

Scrutiny Panel Meeting

**Grand Jury Room, Town Hall, High Street,
Colchester, CO1 1PJ
Tuesday, 14 November 2023 at 18:00**

The Scrutiny Panel examines the policies and strategies from a borough-wide perspective and ensure the actions of the Cabinet accord with the Council's policies and budget. The Panel reviews corporate strategies that form the Council's Strategic Plan, Council partnerships and the Council's budgetary guidelines, and scrutinises Cabinet or Portfolio Holder decisions which have been called in.

Information for Members of the Public

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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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Scrutiny Panel – Terms of Reference

1. To fulfil all the functions of an overview and scrutiny committee under section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011) and in particular (but not limited to):

- (a) To review corporate strategies;
- (b) To ensure that actions of the Cabinet accord with the policies and budget of the Council;
- (c) To monitor and scrutinise the financial performance of the Council, performance reporting and to make recommendations to the Cabinet particularly in relation to annual revenue and capital guidelines, bids and submissions;
- (d) To review the Council's spending proposals to the policy priorities and review progress towards achieving those priorities against the Strategic and Implementation Plans;
- (e) To review the financial performance of the Council and to make recommendations to the Cabinet in relation to financial outturns, revenue and capital expenditure monitors;
- (f) To review or scrutinise executive decisions made by Cabinet, the North Essex Parking Partnership Joint Committee (in relation to decisions relating to off-street matters only) and the Colchester and Ipswich Joint Museums Committee which have been made but not implemented referred to the Panel pursuant to the Call-In Procedure;
- (g) To review or scrutinise executive decisions made by Portfolio Holders and officers taking key decisions which have been made but not implemented referred to the Panel pursuant to the Call-In Procedure;
- (h) To monitor the effectiveness and application of the Call-In Procedure, to report on the number and reasons for Call-In and to make recommendations to the Council on any changes required to ensure the efficient and effective operation of the process;
- (i) To review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge of functions which are not the responsibility of the Cabinet;
- (j) At the request of the Cabinet, to make decisions about the priority of referrals made in the event of the volume of reports to the Cabinet or creating difficulty for the management of Cabinet business or jeopardising the efficient running of Council business;

2. To fulfil all the functions of the Council's designated Crime and Disorder Committee ("the Committee") under the Police and Justice Act 2006 and in particular (but not limited to):

- (a) To review and scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions;
- (b) To make reports and recommendations to the Council or the Cabinet with respect to the discharge of those functions.

COLCHESTER CITY COUNCIL
Scrutiny Panel
Tuesday, 14 November 2023 at 18:00

The Scrutiny Panel Members are:

Councillor Darius Laws [Chairman]
Councillor Dennis Willetts [Deputy Chairman]
Councillor Tracy Arnold
Councillor Sam McCarthy
Councillor Sam McLean
Councillor Thomas Rowe
Councillor Fay Smalls

The Scrutiny Panel Substitute Members are:

All members of the Council who are not Cabinet members or members of this Panel.

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

1 Welcome and Announcements

The Chairman will welcome members of the public and Councillors and remind everyone to use microphones at all times when they are speaking. The Chairman will also explain action in the event of an emergency, mobile phones switched to silent, audio-recording of the meeting. Councillors who are members of the committee will 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 registerable interest or non-registerable interest.

5 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Councillors will be invited to confirm that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2023 are a correct record.

Scrutiny Panel Minutes 3 October 2023

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6 Have Your Say!

The Chairman will invite members of the public to indicate if they wish to speak or present a petition on any item included on the agenda or any other matter relating to the terms of reference of the meeting. Please indicate your wish to speak at this point if your name has not been noted by Council staff.

7 Decisions taken under special urgency provisions

The Councillors will consider any decisions by the Cabinet or a Portfolio Holder which have been taken under Special Urgency provisions.

8 Cabinet or Portfolio Holder Decisions called in for Review

The Councillors will consider any Cabinet or Portfolio Holder decisions called in for review.

9 Items requested by members of the Panel and other Members

(a) To evaluate requests by members of the Panel for an item relevant to the Panel's functions to be considered.

(b) To evaluate requests by other members of the Council for an item relevant to the Panel's functions to be considered.

Members of the panel may use agenda item 'a' (all other members will use agenda item 'b') as the appropriate route for referring a 'local government matter' in the context of the Councillor Call for Action to the panel. Please refer to the panel's terms of reference for further procedural arrangements.

10 Portfolio Holder Briefing from Cllr David King [Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy]

A verbal briefing from the Leader of the Council.

11 Assessment of Colchester's Ability to Develop the Skills the Economy Needs for the Future

17 - 28

This report provides a response information for the Scrutiny Panel in response to their question posed at their meeting on 15 March 2023: 'How able is Colchester to develop the skills needed for the future?'

12 Work Programme 2023-24

29 - 50

This report sets out the current Work Programme 2023-2024 for the Scrutiny Panel. This provides details of the reports that are scheduled for each meeting during the municipal year.

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

SCRUTINY PANEL

3 October 2023

Present: - Councillor Arnold, Councillor Laws (Chair),
Councillor McCarthy, Councillor Rowe,
Councillor Smalls, Councillor Willetts

Substitutions: - Councillor J. Young for Councillor McLean

Also present: - Councillor Goss, Councillor Smith

422. Have Your Say

Mrs Spantidaki addressed the Panel, pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1), to ask when the decision had been made for Community 360 to make use of Holy Trinity Church, following its renovation. Mrs Spantidaki complained that the textile-work sessions that she had attended, run by Community 360, had not been good, had included no formal tuition or lessons in the use of sewing machines. Mrs Spantidaki further complained that donated fabric was given to a local textile shop, instead of used at the textile-work sessions, and that Community 360 had banned her from their City Centre hub without reason and without following their complaints procedure. It was Mrs Spantidaki's view that Community 360 did not run activities that benefited the community, and that the Church should be used by a Christian charity instead.

The Chairman noted Mrs Spantidaki's comments and explained that he would check with the Leader of the Council as to the allegations made and the situation, noting that there was an all-party consensus in favour of making best use of Holy Trinity Church, with Community 360 considered to be the best partner for this.

423. Portfolio Holder Briefing [Housing]

Councillor Paul Smith, Portfolio Holder for Housing, briefed the Panel, highlighting the challenges presented by housing nationwide. 315 households were in temporary accommodation, as of the previous week. 70 were in bed and breakfast accommodation, with almost half of those outside of the Colchester area. Hardship continued to stem from an increase in Section 21 [no-fault] evictions from private rental accommodation, with use of bed and breakfast leading to difficulties, especially for families with children at Colchester schools or where individuals were employed in Colchester. Other Essex local authorities were subject to similarly circumstances, with higher levels of housing issues closer to London.

More affordable housing was needed in Colchester, but the current viability model for new housing was remarked upon as being outdated, for instance assuming that inflation would be at around 2%, which had not been the case in recent years. Cost calculations for refitting and maintenance were out of date, due to high inflation. The current level of £500 per home per annum for maintenance was too low, especially given current rent levels. The Portfolio Holder informed the Panel that consideration would need to be given as to whether, for new-build properties built and rented, the Council should move from the social housing rent rates [50% of market rate] to the higher affordable housing rent rates [75% of market rate] to meet the increased costs facing the Council.

Regarding the target for properties to be bought by the Council, this target may be missed, as the focus was moved to purchasing the larger properties which were much-needed, such as three- and four-bed houses. The average waiting time to obtain a three-bed house was currently around three years, with the rent charged by the Council being £800 per month, compared to the private rental average rate of around £1,300 per month. The Local Plan required new developments to include at least 30% social housing, which had helped, but the Portfolio Holder informed the Panel that Registered Social Landlords [RSLs] often were no longer willing to take up new units built, leaving those units to be sold on the open market. The Government had promised rent increases of CPI [Consumer Price Index] plus one percent, which would have led to increases of 12-13% in the past year, but had then introduced a rent cap in 2022 of seven percent. RSLs therefore felt it too risky to increase their stock, especially with interest rates still high.

