



Colchester
City Council

Cabinet Meeting

**Grand Jury Room, Town Hall, High Street,
Colchester, CO1 1PJ
Wednesday, 12 July 2023 at 18:00**

The Cabinet deals with the implementation of all Council services, putting into effect the policies agreed by Full Council and making recommendations to Full Council on policy issues and the budget.

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COLCHESTER CITY COUNCIL
Cabinet
Wednesday, 12 July 2023 at 18:00

Leader and Chair Councillor King
 Councillor Burrows
 Councillor Cory
 Councillor Goss
 Councillor Jay
 Councillor Luxford Vaughan
 Councillor Smith
 Councillor Sommers

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

Live Broadcast

Please follow this link to watch the meeting live on YouTube:

[\(107\) ColchesterCBC - YouTube](#)

1 Welcome and Announcements

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

2 Urgent Items

The Chair 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.

3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Cabinet will be invited to confirm that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2023 are a correct record.

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 **Have Your Say! (Hybrid Cabinet Meetings)**

Members of the public may make representations to Cabinet meetings on any item on the agenda or any other matter relating to the business of Cabinet. This can be made either in person at the meeting or by joining the meeting remotely and addressing the Cabinet via Zoom. Each representation may be no more than three minutes. Members of the public wishing to address Cabinet remotely may register their wish to address the meeting by e-mailing democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk by 12.00 noon on the working day before the meeting. In addition, a written copy of the representation should be supplied for use in the event of technical difficulties preventing participation at the meeting itself.

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

6 **Decisions Reviewed by the Scrutiny Panel**

Cabinet will consider the outcome of a review of a decision by the Scrutiny Panel under the call-in procedure. At the time of the publication of this agenda, there were none.

7 **Strategy**

7(i) **Local Government Peer Challenge Action Plan Progress** 23 - 66

Cabinet will consider a report inviting it to consider progress in responding to the recommendations of the LGA Peer Challenge and to identify any actions that require further information.

8 **Housing**

8(i) **Acquisition of Four New Build Homes from a Developer as Part of the Council's New Housebuilding Programme** 67 - 72

Cabinet will consider a report which recommends that the Council acquires 4 completed “off the shelf” units directly from the developer of the Chesterwell site as another method of delivering new social housing.

8(ii) **Acquisition of Six Additional New Build Homes from a Developer as Part of the Council’s New Housebuilding Programme** 73 - 78

Cabinet will consider a report inviting it to agree additional Housing Revenue Account Funding that would allow it to pursue the opportunity to purchase a further six new build homes on the Boxted Road development.

8(iii) **Disposal of 106/106A Shrub End Road** 79 - 84

Cabinet will consider a report proposing the disposal of 106/106A Shrub End Road by open market sale.

9 **General**

9(i) **Policy Panel Work Programme** 85 - 86

Cabinet will consider a recommendation from the Policy Panel meeting of 28 June 2023 in respect of the Policy Panel Work Programme.

9(ii) **Progress of Responses to the Public** 87 - 88

Cabinet will consider a report that provides information on the progress of responses to members of the public who have addressed meetings of Cabinet and Council under the Have Your Say! arrangements.

10 **Exclusion of the Public (Cabinet)**

In accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and in accordance with The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 to exclude the public, including the press, from the meeting so that any items containing exempt information (for example personal, financial or legal advice), in Part B of this agenda (printed on yellow paper) can be decided. (Exempt information is defined in Section 100I and Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972).

Part B

(not open to the public including the press)

11 Housing - Part B

11(i) Acquisition of Four New Build Homes from a Developer as Part of the Council's New Housebuilding Programme - Part B

Cabinet will consider a report providing not for publication information in support of the report in Part A of the agenda.

11(ii) Acquisition of Six Additional New Build Homes from a Developer as Part of the Council's New Housebuilding Programme - Part B

Cabinet will consider a report providing not for publication information in support of the report in Part A of the agenda.

11(iii) Disposal of 106/106A Shrub End Road - Part B

Cabinet will consider a report providing not for publication information in support of the report in Part A of the agenda.

12 Resources - Part B

12(i) Colchester Northern Gateway Leisure Park Lease Arrangements

Cabinet will consider a report about the Colchester Northern Gateway Leisure Park lease arrangements.

