides demonstrating the wider system support on offer by all partners in Colchester.

Communities Can...



Cost of living support

Overview of current schemes,
partners supporting residents & actions so far

Michelle Tarbun – Group Manager – Communities
Samantha Preston – Group Manager - Customer
September 2022



Working together

DWP

Communities Can

NEE Health Alliance

One Colchester

ECC & Active Essex

Tendring District Council

Community 360

Various Charities

Colchester Borough Homes

Refugee Action Colchester



Key Teams within CBC - Communities

Bereavement Services

Digital Access

Community Enabling

Healthy Homes

Private Sector Housing



Key Teams within CBC - Customer

Financial and Employment Support

Council Tax and Corporate Debt

Housing Benefit



Financial and Employment Support

- Focus on working families and people that have not needed help before
- Benefits uptake campaigns
- Community outreach and drop in sessions
- Council Tax Rebate
- Discretionary Housing Payment
- Employment support and advice (with DWP)
- Exceptional Hardship Payment
- Funeral cost support
- Household Support Fund
- Housing Benefit & LCTS
- Welfare Benefits Advice



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.



Working with Partners

Financial Support Services through Partners

Direct Financial Support

- Essential living fund
- Credit Union
- Community 360 funding

Advice and Employment Support

- Citizens Advice (CBH funded dedicated post)
- Christians against poverty
- Step Change



Housing & Energy Efficiency Support

- Private Sector Housing Enforcement
- Disabled Facility Grants
- Emergency Loan Heaters
- Energy efficiency advice and support – LAD3 and more
- CBH – energy efficiency improvements to Council housing



Working with Partners

Energy Efficiency

- Essential living fund
- Green Doctor

Transport

- C360 community Transport
- Hospital / Health transport schemes
- Active Travel/Cycling/Bike donations & recycling
- Shopmobility

Help with Clothing

- Anti loo roll brigade community shop
- One Colchester Hub
- School Uniform Project
- North Essex Support Team
- Tots to teens
- Clothing for Job interview



Working with Partners

Help with Hunger

- Holiday Hunger schemes – FirstSite, Essex ActivAte
- Colchester Foodbank
- Cultural Foodbank (RAMA)
- BOAZ Outreach Project
- North Essex Support Team (NEST)
- GO4 Café - Foodbank & Community Fridge
- C3 Church – Community Supermarket
- Refugee Action Colchester

Crisis Support

- Hospital Discharge bursaries at C360
- Mental Health bursaries at C360 – can also be used for practical support
- Essential Living Fund
- Hygiene Bank
- Catalyst grants for people with support needs
- Buttle UK
- Friends of the Elderly



Action so far.....

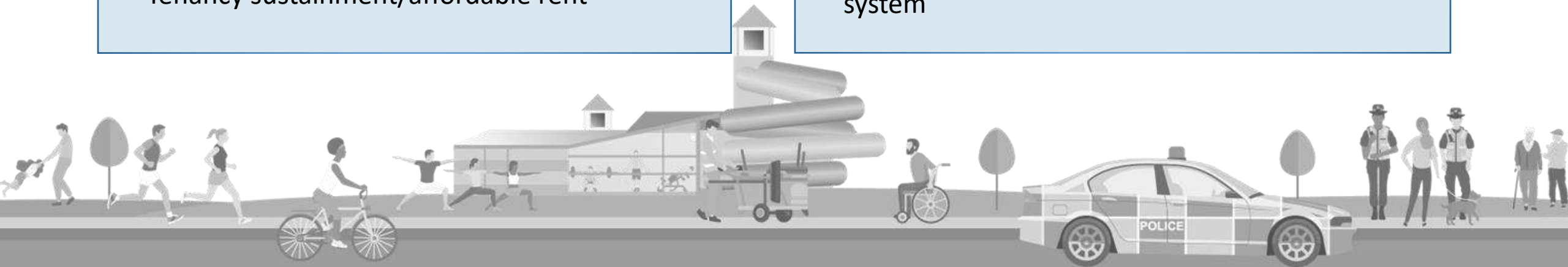
- Additional investment for 4 Colchester based foodbanks
- Increase in community outreach and drop in sessions
- Dedicated CBC comms campaign and website pages
- Support for employees
- One Colchester & CBC working groups set up
- CBC debt recovery processes reviewed
- Conversations with LGA to promote Colchester as good practice
- Monthly updates to all Ward Councillors
- Applications to Social Prosperity Fund for food poverty
- Energy efficiency post recruitment underway
- Essex Pedal Power coming to Greenstead
- Link to Neighbourhood Model