The Panel discussed instances of overcrowding in temporary accommodation, including young families, the reasons which had led to this situation, and the educational difficulties found by children in such households.

A Panel member remarked that Colchester had outperformed other local authorities in the area when it came to numbers of new build properties, going on to ask the Portfolio Holder how Colchester found itself in the current situation. The Portfolio Holder agreed that housebuilding had carried on over the years, but not at a rate which matched the increase in population, which had increased at roughly 11% per year (compared to the national average of 6%). Whilst it was positive that people wanted to live in the Colchester area, this caused problems, exacerbated by a loss of social housing due to 'right to buy' sales, with around 4,000 properties lost, with only one new property able to be provided, at best, for every four lost.

The Portfolio Holder argued that a large investment in social housing was necessary, funded by central government. More affordable homes were needed, and the Panel were told that the provision of an additional three-bedroom house into Council stock had a knock-on effect to improve the lives of more than one family, with the reduction in overcrowding and ability to move people out of overcrowded temporary accommodation. Colchester Borough Homes [CBH] offered a number of incentives for people who found themselves under-occupying Council properties to downsize. These included cash and assistance towards moving house.

The Panel discussed the situation regarding temporary accommodation, with comments made that this continued to worsen over the years, including the

heightening need for larger properties for families. The cost of temporary accommodation was highlighted, being more costly to provide than a normal council-stock property, with a suggestion made that the Council should explore modular housing options, and moving older residents to bungalows if possible, and if they wish to move, to make larger properties available for families to occupy. The provision of temporary accommodation was difficult, with households often having to be placed in unsuitable properties, due to the lack of suitable units. The Portfolio Holder informed the Panel that a site visit was scheduled to take place on 6 November, to look at modular housing options. Chelmsford City Council had explored the use of modular accommodation, but it had taken around three years from the start of the project until the first residents were able to move into the units provided.

The Panel members raised questions about the Gateway to Homechoice letting allocation system, and the award of bandings based on priority need. The Portfolio Holder explained that there were households who had been assigned temporary accommodation, but which had yet to receive a banding for priority. It was explained that people dropped off the housing need register, as those assigned lower bandings were less likely to successfully bid on any properties.

Panel members asked about the funding background to the Council's housing stock. The Portfolio Holder explained that, when Government had sold the housing stock back to Colchester Borough Council, the Council had funded this by taking out 50-year loans at low rates, but was not able to 'gamble' on taking out Public Works Loan Board [PWLB] loans at low rates, on the chance that rates would then rise.

A Panel member asked how many tenants would have the 'right to buy' their rented properties, and what could be done to move tenants from social into private renting. The Portfolio Holder explained that all Council tenants had the right to buy the property they were renting after a certain set number of years tenancy, and that the Council had no scope or ability to ask tenants to move into the private sector. This would require primary legislation to make possible. The Portfolio Holder argued that the expected lifespan of Council properties should be lowered from 60 years to 40 years, to show a more realistic expected lifespan, in light of the likelihood of loss through right to buy. RTB sales were around 100 per year, although this was likely to drop as interest rates stayed high, but then increase again. The units which tended to be lost to RTB sales were the larger three- and four-bed properties, which were difficult to replace.

The Portfolio Holder answered questions regarding energy efficiency measures, explaining the largescale scheme, around 12-13 years previously, to install photovoltaic panels on residential properties. These had proceeded to save the residents around £150 per year, per property, and generated around £100k per year in 'feed-in tariff' [FIT] income for CBH/the Council. This scheme had not entailed a cost to the Council, as the Council had negotiated an excellent deal, leading to the best numbers of properties with photovoltaic panels of any arms-length management organisation [ALMO]. No new panels had been fitted recently, due to the earlier widescale scheme, but the Council was fitting heat pumps in properties in different areas.

A Panel member noted the difficulties faced in housing, and pointed out that the Government's rent cap had been introduced to protect tenants during the cost of living crisis. Arguments were made that, unless ways were found to reduce the cost of new social housing, the efforts that could be made to improve the situation were minimal. The Portfolio Holder agreed that housing was too costly, but argued that the rent cap was not to protect tenants, as the Government would have also capped private rent rises also, if that had been the intention. Different possible ways to reduce housing costs were raised, such as reducing land banking, and looking at land valuations and builder margins.

The Portfolio Holder was asked what the Council could do to help large numbers of households needing housing, and explained that all local authorities in East Anglia had the same crisis in housing and that only central government changes and policy could make significant differences.

The Portfolio Holder was asked if more could be done to weight housing allocations towards households with connections to the area, rather than by housing need. The Portfolio Holder explained that the Gateway to Homechoice lettings system covered seven local authority areas, and that Colchester experienced far more people moving out of the area via this system than the number moving in. Mid Suffolk Council, in comparison, lost around 70 properties per year to bidding applicants moving into its area. The scheme helped people to locate housing of an appropriate size more easily, across a larger geographic area. New build properties that were allocated for social housing were however first offered to people with links to Colchester, and armed forces families received preferential consideration in lettings, waiting around six months less, on average, than non-service families in the same band.

The Gateway to Homechoice scheme received regular reviews, including by Policy Panel. The Panel had, in the previous year, wished to look at whether local links of applicants could be better prioritised, but it had been found that there was not enough accommodation resource to permit a general local lettings policy, and that it would only be possible for specific and appropriate housing schemes, such as on Scarfe Way, and in some rural developments. The Portfolio Holder fielded further questions and confirmed that the marital status of applicants was not a factor when calculating the applicant's housing need.

The Panel discussed the different demographics of residents needing social housing and/or housing benefits. Some were fleeing domestic abuse and homelessness, but many were in full time work but could not earn enough to afford private rental accommodation or home ownership. The Portfolio Holder gave the example that an individual on the average salary for the Colchester area would now need around eight to nine times that salary in order to afford a property in the cheapest 25% of properties in the area. Unless contributions from family members could be made, it was very difficult to start on the housing ladder, especially when having to pay rent whilst saving up. The situation was even worse in Chelmsford and closer to London.

424. Portfolio Holder Briefing [Neighbourhood Services and Waste]

Councillor Smalls (by reason of being a resident of the area in which St Mary's Car Park was sited) declared a non-registerable, non-pecuniary interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7 (5).

Councillor Martin Goss, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services and Waste, gave an outline of the Council services and work which fell within his remit, which covered recycling, waste collection and cleansing. The Portfolio Holder highlighted that the Council was a waste collection authority, whilst Essex County Council [ECC] was the waste disposal authority for the County. This portfolio also included management of the Council's waste collection fleet, parking matters (working with the North Essex Parking Partnership), street naming and parks and playgrounds.

Sickness levels had dropped, with the physical nature of the jobs within waste collection being highlighted, walking around 20 miles per day for collection operatives, filling up to two dustcarts with 10-12 tonnes of rubbish per day. Physio support was provided for staff with musculoskeletal conditions. Councillors were encouraged to accompany a collection team on one of their routes, to see what the job entailed.

The Shrub End depot had been found to be unfit for purpose, and so investments had been made in improving it, including new shower units and improved staff facilities. Where possible, existing facilities were retained and improved as this was cheaper than a full rebuild.

Fifteen new permanent positions had been created, in order to reduce the need for agency staff. Agency staff would always be needed, to cover rounds and increase capacity where this was temporarily necessary, with the split of permanent staff and agency staff currently at around 80% to 20%. The Portfolio Holder stated that there would always be a need for around 10% of staffing to be covered by agency staff, but this should be minimised as they were less reliable, didn't know routes so well and missed more collections. The recruitment freeze at the Council was a challenge, with all recruitment requiring signing off. The Portfolio Holder recommended if recruitment was necessary, then this was sent up the chain for approval. Agency staff were easier to call in, but cost more.