12(ii) Colchester Community Stadium Services Agreement

Cabinet will consider a report relating to the Colchester Community Stadium Services Agreement.

CABINET 7 June 2023

Present: - Councillor King (Chair)
Councillors Burrows, Cory, Goss, Jay, Luxford Vaughan,
Smith, Sommers

Also in attendance: Councillors Bickersteth*,
Bloomfield, Hagon, Harris*, Lissimore, Naylor, Pearson,
Rippingale, Scordis*, Warnes, Willetts

* attended remotely

751. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 April 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

752. Have Your Say!

Sir Bob Russell attended and addressed Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1). He believed that the current Cabinet had no moral legitimacy, as the Liberal Democrat Group had less than a third of the seats on Council. This was contrary to the traditional Liberal Democrat values of fairness and its support for proportional representation. The administration should reflect the reality that each of the main parties held approximately a third of seats on Council. Joint administrations of the three main parties had worked in Colchester when the Cabinet system was first introduced. In addition, the Cabinet was too large and should be reduced to five posts, with the resulting saving being passed on to Colchester Citizens advice Bureau.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, thanked Sir Bob for his comments and noted that it was the High Steward's role to advise. Under the Cabinet system, an administration had to be formed to run the Council. No alternative proposal had been put forward. It was supported by other groups and could command support in the Chamber. It therefore had legitimacy. Its legitimacy also come from its approach which would be inclusive and collaborative. This was demonstrated by the way Committee Chair positions were held by members of other groups.

Linda Gaine and Louise Davey attended and addressed Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) to ask Cabinet to provide more urgency to the repairs to netball courts at Highwoods. This had been an ongoing issue

since 2018 with issues relating to the floodlights and the surface of the courts. The courts were used by women and children of all ages, providing physical and mental health benefits and helping develop inter-generational relationships. They contributed to the Strategic Plan priority of Creating Safe, Healthy and Happy Communities. There was no other suitable facility in the city and it was disappointing that when the Northern Gateway Sports Park had been developed, no provision for netball had been made., which was a further example of women's sport not being prioritised. Officers should be encouraged to prioritise the work so the necessary improvements could be completed by the end of August.

Councillor Burrows, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Heritage, undertook to actively champion this issue and would respond fully after raising it with relevant officers. It was understood that the works were scheduled for August, subject to the views of the Gilberd school.

Piter Vera attended and addressed Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1). He was seeking help from the Council to help find a location for the development of a pilot for his project, Change Recycling, which created bricks from waste plastic and sand. This helped deal with waste plastics and created a valuable resource with many potential uses.

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, explained that the Council had limited assets with which to help. However, the Climate Alliance or Colbea may be able to help and if further details were provided he would be willing to share his proposals to see what assistance could be provided.

Councillor Warnes attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Cabinet, to request that the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Waste arrange a meeting with representatives of the Police and the Neighbourhoods Team so there was clarity on how to report instances of graffiti. Dealing with graffiti took up valuable neighbourhood and ward councillor resource. It would be helpful if the Police and the Neighbourhoods Team could meet so it was clear what information was needed to make a report which the police could take action on, to break the logjam on this issue. Whilst the difficulties of bringing criminal prosecutions were understood, more could be done to tackle the issue through the Council's powers to deal with anti-social behaviour.

Councillor Goss, Portfolio for Neighbourhoods and Waste, undertook to arrange such a meeting. Graffiti was an issue across the city, and the Neighbourhoods Team had a full time officer dedicated to dealing with it. It was difficult to take action unless the perpetrator was caught in the act and the Crown Prosecution Service would only prosecute in the most serious cases.

753. Garden Waste Collection Service

The Group Manager, Neighbourhoods, submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The following members attended and, with the consent of the Chair, addressed Cabinet and raised the following issues:-

Councillor Harris (attended remotely):

- The proposals were being brought forward because of the Council's serious financial position. This needed to be better understood by residents and there should be a communication campaign to raise awareness.
- An incentive for those who had wheeled bins but did not wish to participate in the scheme should be considered. This would enable these bins to be reused and reduce the number of new bins that would be needed.
- There should be a communications campaign and signage to address potential increases in flytipping.

