

COLCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

Council Meeting

7 December 2023

Supplementary Information

Please note that the business will be subject to short breaks at approximately 90-minute intervals.

Apologies: The Mayor and Councillors Davidson, Ellis, Bloomfield, McLean, Nissen, Powling, Rippingale

2. Have Your Say!

4. Minutes of Previous Meetings

A... Motion that the minutes of the meeting on 18 October 2023 be confirmed as a correct record (see page 11 of the Council Summons) .

5. Mayor's Announcements

The Deputy Mayor to make announcements and to hold a minute's silence in memory of the late Alderman David Cannon.

6. Items (if any) referred under the Call-in Procedure

None

7. Electoral Review of the City of Colchester

B... Motion that the recommended decision in the report by the Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer be approved and adopted (see page 25 of the Council Summons).

8. Appointment of Temporary Parish Councillors

C... Motion that the recommended decision in the report by the Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer be approved and adopted (see page 53 of the Council Summons).

9. Recommendations of the Cabinet, Panels and Committees

To consider the following recommendations:-

9(i) Appointment of Deputy Mayor 2024-25

D... Motion that the recommendation contained in draft minute 806 of the Cabinet meeting of 22 November 2023 be approved and adopted (see page 55 of the Council Summons).

9(ii) Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

E... Motion that the recommendation contained in minute 390 of the Governance and Audit Committee meeting of 28 November 2023 be approved and adopted (see page 8 of this Supplementary Agenda).

10. Notices of Motion pursuant to the provisions of Council Procedure Rule 11

(a) Motion F, Impact of the conflict in the Middle East

Proposer: Councillor Goacher

Colchester City Council recognises the significance of the tragic situation in the Middle East to our city and its impact on our local communities, including the rising incidence of antisemitism and Islamophobia, and the potential need for Colchester to provide sanctuary to refugees fleeing the conflict.

We therefore call on the UK Government to use its influence to press for the urgent release of all hostages; for international law to be upheld and for the protection of all civilians in Israel and Palestine; for an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people and an end to the siege of Gaza to allow vital supplies of food, fuel, medicine and water to reach the civilian population; and to join with the international community and the UN and its aid agencies in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire.

Main Amendment A

Proposer: Councillor Cory

That the motion on the impact of conflict in the Middle East be approved and adopted subject to the addition of the following words at the end of the motion:-

A ceasefire and diplomatic talks, will reduce tensions across communities at home and abroad. Colchester City Council will communicate with and work with affected communities and support local efforts to help those affected.

Colchester City Council will continue to listen to and communicate with our Jewish and Islamic communities in Colchester. We represent all communities with equity and denounce discrimination of any kind.

Should the amendment be agreed the revised wording of the motion will be:-

Colchester City Council recognises the significance of the tragic situation in the Middle East to our city and its impact on our local communities, including the rising incidence of antisemitism and Islamophobia, and the potential need for Colchester to provide sanctuary to refugees fleeing the conflict.

We therefore call on the UK Government to use its influence to press for the urgent release of all hostages; for international law to be upheld and for the protection of all civilians in Israel and Palestine; for an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people and an end to the siege of Gaza to allow vital supplies of food, fuel, medicine and water to reach the civilian population; and to join with the international community and the UN and its aid agencies in urgently pressing all parties to agree to an immediate ceasefire.

A ceasefire and diplomatic talks will reduce tensions across communities at home and abroad. Colchester City Council will communicate with and work with affected communities and support local efforts to help those affected.

Colchester City Council will continue to listen to and communicate with our Jewish and Islamic communities in Colchester. We represent all communities with equity and denounce discrimination of any kind.

Main Amendment B

Proposer: Councillor T. Young

That the motion on the impact of conflict in the Middle East be approved and adopted subject to following amendments:-

The deletion of all words following “the protection of all civilians in Israel and Palestine” and the insertion of the following words:-

This Council, therefore, supports UN resolution 2712 passed by the UN Security Council on 15 November 2023 which called, amongst other things, ‘...for urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors throughout the Gaza strip...to enable...full, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access. ‘and further calls for an ‘immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities’ as set out in resolution ES–10/21 adopted by the UN General Assembly on 27 October 2023.

Should the amendment be agreed the revised wording of the motion will be:-

Colchester City Council recognises the significance of the tragic situation in the Middle East to our city and its impact on our local communities, including the rising incidence of antisemitism and Islamophobia, and the potential need for Colchester to provide sanctuary to refugees fleeing the conflict.

We therefore call on the UK Government to use its influence to press for the urgent release of all hostages; for international law to be upheld and for the protection of all civilians in Israel and Palestine. This Council, therefore, supports UN resolution 2712 passed by the UN Security Council on 15 November 2023 which called, amongst other things, '...for urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors throughout the Gaza strip...to enable...full, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access.' and further calls for an 'immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities' as set out in resolution ES-10/21 adopted by the UN General Assembly on 27 October 2023.