Officers were being trained up, including being sent on HGV [Heavy Goods Vehicle] driver training courses, to give them the ability to progress to be team leaders/collection vehicle drivers. The Panel asked if these officers would then be tied into their contracts for a certain length of time, once trained. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that this was the case, and that Human Resources could supply the details.

Trade waste collection had achieved profitability and targets had been exceeded to provide bins to flat management companies. A new contractor for local recycling had been found in August 2023; a company called Plan B. Food waste was sent to Halstead whilst garden waste went for processing in Birch This minimised the carbon footprint of the Council. A local waste review continued, alongside ECC's Essex-wide Waste Strategy consultation. The Council's recycling and landfill rates compared favourably to many other local authorities' rates.

A new system had been introduced to identify litterers and issue penalty notices, with patrols covering different parts of Colchester. There was currently a payment rate of around 70% of notices issued. Possible ways to increase fines for littering and fly tipping were being considered. Funding of more than £10k had been achieved for the purchase of a chewing gum removal machine, with suction cleaners also being purchased. New 'ballot casting' style cigarette bins were to be trialled at the end of the current month. Many dog waste bins were being replaced with 'dual use' bins which could also take normal litter, thus reducing collection costs.

A full refit of the Vineyard Gate lift had been carried out, the Knife Angel had been brought to Colchester and days of action had continued to be carried out in the City.

The Portfolio Holder outlined the specific challenges presented by cleansing the A12 within the Colchester area. A joint tender for cleansing had been explored with Tendring District Council, but this had been shown to be cost prohibitive, and all bidders had failed the tender requirements. A12 cleansing should require lane closures, but the Council was working with Highways England to find a way to proceed without significant traffic disruption.

The Council's grounds maintenance contract continued with idVerde, with whom the Portfolio Holder had recently met to discuss service provision. Work was due to start on the new Highwoods playground, and the Portfolio Holder outlined other ongoing works with park services.

Saint Mary's car park was now closed on weekend evenings. Cars which were parked there could exit after closing time, but new vehicles could not enter after 10pm. This meant that theatre goers would not be affected. If this did not reduce the levels of antisocial behaviour, other options would be explored, such as the use of barriers. The MiPermit payment system was working well, and significant investment had been made in modern payment machines. A member of the Panel noted their disappointment in the low level of enforcement and fining of offences against the vehicular PSPO, and lack of support by the Police, arguing that the Police should be pressed to increase enforcement. 55 warnings had been issued, but only one fine. This PSPO had also targeted other areas and seen Police enforcement action elsewhere. Alternatives for Saint Mary's car park were suggested, such as manually putting up a fence overnight in the short term, to be replaced by automatic barriers in the long term. The Portfolio Holder informed the Panel that the cost of shutters was being examined, and that he had raised the problems at this car park with the Police, who had been supportive of measures to address them.

Councillor David King, Leader of the Council, referenced the promise he had made to residents of the Saint Mary's area that there would be zero tolerance of antisocial behaviour and PSPO breaches, with fines to be issued. The Leader gave his view that it was appropriate for the Police to seize the vehicles of repeat offenders. More CCTV and patrols were being brought in. The initial measures used would be temporary and be replaced by a long term solution.

The Panel discussed the differences in types of recycling collection, with one member questioning whether materials collected for recycling were actually recycled.

The Portfolio Holder explained the recycling process used, and that plastic recycled from co-mingled recycling collection was of lower quality than that created from plastic recycling collected separately. Maldon conducted hand sorting of its co-mingled recycling, as the technology for automatic sorting was not there. Colchester asked its residents to split recycling into different materials, which reduced the cost and complexity of the process, which was greener as it was a shorter process.

The use of recycled materials was discussed by the Portfolio Holder, with Germany using plastic for burning in eco-friendly energy production methods. China had stopped taking plastic recycling, leading to a glut in the market, but there was now a market again for plastics used in yoghurt and flower pots, which could be washed, turned into pellets and put to new uses. The Portfolio Holder explained that ECC insisted on sending black bag waste to landfill, even though other places burned them for power generation. The current main landfill for North Essex was in Stanway.

At this point in the meeting, Councillor Laws left for another commitment. Councillor Willetts, as Deputy Chairman of the Panel, took over the chairing of this meeting.

The Portfolio Holder answered questions about the price the Council received for its recycling, explaining that fixed contract pricing was not possible, and that all materials had to be sold at the spot price at the time. ECC was moving to a 70% recycling target for all Essex in the next decade. The Council would fall in line with this, and the new Waste Strategy, due to be published in the coming year, would show how this would be achieved. Efforts would be made to encourage households to start recycling, as many were still binning materials such as glass. Local authorities could issue fines for non-recycling, and it was expected that councils would use a tougher approach in the future. Recycling targets related to the percentage of collected waste going for recycling, with the current key target being 55%. A Panel member asked how recycling could be made easier for residents. The Portfolio Holder extolled the benefits of using wheelie bins for ease of use, but having one bin for mixed recycling collection would increase the processing fee and level of contamination, so would lower the amount paid to the Council for the materials produced. This was being examined in the waste review.

The Portfolio Holder was asked how recycling bags were delivered to households, and explained that they were delivered by a mix of Council staff and agency staff. A Panel member asked what alternative there was to this way of delivering the bags, being told that the only alternative was to stop delivering recycling sacks to households. The cost of delivery was around £70k per year. Council staff had knowledge of the area which aided delivery. Outsourcing the delivery of bags would increase costs.

A Panel member asked about the proposed new system for charging for garden waste collection, stating that the cost profile raised questions, such as about over-staffing. The Portfolio Holder was asked if a more comprehensive profit and loss statement could be provided for the scheme. The Portfolio Holder agreed to see if this was possible. When asked why it had taken such time to commence the waste review, after receiving this as a recommendation from the Local Government Association peer review, the Portfolio Holder explained that the Environment and

Sustainability Panel owned that work, with the expected publication of the review results in January or February 2024.

The Portfolio Holder was asked when the Council would move to a fully electric fleet of waste collection vehicles. It was explained to the Panel that the current fleet would depreciate over seven or eight years. It had been seen to be cost-effective to buy the fleet rather than lease it, with the technology not yet in place for electric collection vehicles to be affordably used. Electric vehicle options had been prohibitively expensive prior to the increase in inflation, which had further increased the cost. The range of these vehicles was insufficient to cover the Council's area for rounds further from the Council's depot. A bid had, however, been submitted for grant funding towards buying an electric road sweeper. The NEPP was currently leasing electric vehicles, with the Council on a pathway to this but being hampered by Government changes over time to different deadlines and requirements relating to electric vehicles [EVs]. As the next fleet replacement neared, the different options would be benchmarked, and the most cost-effective option chosen. EVs would not be purchased until they were at an affordable price.

A Panel member asked if the Council's car parks would pivot to prioritising use by EVs. The Portfolio Holder noted that the average usage of car park spaces in Colchester was in excess of 800 spaces per day, with car parks full at weekends. A long-term parking strategy had been in place for the past two years, with two needing to close within the next decade, having reached their end of life: Saint Mary's and Saint John's car parks. Some car parks had been in the Local Plan for over a decade, and the Portfolio Holder ventured that some could be removed whilst retaining enough spaces overall, however the Britannia car park would need to be replaced when it reaches its current end of life. The Parking Strategy included content on how to effect modal shift of journeys from private cars and on to public transport and other alternatives. The Portfolio Holder was asked the budget implications of underuse on weekdays and overuse on weekends, and how charges could be adjusted to maximise income. The Portfolio Holder noted that at its peak, parking income was £4m per year, but had dropped in recent years. Offers were in place for off-peak use during the week, overseen by Richard Walker, Head of Parking.

The Portfolio Holder was asked how pavement parking could be dealt with, and explained that this remained a Police matter, except in London. The Government had been examining the potential decriminalisation of obstructive parking, so that local authorities could issue fines, but work had stalled.