Councillor Bickersteth (attended remotely):

- The move to wheeled bins for garden waste would have health benefits for collection staff.
- How would the Council ensure the scheme was equitable in terms of costs. Highwoods was not a wheeled bin area so residents would be charged for the provision of a bin on top of the costs of the service. This would have a disproportionate impact on low income families which may deter them from taking up the service.
- The Council should look at the recycling of bins that would no longer be used to reduce costs.

Councillor Scordis (attended remotely):

- The Council was effectively selling a product so needed to maximise take up. Launching the service in January when demand would be low may lead to a low take up of the service.
- The cost of the service may also deter take up.
- Residents would not understand the logic of a system based on financial years, and an initial 18 month offer would be more attractive.
- The compost schemes were welcome and there may be opportunities to link up with allotment groups who may welcome additional garden waste for composting purposes.

Councillor Lissimore

- The Government's draft Environment Bill had included provisions imposing a statutory duty on local authorities to collect garden waste, which would completely undermine the principle of the scheme.
- Home composting was not as straightforward as the report suggested.
- The suggestion that garden waste could be taken to the recycling centre was simply to transfer the problem to Essex County Council to resolve and would result in additional vehicle journeys.
- Some residents would not have the space to store a wheeled bin or the capacity to move a bin, particularly when full. A white sack option should be retained.

- There were too many unknown factors to enable the Council to be confident the scheme would be cost effective.
- No refund would be provided to those who died during the scheme.
- There would be an increase of garden waste being put in black refuse sacks, which needed additional cost and resources to collect and these had not been quantified.
- Key Performance Indicator targets were being reduced as a consequence of the scheme.

Councillor Pearson:

- Further consideration needed to be given to the equity of the charges, given that parts of the city had already received a wheeled bin without charge.
- The encouragement of home composting was welcomed although the detail of the schemes that were being promoted needed to be looked at.
- The fleet transport plan was three years old and may need reviewing. There may be opportunities to use alternative fuel options.
- Central government funding decisions had forced this on the Council. However, the Council needed to ensure the implementation of the scheme was fair.

Councillor Willetts

- The increase in recycling rates was one of the clear achievements of the Council in recent years. This had been driven by increases in food and garden waste collections. This scheme would undermine this achievement.
- The Council's financial position was a consequence of trying to prioritise too many services.
- The collection and recycling of waste was a core service that should be covered by council tax.
- The Scrutiny Panel had looked at the impact that scheme would have on Key Performance Indicator targets. It would result in more waste to landfill and a reduction in the amount of household waste recycled.
- The scheme did not take the opportunity to introduce electric waste collection vehicles.

Councillor Naylor:

- She had approached the issue from first principles as both a resident and a representative of residents of Lexden and Braiswick.
- Residents expected a reliable waste and recycling service would be provided and funded as part of the core council service and that this would include the collection of garden waste.
- The consultation referred to in the report highlighted the importance of environmental issues to residents.
- However, when the data beneath the consultation was analysed it revealed that the consultation was based on a sample size of 0.6% of the population. The discussion group referred to in paragraph 9.3 of the report consisted of only 16 people who, the report stated, had not had time to discuss the issue in further detail.

- The conclusion of the consultation report was that the Council needed to talk and listen to residents more and that residents felt they were not listened to. This conclusion was supported by the representations of other Councillors that residents felt this was being imposed on them and was based on unreliable data.
- The consultation could not be relied upon as evidence that the scheme was supported by residents. This was not a fair representation. Residents felt “blindsided” by the proposals and that they were being imposed without proper consultation and therefore should be subject to further consultation.

Councillor Hagon:

- The views of residents in Stanway were clear on this issue, Concerns had been raised about the impact of additional charges in a cost of living crisis, effectively double charging for a service, the impact on flytipping, lack of space for wheeled bins, the lack of alternatives for those who did not own a car and that the scheme was not cost effective for those who generated a small amount of garden waste.
- The service should be put out to tender as a private operator may be able to offer a better value service.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, emphasised that the scheme was being introduced in response to the serious financial position facing the Council, which resulted from decisions by central government. The administration would look to adjust the scheme where it could, but the financial position had to be addressed. Whilst there would be some small adjustments to Key Performance Indicator targets, these remained ahead of other comparable authorities and should be seen in the context of a high performing Council. The Council had received a letter of thanks from the Leader of Essex County Council for its work on recycling and the Waste Strategy. Further consideration would be given to the issues raised about the consultation.