(b) Motion G, City of Sanctuary

Proposer: Councillor J. Young

Seconder: Councillor Dundas

This Council acknowledges the overwhelming tragedies of the ongoing conflict in Israel and Gaza and other conflicts around the world.

Residents of all persuasions will be feeling powerless, scared and uncertain here in Colchester too.

Residents in our City have friends, relatives and family connections with Israel and Gaza and we acknowledge the shock, terror and grief that they must be feeling.

The Council's number one priority at this time is to keep all of our residents safe and we are working with our partners in the Police and charities such as Refugee, Asylum-seeker and Migrant Action (RAMA) and Community 360 to help keep everyone, and especially those most vulnerable in the City, as well supported as possible.

Colchester as a City of Sanctuary has a vision of being a welcoming place of safety for all. We are proud to offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution. We reaffirm our commitment to this important work and thank our officers for the most difficult but vital work they do to support all communities in our City especially at this difficult time.

(c) Motion H, Accuracy in Financial Reporting

Proposer: Paul Dundas

This Council notes that:

1. Colchester City Council recently published on its website a list of payments to suppliers over the last 12 months, this being a statutory duty

pursuant to the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, revealing to Colchester Council Tax Payers where their money was being spent.

2. All payments were correctly made, but a publication error meant that a number of payments were incorrectly attributed to the wrong recipients including £2,200,809 on stationery, over £2.1m on election software, £880,000 on playground inspections, over £5m on newspaper advertising, over £1m on an individual no one can identify, £350,000 on printing, £847,000 on telephone bills, just under £5m with a Christian Empowerment Charity, £8,646 on Oysters, £130,000 on mobile phones and £1,097,146 on Ice Creams. This has led to misunderstanding and complaint, regretted by the Council.

3. Consequently the published figures were removed from the website and the Leader of the Council issued an apology to Councillors.

Therefore, the Council:

1. Thanks the Leader of the Council for prompt acknowledgement of the error and the email notification of the data failures issued on October 31.

2. Thanks and notes the work of Conservative opposition councillors who brought these errors to the attention of the Council.

3. Informs Cabinet that the operational finance team may be under considerable time pressure and a review of its workload would be appropriate.

4. Notes the Council has apologised for this rare publication error and has taken steps to ensure it will not be repeated

(d) Motion I, Knife Crime

Proposer: Councillor Goss

Council

1. Notes and congratulates the Evening Gazette on their anti-knife campaign launch last month in association with the arrival of the Knife Angel statue to Colchester.

2. Notes the tragic consequences of knife attacks on families and friends and recognises the bravery and work of Ann Oakes-Odger MBE whose son was sadly murdered through stabbing.

3. Notes the alarming increase in knife carrying, nationwide, particularly by those associated with gang membership and/or illegal drug activity.

4. Welcomes the work of the police in tackling all forms of crime and the progress they are making, including reducing violent crime. And welcomes their work to raise awareness through the deployment of a knife arch in Colchester centre and work with knife amnesties and knife bins.

5. Notes the work of the Youth Voices Listening Project that found “knife crime and knife harm stood alongside fights and drug use as major concerns for young people in Colchester”.

6. Therefore calls on Colchester Council through the Safer Colchester Partnership to deepen multi-agency collaborative working on this issue. And with our schools and young people to continue work done through the Knife Angel visit. To help make Colchester and its surrounding area safer for us all, particularly our younger residents.

As this motion relates to an executive matter, the suspension of Council Procedure Rule 11(2) will be moved to allow the motion to be debated and determined.

(e) Motion J, CCTV in Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles

Proposer: Councillor Harris

That this Council agrees to lobby the relevant Government Department to introduce mandatory regulations which would install CCTV / taxi cameras in Hackney Carriage / Private Hire vehicles which would be to the benefit of both drivers and customers in the City of Colchester area. And to seek funding to help with installation and or data management running costs.

11. Questions to Cabinet Members and Chairmen pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 10

No pre-notified questions to Portfolio Holders or Committee Chairs have been received.

12. Parental Leave Policy for Councillors

K... Motion that the recommended decision in the report by the Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer be approved and adopted (page 57 of the Council Summons).

13. Schedule of Portfolio Holder Decisions

Council is invited to note the schedule of Portfolio Holder decisions covering the period 7 October 2023 – 27 November 2023 (see page 63 of the Council Summons).

14. Exclusion of the Public

In accordance with Section 100A 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) may be decided. Exempt information is defined in Section 1000I and Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972).

Extract from the draft minutes of the Governance and Audit Committee meeting of 28 November 2023

390. Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

The Committee considered a report requesting that it recommended to Full Council a revised schedule of polling districts and polling places within the City of Colchester area.

The Committee were advised that the Chair of the Committee had decided to deal with item 9 on the agenda at the start of the meeting due to time pressures on the Officers involved in these items.