The Panel asked questions regarding sickness levels, and measures being taken to support staff. The Portfolio Holder informed the Panel that days lost to sickness had reduced from 20.94 in August 2022, to 13.25 in August 2023, with reductions in both long- and short-term sickness. Care for staff was key, and was an important reason in favour of increasing the use of wheelie bins. Council staff received a discount for use of Leisure World, as exercise could help prevent injury. The Portfolio Holder explained that agency staff would always be needed to assist in waste collection, covering holidays, sickness and training time taken by Council staff. Agency workers were the most flexible way to provide cover where needed, and the best rates were

sought from employment agencies. It was not possible to recruit and have 100% staffing in-house.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holders for Housing, and for Neighbourhood Services and Waste, for their comprehensive briefings and detail provided in their answers to questions.

425. Work Programme 2023-24

The Chair asked if there had been progress in actioning the Scrutiny Panel's request to receive a report and agenda item on the work of the Local Highways Panel for the Colchester area. Owen Howell, Democratic Services Officer, confirmed that this had yet to be scheduled and that it would be scheduled as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that the SCRUTINY PANEL's Work Programme be approved for 2023-24.



Scrutiny Panel

Item

14 November 2023

Report of	Matthew Sterling, Economic Growth Manager	Author	Karen Turnbull
Title	Assessment of Colchester's Ability to Develop the Skills the Economy Needs for the Future		
Wards affected	All Wards		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides a response information for the Scrutiny Panel in response to their question posed at their meeting on 15 March 2023: 'How able is Colchester to develop the skills needed for the future?'
- 1.2 The report considers what is meant by 'skills', why they are important, assesses the current strategic situation in the UK labour market in terms of recent policy changes, new legislation and social change. It looks at local evidence of need and skills priorities and outlines Colchester's 'skills landscape'. This includes providers of training, projects currently taking place to address skills development and partnership work to address shortages directly.

2. Action Required

- 2.1 Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the report and to take a view as to whether further action is required.

3. Reason for Scrutiny

- 3.1 Colchester City Council approved a new Economic Strategy in February 2023. This stimulated reports to Policy Panel around Business Support and the subject of the importance of skills provision arose from this.

4. Background Information

4.1 What do we mean by 'skills'?

Skills are a collection of attributes which make us fit for life. In economic terms skills make us effective contributors to the labour force, they help individuals to expand their fields of knowledge which can help develop career paths, possibly with higher pay and ultimately, through the work they do and their contribution to businesses, help the economy to grow.

Skills acquisition starts in early childhood, formalises in education and continues throughout working life. These skills complement personal growth and can contribute to achieving personal potential both personally and professionally.

The average person is now anticipated to need to prepare to change career five times during a 50-year working life (assuming that on average many people will start some form of work at 16 and retire at age 67). People therefore need to have easy access to the skills they need to navigate this uncertainty, to realise their personal potential and to contribute to the local economy through improving commercial and social productivity.

4.2 Why Skills are Important

A country's ability to increase productivity is one of the key targets of economic policy as this enables countries to compete in a global economy and afford good quality public services.

Productivity refers to how efficiently production inputs like labour or capital are transformed into output.

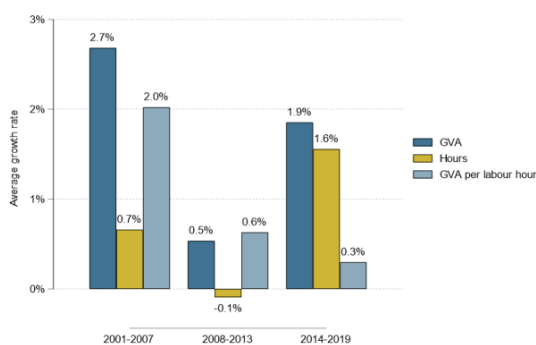
In June 2023, the [Institute for Public Policy Research analysis](#) reported that the UK risked falling further behind comparable wealthy nations as business investment is lower in the UK than in any other country in the G7, and 27th out of 30 OECD countries, ahead of only Poland, Luxembourg and Greece.

Highlighting a severe shortfall in public and private investment stretching back over several decades, the IPPR's research showed that Britain had ranked below the G7 average since 2005 for spending on infrastructure, research and development, skills and training.

Historical trends also show that the growth in UK labour productivity has been lower in recent years compared with the growth rates observed at the beginning of the early 2000s. This is referred to as the productivity puzzle, and it is not unique to the UK. It is therefore critical to understand the reasons for this decline.

Analysis published earlier this year on [Skills and UK Productivity](#) shows that the growth in UK labour productivity has slowed over the last twenty years. GVA per hour worked (presented by the light blue bar in Figure 1 below) grew by 2% per annum between 2001 and 2007, but only 0.6% per annum between 2008 and 2013, and further declined to 0.3% per annum between 2014 and 2019.

Figure 1: Growth in GVA, hours worked and labour productivity



Sources: LFS and London Economics' calculations

¹ The analysis uses data from the Quarterly LFS between 2000 and 2019. Variables are expressed as growth rates between two consecutive years, so the analysis relates to the years 2001 to 2019.

Overall, the evidence presented in this report, together with the findings from recent literature showing the positive effect of educational attainment on labour market outcomes shows that skills have a positive effect on wages and labour productivity.

The report also highlighted how investment by businesses is another key factor when considering productivity. Investment in new capital and innovative processes drives the need for new skills acquisition and can improve productivity.

Business confidence is key when borrowing to invest as those debts need to be serviced, ideally with increased productivity. Recent quarter's figures from the [Office of National Statistics](#) show a positive trend as the primary driver of growth in Quarter 1 2023 was ICT equipment and other machinery and equipment. However, this does coincide with the end of the temporary tax relief on qualifying capital asset investment.

In early 2022, the UK workforce comprised around 32.6 million people. Workers require a range of skills to be productive. The skills system is complex, involving government, employers, training providers, local bodies and individuals.

Office of National Statistics figures show that in Colchester there are 121,600 people aged 16-64 – the 'working age population'. Of these 98,100 are in employment and a further 8,900 are self-employed (81% and 7% of the working age population respectively).

Employers play a crucial role in developing workforce skills and stimulating the skills system and contributing to economic growth in this way. They can encourage and support their staff to take up government-funded training opportunities. They also invest in their own training activities, create higher-skilled jobs, and offer career progression and other opportunities for those with the appropriate skills.

In terms of the specific skills that are needed, it is important to note that a recent Green Skills Summit hosted by ECC argued that along with literacy, numeracy, digital literacy and 'soft skills' around customer care, sustainability is the fifth essential skill for everyone. There was a strong consensus that every job is a 'green job' as every industry plays a crucial role in minimising environmental impacts as we collectively work towards the goal of Net Zero.

4.3 Current Situation in the UK Labour Market

1. A Challenging National Picture

According to this year's [Business Barometer 2023](#) report published by The Open University and the British Chambers of Commerce:

- three-quarters (73%) of UK organisations are currently experiencing skills shortages, which remain one of the top challenges facing employers
- more than half (54%) of **organisations don't have specific skills initiatives** in place for specific talent pools, including those from underrepresented groups
- organisations also reported **an impact on reduced activity or output (productivity)** (42%) and reduced long-term growth plans (40%)
- therefore the additional pressure of skills shortages **are impacting the future of organisations and their local economies**, which could lead to further challenges for the economy as well as meeting Net Zero and equality, diversity and inclusion goals.
- Businesses, especially **Small/Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) lack the necessary expertise and resources** to strategically address the skills gaps effectively and as a result many firms are trapped in a cycle of continual recruitment and retention challenges.

A [National Audit Office report](#) in 2022 - examined whether government has an effective approach to enhancing workforce skills. Given its responsibilities for leading Governments' approach to skills, much of the NAO's examination focused on Department for Education's (DfE) activities, as well as other departments which play a role in supporting skills development.