Future considerations

- Resource/funding issues
- Recruitment/retention issues
- Measurement/metrics
- UC Managed Migration
- Government rebates & support via LA's
- Tenancy sustainment/affordable rent

- Communications campaign
- Ukraine/Refugee crisis
- Ongoing Covid implications
- Sustainable solutions, not just short term crisis reaction
- Maximise other funding & resource across the system



#CostOfLivingColchester Campaign

Campaign launched in July 2022

- Organic posts on social media, using stories and feed on Facebook and Instagram & Twitter feed
- Using hashtag #CostOfLivingColchester to tie all the relevant messages together
- Social media graphics showing positive impact support has made to a person's life
- Council Community team signposting in Colchester's largest Facebook Community Groups
- Web banner on homepage of Council website
- Articles in Council's monthly newsletter 'Borough News'
- Press releases around topical support or decisions made to support residents in Colchester

www.colchester.gov.uk/cost-of-living



#CostOfLivingColchester Campaign

www.colchester.gov.uk/cost-of-living

I didn't know that
I could get **support**
with job applications
and CV skills to
find a job.



I didn't know that
I could get **free**
advice to make sure
I am receiving the
right benefits.



I didn't know that
I could get **free**
debt advice to help
me get my finances
under control.



Filip, Warehouse worker
Colchester

#CostOfLivingColchester Campaign

Supported by Museums and Visit Colchester #Free campaigns – also using #CostOfLivingColchester



#CostOfLivingColchester Campaign

Please help amplify our social media content through your own channels:

Twitter: @YourColchester

Facebook: /EnjoyColchester

Instagram: @BetterColchester

Follow #CostOfLivingColchester

We will be regularly sharing from a mix of One Colchester partners who post relevant cost of living support information too

www.colchester.gov.uk/cost-of-living



#CostOfLivingColchester Campaign

Next Steps

- Research ongoing to locate the households who are most likely facing financial hardship now or in the coming months, using MOSAIC profiling
 - Research data will enable us to target digital and print advertising to those that are most likely to need support, especially those that have not been in this position before and don't know where to go
 - Working to identify case studies that can be used to create media interest and coverage
 - Promote Colchester good practice with Local Government Association (LGA)
 - How do we join this up with Seasonal Resilience work?
- Regularly sharing posts from partner social media feeds, to really show the breadth of support that is available across the borough and signpost. Using the #CostOfLivingColchester to tie the campaign messages together
 - Planned media stories around Household Support Fund payments and energy efficiency funding
 - Internal comms to our council staff, signposting to support if needed. Looking at a system wide staff info/advice video
 - Consider Warm Space in public buildings in Colchester through One Colchester
 - Arrange a programme of outreach public events – SOS bus, Town Centre etc....

Policy Panel

Item
9

21 September 2022

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

15. 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.
- 4.2 It should be noted that an item regarding the draft Green/Blue Infrastructure Strategy was due to be received by Policy Panel on 21 September 2022. At the request of Councillor Martin Goss, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services and Waste, and Councillor Steph Nissen, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, this will be rescheduled. This is in order to allow the Portfolio Holders more time to work with relevant officers on the content and approach taken.

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
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work Programme 2022-23
3 August 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• City Status – meaning and opportunities [verbal update]• New Voter ID requirements [verbal update]• Hear ideas from the public
21 September 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cost of Living Crisis and update on Council mitigations of financial inequality• Green/Blue infrastructure strategy
23 November 2022
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How to develop roles of CBC Champions
11 January 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Climate Change Policy
1 March 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grounds Maintenance Contract

Items which need to be rescheduled:

- Green/Blue infrastructure strategy