Andrew Weavers, Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer attended the meeting to present the report and assist the Committee with its enquiries. The Committee heard that each Local Authority was required to undertake periodic reviews of its polling districts and polling places districts for parliamentary elections, and that these reviews took place every 5 years. Accordingly, the Council should be commencing a review at the present time, however, an electoral review by the Local Government Boundary Commission was currently in its early stages for Colchester, and the Commission had advised that it was not appropriate to undertake a full review of polling districts and polling places at this time. A full review of polling districts and polling places would be conducted in 2026. The Council had, however, taken the opportunity to undertake a public consultation in respect of polling districts and polling places, and as a result of this some changes were proposed to a number of polling places to ensure that each polling place was suitable and as accessible as possible for voters. The proposed changes which had been consulted on were listed in the Officer's report, and the Committee was requested to commend these to Full Council.

Councillor Sam Mclean attended the meeting and addressed the Committee in accordance with the Council's Have Your Say! procedures. He considered that democracy was priceless and any disruption to day-to-day life in the interests of democracy was worth it. Where disruption could be avoided, however, then it should be, particularly in relation not the use of schools as polling stations. It was considered that a school should not be used as a polling station when other suitable venues were available nearby. Hamilton Primary School was situated in his ward, and the Head Teacher, pupils and parents of pupils at the school did not want it to be used as a polling station, and its' proposed replacement as a polling station was fully supported by Councillor Mclean.

A Committee member supported the comments of Councillor Mclean in respect of the use of schools as polling stations, and was pleased to note that a polling station in his ward had been moved from a school to a local croquet club. The contents of the Officer's report were welcomed.

A Committee member considered that the reference in the Officer's report to

Willows & Monkwick and Barnhall Polling Districts was a typographical error, and requested clarification on this point. Although he considered it sensible for Rainsborowe Road and Shrub End constituents to vote at the C3 Centre, he did not support the proposal to move AA Berechurch voters to this location. The Officer's report stated that the C3 Centre had adequate parking but he disputed this, pointing out that the Abbey Field Medical Centre shared this car park, and was very busy during the daytime. The proposed move would now require AA Berechurch voters to cross the busy Berechurch Road to vote at the C3 Centre as opposed to their previous polling station at Plum Hall, which would make it much more difficult for them to vote in person. He had been approached by a number of his constituents who had indicated that they did not wish to use a postal vote, but due to mobility issues would find it very difficult to vote at the new location of the C3 Centre. He noted that Plum Hall was owned by Colchester Borough Homes, and queried the wisdom of incurring the expense of moving to another polling station when voters were happy with the current arrangements, particularly those who would struggle to cross the busy main road to vote. Although supportive of the other proposals in the Officer's report, he could not support this particular change, and would be voting against the suggestions for this reason. Commenting on another polling station, St Margaret's Church Hall Stansted Road, it was suggested that this building needed to have disabled access at the front, and requested that consideration be given to installing a ramp to address this issue as this was an old building with limited access.

The Chair of the Committee did share some of the concerns which had been raised, but considered that, on balance, there were advantages to moving the polling station away from Plum Hall. Parking was limited at this venue as well, and he had concerns about the safety of residents there with strangers appearing throughout the day to vote. A member of his political group had requested that the proposed move of a polling station in Greenstead to the Hythe Community Centre be reconsidered, as it was thought that this move would lower voter turnout. Could a portacabin situated in the carpark of a local supermarket be used instead? In response to the questions from the Committee James Bennett, Electoral Services Team Leader, confirmed that the reference to Barnhall alongside Monkwick in the Officer's report was a mistake, and the entry should simply read 'Willows & Monkwick'. With regard to the suggestion that a ramp be installed at St Margaret's Church Hall, it was unlikely that the Council would be able to fund the installation of a permanent ramp, however, the possibility of obtaining a temporary ramp to assist on polling day would be investigated. The Committee heard that it was recognised that the proposed change of polling station from Plum Hall to the C3 Centre had advantages and disadvantages. One of the principal concerns about the continued use of Plum Hall was the poor access to the polling station, which was through a residential corridor onto which peoples' front doors opened, to a communal area on the residential site. Although the problems with parking and crossing the road to the C3 Centre were recognised, it was considered that on balance the use of the C3 Centre was the more preferable option. The suggestion that a portacabin be used as a polling station in Greenstead had been considered, but this was not thought to be suitable from a safety point of view, or as a suitable venue to run an effective polling station from. The use of such a polling station would only be considered in an emergency, and not for routine use.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL that:

- The revised schedule of polling places set out in Appendix A, and the explanation of changes contained at Appendix B of the Officer's report be approved.

RESOLVED that:

- The Returning Officer be granted delegated authority to approve an alternative polling place if any polling place becomes unavailable or found to be unsuitable in the run up to an election.