The report concluded that:

'Having a sufficiently skilled workforce is critical to the UK's economic success and to achieving wider government aims such as greater equality of opportunity. Government, led by DfE, has strengthened its approach in recent years. It has taken sensible steps to deepen its understanding, improve its oversight and work more coherently to address this priority.

At the same time, the skills challenge that government is facing has grown significantly, with key indicators going in the wrong direction.

- Employers' investment in workforce training has declined
- as has participation in government-funded skills programmes
- and these programmes impact on productivity.
- In addition, wider changes in the labour market (see below) are intensifying the challenge.

There is still an opportunity therefore for the Government at all levels to work in partnership with business to help to provide the skills the country needs.

The Department for Education is working on a more employer-led system but, from the evidence, it is unclear whether the conditions are in place for this to be implemented successfully, in particular whether employers are ready to engage to the extent that will be needed to achieve a step-change in performance. Employers may well ask why they invest in training people when those people might move on quickly in, what is currently, an employees' recruitment market.

As a result, there is a risk that, despite government's greater activity and good intent, its approach may be no more successful than previous interventions in supporting workforce skills development'.

New Legislation - 2022 saw new legislation come into effect when the [Skills and Post-16 Education Act](#) was passed. This is intended to help transform the skills and training landscape and level up opportunities across the country.

The Act underpins the government's transformation of post-16 education and skills as set out in the [Skills for Jobs White Paper](#) and is intended to help level up and drive growth across the whole country.

Skills to support the growing green economy are prioritised to create a workforce for jobs now and in the future, and schools are to be required to make sure all children get to meet providers of technical education routes such as apprenticeships, T Levels or traineeships – opening them to a wide range of careers.

The legislation may help economic recovery and growth by making it easier for people to get the skills they need to secure well-paid jobs in industries with skills gaps, such as health and social care, engineering, digital, clean energy and manufacturing. It may also give more people the opportunity to get jobs in their local areas, by requiring employers and colleges to work together to identify the skills needed within communities.

Key measures introduced by the Act include:

- Developing [Local Skills Improvement Plans](#) (LSIPs) Locally this is being led by the [Essex Chambers of Commerce](#) which is currently gathering data and insight on business needs through a variety of sector-based workshops. There is an update on the Essex LSIP below.
- embedding employers in the heart of the skills system by placing a legal requirement on colleges and other providers to work with employers to develop skills plans, so that the training on offer meets the needs of local areas, and people no longer have to leave their hometowns to find great jobs
- making sure all pupils meet providers of technical education so that they understand the wide range of career routes and training available to them, such as apprenticeships, T Levels or traineeships, not just the traditional academic options
- prioritising green skills so the training on offer across the country meets the needs of the growing green economy and helps gets more people into jobs
- supporting changes to the current student loans system so from 2025 learners can access a flexible loan for higher-level education and training at university or college, useable at any point in their lives
- introducing new powers to intervene when colleges are failing to deliver good outcomes for the communities they serve
- making it a criminal offence to provide, arrange or advertise essay mill services for financial gain to students taking a post-16 qualification at institutions in England including colleges, universities and sixth forms, and
- creating a unified skills system that builds from quality gains achieved with apprenticeships and T Levels by ensuring all technical qualifications match up to employers' high standards.

2. The UK Labour Market: a changed picture

Skills gaps have long been an issue in the national economy. Historically this was resolved by encouraging immigration and temporary seasonal work. Industries which were highly dependent on importing skills were and remain: health and care, agriculture, construction and tourism, leisure and hospitality, all of which are key to Colchester's economy.

Skills Gaps Compounded - The UK's departure from the European Union, Pandemic relocations of overseas nationals to be with family and a more stringent immigration policy have compounded the skills gaps now being seen across most sectors of the economy. The issue is therefore a structural one and one which cannot be resolved by UK businesses or education and training institutions.

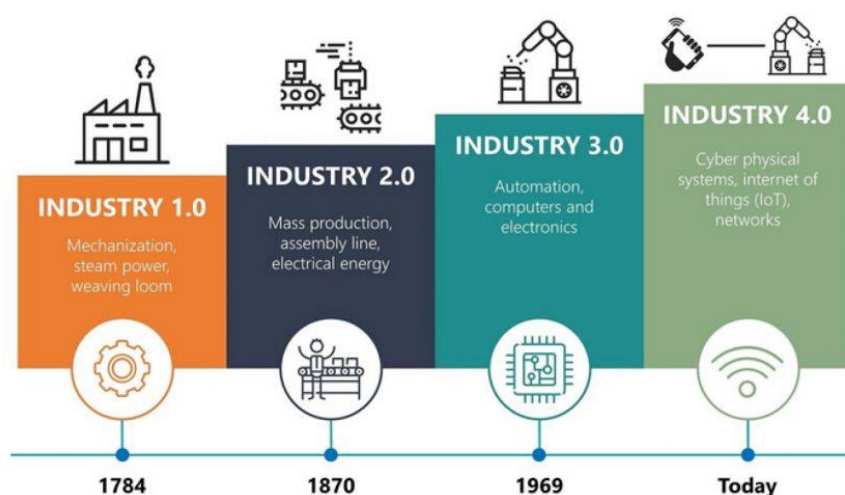
Business support is needed - Organisations, in particular Small / Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs), need support to invest and develop their Human Resource and people management capability to enable them to invest in their workforce's skills and make best use of existing capabilities.

Labour Market Churn - The Pandemic also saw many people re-evaluate their careers and change sectors. Hospitality is a case in point where some Chefs left to become delivery drivers for instance, citing better working conditions.

This churn has seen skills and experience lost in many sectors which again is compounding the issue locally, regionally and nationally. Conversely there is an issue around the ability of some sectors to attract people with transferable skills from other sectors.

Technological change - Increasing automation combined with the forces of Globalisation mean that working life is increasingly impermanent and unpredictable and will intensify over time. For some people this is liberating whilst for others it is daunting. *The Financial Times* predicts that people will change career (not job) around five times in future. However, restarting careers at entry level or going back into education will undoubtedly affect incomes and people's ability to sustain a life/lifestyle that their parents had as standard.

It is also worth noting that we are currently in the 4th Industrial Revolution as evidenced by this diagram. This is also demanding a new level of skills acquisition and development in order to remain competitive internationally.



Economic inactivity - Since the release of lockdown restrictions there have been significant changes in the labour market which are further contributing to skills shortages across the board.

Significant numbers of [Young people are leaving the labour market](#) because they are:

- Entering education and training
- Too unwell to work – especially young men
- However, more young women are entering the labour market as there are more flexible working opportunities since the Pandemic which mean that family responsibilities can be combined with working.

A significant number of [older people have left the labour market](#) taking their experience and skills from the economy. Recent findings, including by the ONS, show that [rising inactivity among 50-to-64-year-olds accounted for 68.5% of the total rise in economic inactivity](#) among 16-to-64-year-olds since the start of the pandemic.

There are two main explanations for the rise in economic inactivity among older workers: they chose to retire early or they are unable to work for health reasons. The [Health Foundation](#) and the [Institute for Employment Studies](#) have argued that the main reason for the rise in economic inactivity has been worsening health, exacerbated by difficulties accessing care and delays in treatment.

Demographic change - [‘Generation Z’ and ‘Y/Millennials’](#) have a vastly different expectation of the world of work compared to ‘Boomers’. Indeed, Gen-Z stands out as a group that is wholeheartedly embracing continuous learning at work. Their experience of life and their values will affect career choices and the skills they acquire to match.

4.4 Evidence of Need

Like any other activity, investment in skills takes place when there is evidence of need. February this year saw the approval of [Colchester City Council's Economic Strategy 2022-25](#), of which ‘people’ and skills is one of four key themes.

Sophisticated sector analysis was carried out by Essex County Council and was published last year in its [ECC Sector Development Strategy](#). This was adopted into Colchester’s Economic Strategy as both businesses and employees see no Local Authority boundaries in their operations. This is complemented by the [Essex Skills Plan 2022-23](#) which is an employer-led partnership approach to local skills delivery. This plan is deliberately light touch due to emerging skills policy nationally including a Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for Essex, Southend and Thurrock.

Over the Spring of 2023, the Essex Chambers of Commerce undertook an intensive engagement programme to produce the [Local Skills Improvement Plan \(LSIP\)](#). It concluded these priorities, actions for the following sectors. The Government approved funding for the LSIP for Essex in July and the plan will commence implementation in September.

Skills Priorities

- Soft skills and behaviours

- Basic English, Maths and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)
- Digital skills and 'Digitech'
- Green skills
- Leadership and Management skills system priorities
- System access and flexibility

Skills System Priorities

- Information, Careers Advice and Guidance
- Tutor shortages and capacity of providers to respond
- Inclusive employment
- Barriers to engagement
- Skills planning system for Essex Sectors and Technical Skills

Essex Sectors and Technical Skills

- AgriTech and Food Tech
- Community and Voluntary
- Construction and the Built Environment
- Creative and Cultural
- DigiTech
- Education
- Health, Social Care and Med Tech
- Professional Services Transport and Logistics.

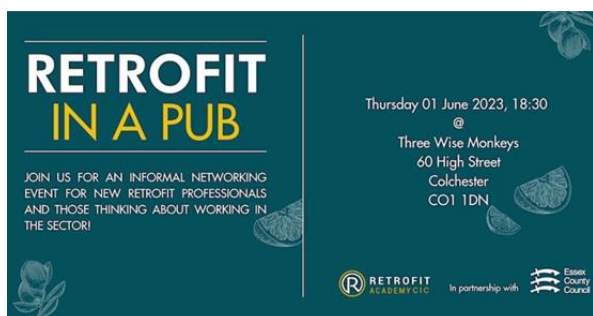
The Government approved funding for the LSIP for Essex in July and the plan will commence implementation in September.

There are also sector specific reports such as the [Green Skills Infrastructure Review 2022](#) by Mace commissioned by ECC and the [Leisure Recovery Strategy 2022](#) commissioned by the Our Colchester BID both of which are in the delivery phase now.

4.5 The Colchester Skills Landscape

- *Education:* Primary and Secondary Schools, Further and Higher Education: Colchester Institute and the University of Essex, Adult Education courses and sector specific, eg: The Edge Hotel School at Wivenhoe House Hotel.
- *Training:* workplace training offered by employers and specialist sector training companies ([Skills Bootcamps training providers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)), continuing professional development, internships, work experience, apprenticeships. Sector specific provision, eg: the Think BDW Academy, peer to peer support.
- *Professional membership organisations:* Chartered Institute of Customer Service, Marketing, Accountancy, Personnel, Procurement offer training, CPD and professional qualifications.
- *Business Support:* The Colchester Business Enterprise Agency offers a range of business support and training across the business skill set. The Colchester Institute offers a comprehensive range of courses, training, consultancy, apprenticeships and work experience placements.

- *Funding:* The UK Shared Prosperity Fund for Colchester is £3.1m over three years from 2023; the Rural England Prosperity Fund is £532,000 over 2023/25 and is restricted to capital projects only. A significant amount of money has been allocated into skills development including these specific local projects and partnerships:
 - Projects
 - *Digital Infrastructure* – Colchester City Council has a £50m programme to install digital infrastructure (Ultrafast gigabit fibre Broadband and 5G). This enables personal development/skills acquisition at home in our communities as well as enabling businesses to change business models to enter new markets and develop new products and services.
 - *Digital Creative Hub* in Queen Street – This will be a collaborative space for digital artists, entrepreneurs and tech creatives working with new and emerging technologies such as 5G. Due to open 2024/5.
 - *Wilson Marriage Digital Skills Hub* in Magdalen Street – upgrade and refurbishment work completed October 2023. The facility is supporting training, development, providing digital access and community activities. Adult Community learning will also expand digital skills development at other targeted locations throughout the town. The project provides adults across Colchester with substantial opportunities to re-skill and re-train (notably with enhanced digital skills), given the significant and rapid changes to several key local economic sectors.
 - *The Town House, Stanway and High Woods Youth Centres* – all refurbishment projects to improve youth facilities in which hard and soft skills activities can take place. Due for completion 2023.
 - *Skills Events* – Skills Festivals, sector specific Skills Networking Events for example:
 - [Skills Fest 2022 | University of Essex](#)
 - [Skills Hub - ACL Essex](#)
 - [Spring into Business Expo 8th June 10.30am-15.30pm Tickets, Thu 8 Jun 2023 at 10:30 | Eventbrite](#)
 - [Essex Green Skills Summit 2023 \(essexopportunities.co.uk\)](#)
 - **BID Employers' Breakfast** 4th October 2023, with Colchester Institute and Open Road. Inviting local employers to meet to learn more about apprenticeships and employment support programmes to open up more employment opportunities for local people and hospitality businesses alike.
 - **BID roll out of Night Time Economy training into the Day-time economy** – for retail, leisure and hospitality staff



- The Council’s Museum service has recently been awarded £28,288 from the Phase 4 Low Carbon Skills Fund to develop a comprehensive heating design for the Natural History Museum and will identify the most efficient way of heating the museum while reducing CO2 emissions. The design will then be used to inform an application for a full funding grant in Phase 4 of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme which is due to open to applications towards the end of 2023.

- Partnerships
 - Construction sector support through Shared Prosperity Funding in partnership with Colchester Institute.
 - Employability Support from the Shared Prosperity Fund for people from a range of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in partnership with Abberton Rural Training.
 - Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Sector support from the Covid Additional Restrictions Grant to help the Our Colchester BID to deliver training and support in partnership with The Edge Hotel School and Colchester Institute.
 - Digital Access Support for people who need basic digital skills upon which they can build in partnership with the Department of Work & Pensions
 - Sector Based Work Academy (SWAPs) are a Department of Work & Pensions scheme which are open to people who are in receipt of a Working Age Benefit. There is a SWAP at Colchester Northern Gateway in partnership with Colchester Institute which is offering an Employability Skills course over 2 weeks.
 - The Colchester Business Enterprise Agency (Colbea) offers free business support to help local companies to address their workforce and skills shortages
 - BEST Growth Hub (a business support service formerly offered by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership) is now contracted out to Colbea and offers core services of initial triaging, 1 hour diagnostic and 1 hour follow-up. This then enables a bespoke training / support programme to be developed in partnership with the business.
 - Freeport East, a designated area 45km around Harwich and Felixstowe Ports, which includes much of Colchester, recently launched an £800,000 programme of support for small businesses and to help get young people into green energy jobs.

5.0 Conclusion

- 5.1 The supply of skilled labour and the availability of skills education and training continues to be a major structural issue for the UK economy.
- 5.2 The aim at more local level is to ensure that there is effective access to providers of skills, training and education at all levels and to promote this availability to employers and residents alike.
- 5.3 There is also a need therefore to support the existing strong local offer for free and comprehensive business support to help local businesses plan to develop their existing workforce, recruit effectively, retain those skills within the business, increase productivity and develop 'legacy' plans for their ageing staff where necessary.
- 5.4 The ultimate aim is to retain and develop skills in businesses in and around Colchester. This in turn helps to retain businesses here and attracts more businesses and families to invest their future here as the city grows. This will sustain and improve productivity and contribute to local economic growth.
- 5.5 Given Colchester's rich supply of education and training opportunities and the investment in key infrastructure such as digital/Broadband, Colchester is relatively strongly provisioned in a range of education and training opportunities.
- 5.6 Digital infrastructure supports businesses to better weather economic shocks like the Pandemic by enabling business models to change to meet new and different market needs and opportunities as demanded by the 4th Industrial Revolution which is all about technological innovation.
- 5.7 The local skills landscape is rich and diverse and so, to answer the question posed by Scrutiny Panel, Colchester is in a strong position to develop the skills needed for the future because it is relatively well provisioned, and businesses are well supported, but with an important caveat at the national level.
- 5.8 Serious challenges remain. There are skills gaps in key sectors, such as health and care, hospitality and construction, which need strategic government interventions and policy change.
- 5.9 This has direct implications for Colchester's ageing population and growing population in terms of consistent access to high quality health care and the ability to deliver on major projects such as housebuilding.
- 5.10 Importantly, it may also curtail the ability for local businesses to take advantage of market opportunity, such as retrofitting to reduce carbon emissions, as they may choose to pursue more straightforward contracts which may pay equally as well if not more.
- 5.11 This report demonstrates that Colchester, its businesses, training and education providers, business support organisations, professional and industry organisations as well as its Council, are seeking every opportunity to help businesses and local people alike, to trade efficiently and effectively, raise productivity, and to have the skills to do so.

5 Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

5.4 This report considers the national, regional and local situation on skills and identifies the business potential to be realised offered by people in underrepresented groups.

5.5 The Council's Economic Strategy 2023-25 considers equality, diversity and human rights implications through its [Equality Impact Statement](#).

6 Standard References

6.4 There are no particular references to consultation or publicity considerations or financial; community safety; health and safety, environmental and sustainability or risk management implications.

7 Strategic Plan References

7.1 The programme of skills development and business support is driven by the Council's [Strategic Plan 2020-23](#) objectives:

- Growing our economy so that everyone benefits
- Respond to the climate emergency
- Delivering modern services for a modern city
- Improving health, well-being and happiness



Scrutiny Panel

Item
12

14 November 2023

Report of	Chief Operating Officer	Author	Owen Howell ☎ 282518
Title	Work Programme 2023-24		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the current Work Programme 2023-2024 for the Scrutiny Panel. This provides details of the reports that are scheduled for each meeting during the municipal year.

2. Action Required

- 2.1 The Panel is asked to consider and approve the contents of the Work Programme for 2023-2024, or request amendments, additions and/or deletions.
- 2.2 The Panel is asked to identify any additional specific issues, matters or areas of Council operations which it wishes to scrutinise during the 2023-24 municipal year, and to provisionally schedule these items, subject to feedback from relevant officers on any issues which may affect reporting timescales.

3. Background Information

- 3.1 The Panel's work programme evolves as the Municipal Year progresses and items of business are commenced and concluded. At each meeting the opportunity is taken for the work programme to be reviewed and, if necessary, amended according to current circumstances. The draft work programme for 2023-24 is appended to this report. This contains the items which are reviewed each year by the Panel.
- 3.2 The Forward Plan of Key Decisions is included as part of the work programme for the Scrutiny Panel, and this is included an **Appendix A**.

4. Standard References

- 4.1 There are no particular references to publicity or consultation considerations, or financial, equality, diversity, human rights, community safety, health and safety, environmental and sustainability or risk management implications.

5. Strategic Plan References

5.1 Scrutiny and challenge is integral to the delivery of the Strategic Plan 2023-2026 priorities and direction for the area as set out under the strategic themes of:

- Respond to the climate emergency;
- Deliver modern services for a modern city;
- Improve health, wellbeing and happiness;
- Deliver homes for those most in need;
- Grow our economy so everyone benefits;
- Celebrate our City, heritage and culture.

5.2 The Council recognises that effective local government relies on establishing and maintaining the public's confidence, and that setting high standards of self-governance provides a clear and demonstrable lead. Effective governance underpins the implementation and application of all aspects of the Council's work.

Appendices

Appendix A – Scrutiny Panel Work Programme, 2023-24

Appendix B – Forward Plan of Key Decisions: 1 October 2023 – 31 January 2024

Work Programme for 2023/24

Scrutiny Panel meeting – 6 June 2023
Scrutiny Panel Chairman’s briefing – 1 June 2023
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Corporate Key Performance Indicator Targets for 2023-24 2. Work Programme 2023-24
Scrutiny Panel meeting – 4 July 2023
Scrutiny Panel Chairman’s briefing – 29 June 2023
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Year End 2022/23 Performance Report and Strategic Plan Action Plan 2. Capita data breach 3. Work Programme 2023-24
Scrutiny Panel (Crime and Disorder Committee) - 19 September 2023
Scrutiny Panel Chairman’s briefing – 14 September 2023
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Safer Colchester Partnership (Crime and Disorder Committee)
Scrutiny Panel – 3 October 2023
Scrutiny Panel Chairman’s Briefing – 28 September 2023
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Portfolio Holder Briefing [Neighbourhood Services and Waste] 2. Portfolio Holder Briefing [Housing] 3. Work Programme 2023-24
Scrutiny Panel meeting - 14 November 2023
Scrutiny Panel Chairman’s briefing – 9 November 2023
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Portfolio Holder Briefing [Leader of the Council/Strategy] 2. Budget Strategy for 2024-25 3. Skills: How Able is Colchester to Develop the Skills Needed for the Future? 4. Work Programme 2023-24
Scrutiny Panel meeting - 12 December 2023
Scrutiny Panel Chairman’s briefing – 6 December 2023
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Portfolio Holder Briefing [Economy, Transformation and Performance] 2. Half Year 2023-24 Performance Report 3. Key Performance Indicators Benchmarking Report 4. Strategic Plan Action Plan progress 5. Work Programme 2023-24

Scrutiny Panel meeting - 23 January 2024

Scrutiny Panel Chairman's briefing – 18 January 2024

1. Portfolio Holder Briefing [Resources]
2. 2024-25 Revenue Budget, Capital Programme, Medium Term Financial Forecast and Treasury Management Investment Strategy
3. Housing Revenue Accounts Estimate and Housing Investment Programme
4. Work Programme 2023-24

Scrutiny Panel - 13 February 2024

Scrutiny Panel Chairman's briefing – 8 February 2024

1. Portfolio Holder Briefing [Leisure, Culture and Heritage]
2. Corporate Key Performance Indicator Targets for 2024-25.
3. Arts Organisations receiving Council funding
4. Council's approach and policy towards the use of owned community assets and whether to charge for use
5. Work Programme 2023-24

Scrutiny Panel meeting– 12 March 2024

Scrutiny Panel Chairman's briefing – 7 March 2024

1. Portfolio Holder Briefing [Communities]
2. Portfolio Holder Briefing [Planning, Environment and Sustainability]
3. Town Deal projects progress report
4. Impact Evaluation of City Status
5. Scrutiny Panel Annual Report
6. Work Programme 2023-24

Items still to schedule, when possible:

- Previous Council negotiations with Alumno [Monitoring Officer advice is that this will only be able to be scrutinised in open session once the current ongoing legal situation is resolved regarding the Queen Street site]
- Planning trial of local prioritisation for property purchasing [relating to a recent planning application] [Officer advice is that this is at an early stage and is likely to need to wait until it is ready for meaningful scrutiny of scheme and outcomes, expected at some point in 2023-24]

COLCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS 1 December 2023 – 31 March 2024

During the period from 1 December 2023 – 31 March 2024* Colchester City Council intends to take 'Key Decisions' on the issues set out in the following pages. Key Decisions relate to those executive decisions which are likely to either:

- result in the Council spending or saving money in excess of £500,000; or
- have a significant impact on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards within the City of Colchester.

This Forward Plan should be seen as an outline of the proposed decisions and it will be updated on a monthly basis. Any questions on specific issues included on the Plan should be addressed to the contact name specified in the Plan. General queries about the Plan itself should be made to Democratic Services (01206) 507832 or email democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk

The Council invites members of the public to attend any of the meetings at which these decisions will be discussed and the documents listed on the Plan and any other documents relevant to each decision which may be submitted to the decision taker can be viewed free of charge although there will be a postage and photocopying charge for any copies made. *All decisions will be available for inspection on the Council's website, www.colchester.gov.uk*

If you wish to request details of documents regarding the 'Key Decisions' outlined in this Plan please contact the individual officer identified.

If you wish to make comments or representations regarding the 'Key Decisions' outlined in this Plan please submit them, in writing, to the Contact Officer highlighted two working days before the date of the decision (as indicated in the brackets in the date of decision column). This will enable your views to be considered by the decision taker. Details of the decision makers are correct at the time of publication.

Contact details for the Council's various service departments are incorporated at the end of this plan.

If you need help with reading or understanding this document please telephone (01206) 282222 or textphone users dial 18001 followed by the full number that you wish to call and we will try to provide a reading service, translation or other formats you may need.

*The Forward Plan also shows decisions which fall before the period covered by the Plan but which have not been taken at the time of the publication of the Plan.

KEY DECISION REQUIRED	DOES DECISION INCLUDE EXEMPT INFORMATION (or information defined by the Government as Confidential)	DATE OF DECISION or PERIOD DECISION TO BE TAKEN	DECISION MAKER (title and name, including Cabinet, portfolio holders and officers) – details of decision makers correct at time of publication	DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED OR TO BE SUBMITTED TO DECISION TAKER TO CONSIDER (and from where they are available)	CONTACT DETAILS FROM WHICH DOCUMENTS CAN BE OBTAINED (name of the authors of the reports)
Approval to complete the purchase of land/property at ‘The Centre’ Greenstead from Notting Hill Genesis, using funding received via the Estates Regeneration Fund	No	November 2023	<p>Portfolio Holder for Resources, Councillor Mark Cory</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Portfolio Holder report	<p>Richard Kendrew Project Manager richard.kendrew@colchester.gov.uk 01206 589276</p>
Award of Contract for the communal area cleaning of 2 and 3 storey blocks	No	November 2023	<p>Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Paul Smith</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Portfolio Holder report	<p>Martin Norgett Strategic Client for Asset Management martin.norgett@colchester.gov.uk 07816 204488</p>

KEY DECISION REQUIRED	DOES DECISION INCLUDE EXEMPT INFORMATION (or information defined by the Government as Confidential)	DATE OF DECISION or PERIOD DECISION TO BE TAKEN	DECISION MAKER (title and name, including Cabinet, portfolio holders and officers) – details of decision makers correct at time of publication	DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED OR TO BE SUBMITTED TO DECISION TAKER TO CONSIDER (and from where they are available)	CONTACT DETAILS FROM WHICH DOCUMENTS CAN BE OBTAINED (name of the authors of the reports)
Acquisition of family homes from Developer within the Chesterwell development	Yes	November 2023	<p>Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Paul Smith, in consultation with Richard Block, Chief Operating Officer,</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Portfolio Holder report	<p>Terri Hamilton Client for Affordable Housebuilding Terri.hamilton@colchester.gov.uk 07870 542949</p>
Award of contract for the upgrade of thermal elements and deck areas to flats at Trinity Square	No	November 2023	<p>Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Paul Smith</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Portfolio Holder report	<p>Martin Norgett Strategic Client for Asset Management martin.norgett@colchester.gov.uk 07816 204488</p>

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<p>Proposed Strategy for Future Direction of Amphora companies</p> <p>The key decisions to be made are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Endorsement of future strategy for Amphora • Hibernation of both CAHL and CAEL. • Simplification of Amphora to focus on trading services and the associated implications 	Yes	22 November 2023	<p>Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers)</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	<p>Cabinet report Proposed Amphora Strategy Proposed Hibernation of CAEL CIPFA report of review recommendations</p>	<p>Richard Carr Managing Director (Interim), CCHL richard.carr@colchesteramphora.com 01206 282421</p>

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Viability Assumptions and Affordable Rent on New build affordable housing developments within the Council's General needs housing stock	Yes	22 November 2023	Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers) Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk	Cabinet report	Terri Hamilton Client for Affordable Housebuilding Terri.hamilton@colchester.gov.uk 07870 542949

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2023-24 Mid-Year Budget Review and Budget Strategy 2024-25	No	22 November 2023	<p>Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers)</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Cabinet report	<p>Richard Block Chief Operating Officer Richard.block@colchester.gov.uk (01206) 506825</p>

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Asset Management Review: Corporate Landlord Model	No	22 November 2023	<p>Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers)</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Cabinet report	<p>Mandy Jones Strategic Director mandy.jones@colchester.gov.uk (01206) 282245</p>

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Officer Pay Policy Statement 2024-25	No	22 November 2023	<p>Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers)</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Cabinet report Draft Officer Pay Policy Statement 2024-25	<p>Jess Douglas Head of People Jessica.douglas@colchester.gov.uk 01206 282239</p>

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Approval of Fees and Charges 2024-25	No	19 December 2023	<p>Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers)</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Cabinet report Schedule of draft fees and charges	<p>Andrew Small Section 151 Officer Andrew.small@colchester.gov.uk</p>

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<p>Devolution – to note the current position and take any relevant decisions relating to the Devolution deal for Essex</p>	No	19 December 2023	<p>Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers)</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Cabinet report	<p>Pam Donnelly Chief Executive pamela.donnelly@colchester.gov.uk 0206 282211</p>

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<p>North Essex Authorities and Shared Services</p> <p>The report will update Cabinet on progress since agreeing the North Essex Authorities' (NEA) Memorandum of Understanding in December 2022, seek approval to establish the North Essex Councils partnership and commit resources to enable its objectives to be delivered. It will also provide an update on shared services and seek approval to progress to develop a full business case for a single shared back office.</p>	No	19 December 2023	<p>Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers)</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Cabinet report	<p>Richard Block Chief Operating Officer Richard.block@colchester.gov.uk (01206) 506825</p>

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Peer Review Action Plan Update	No	19 December 2023	<p>Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers)</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Cabinet report Peer Review Action Plan Update	<p>Richard Block Chief Operating Officer Richard.block@colchester.gov.uk (01206) 506825</p>
Local Council Tax Support 2024/25	No	19 December 2023	<p>Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers)</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Cabinet report 6-week public consultation results LCTS scheme 2024/25	<p>Adam Wood Benefits and Support Manager adam.wood@colchester.gov.uk 01206 505857</p>

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Award of Contract for General Building	No	December 2023	<p>Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Paul Smith</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Portfolio Holder report	<p>Martin Norgett Strategic Client for Asset Management martin.norgett@colchester.gov.uk 07816 204488</p>
Award of contract for retrofit installation to combat fuel poverty	No	December 2023	<p>Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Paul Smith</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Portfolio Holder report	<p>Martin Norgett Strategic Client for Asset Management martin.norgett@colchester.gov.uk 07816 204488</p>

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Housing Revenue Account Fees and Charges 2024 – 2025 To agree the Housing Revenue Account fees and charges for 2024-2025	No	December 2023	Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Paul Smith Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk	Portfolio Holder report, including schedule of fees and charges	Suzane Norton Housing Client Coordinator suzanne.norton@colchester.gov.uk (01206) 282249
Award of Contract for Gas Servicing	No	January 2024	Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Paul Smith Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk	Portfolio Holder report	Martin Norgett Strategic Client for Asset Management martin.norgett@colchester.gov.uk 07816 204488

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Enabling Works for Colchester Northern Gateway	Yes	24 January 2024	<p>Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers)</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Cabinet report	<p>Lindsay Barker Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director, Place lindsay.barker@colchester.gov.uk (01206) 507435</p>

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2024-25 Budget, Council Tax and Medium Term Financial Forecast	No	24 January 2024	<p>Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers)</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Cabinet report	<p>Andrew Small Section 151 Officer Andrew.small@colchester.gov.uk</p>
Housing Revenue Estimates 2024-25	No	24 January 2024	<p>Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers)</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Cabinet report	<p>Darren Brown Finance Manager darren.brown@colchester.gov.uk 01206 282891</p>

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Housing Investment Programme 2024-25	No	24 January 2024	<p>Cabinet (Cllrs King, Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan, Smith, Sommers)</p> <p>Please contact via Democratic Services (01206) 507832 email: democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk</p>	Cabinet report	<p>Darren Brown Finance Manager darren.brown@colchester.gov.uk 01206 282891</p>

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