Councillor Goss, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Waste, introduced the report and responded to the questions of members.

On the question of electric vehicles, technology did not yet support this. Experience at another authority, and when the council had trialled an electric vehicle, demonstrated that there were issues with range and capacity of electric waste collection vehicles. There were also growing issues relating to battery production which was restricting the development of the electric vehicle market in the United Kingdom and the cost effectiveness of electric vehicles. Alternative fuels were also not cost effective.

Whilst the government had indicated in the draft Environment Bill that it was considering requiring local authorities to collect garden waste without charge, this had provoked a significant backlash, as 65% of authorities charged for its collection. It was understood that the government was no longer intending to proceed in this way.

The Council was faced with £10 million in additional costs. This could not be met through raising council tax. The small proportion of council tax received by the Council also needed to be borne in mind. The Council had to be responsible and deliver a balanced budget, which meant taking difficult and unpopular decisions. The Council needed to ensure that was understood by residents.

The scheme would be made as flexible and affordable as possible. The Council had undertaken considerable benchmarking and looked at the experience of other authorities who introduced a similar scheme. This included looking at the impact on flytipping and how discounts could be applied. There was flexibility to allow the scheme to be refined and the representations made at the meeting would be considered.

The service would be an opt in service. There would be an opportunity to share a bin with neighbours. There would be the option of a smaller wheeled bin for those with limited space or with mobility problems. The Council would also continue to offer an assisted service. Composting schemes were being encouraged and links to allotment groups were being pursued. Residents who did not take up the service would also have the option of using a private waste contractor. Essex County Council had been fully consulted on the proposals and the Council was continuing to work with them on the Waste Strategy. Flytipping was reducing by 20% annually and the Council continued to work with WISE on strategies to reduce it further.

12,700 properties in the City already had wheeled bins. Whilst the arguments about the equity of the scheme were understood, it was not considered fair to charge for these retrospectively, as the Council had received funding for them. A charge needed to be made for those receiving a wheeled bin in this scheme, as it would not be viable to provide them without charge.

The scheme would also deliver improvements in staff welfare. Wheeled bins would reduce muscular-skeletal injuries and therefore reduce sickness rates. No white sack option would remain. In-cab technology would prevent fraud and stop the scheme being abused. There would be considerable promotion of the scheme and offers to encourage take up. Further details of the scheme would be referred to the Scrutiny Panel in due course, but this would look at the details of the scheme within the agreed budget.

Cabinet members also highlighted the need for responsible financial decisions in the current climate with examples of other local authorities declaring bankruptcy, the benefits to the welfare of the waste operatives, who were also residents of the city, and the other options for residents such as composting.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The arrangements for the opt-in paid for Garden Waste service which will replace the existing service with effect from January 2024 be approved.
- (b) The capital funding and procurement of replacement vehicles as detailed in the report be approved.
- (c) Authority be delegated to the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Waste to adjust the scheme as may be needed, taking account of early take up and experience, to include discounts and promotions.

REASONS

To deliver the budget income previously approved by Full Council and in doing so ensure a

balanced budget for 2023/2024.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Several alternative budget savings were considered through the formation of the budget in 2022/2023. To deliver this scale of saving, alternative options such as closing leisure centres would be required. Any alternative option would need to deliver an equivalent budget saving of £600K. One related alternative would be to cease the existing free garden waste collection service, dispose of vehicles and redeploy or make staff redundancies.

754. Acquisition of Seven New Build Homes from a Developer as Part of the Council's New Housebuilding Programme

The Client and Business Manager submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Rippingale attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed Cabinet to seek clarification as to whether the homes would be acquired as freehold or leasehold. There was risk that tenants would be at risk of increasing ground rent charges if they were leasehold. Colchester Borough Homes were concerned about the costs of retrofitting acquisitions to their high standards, which was approximately £30,000. Consideration should be given to reviewing the acquisitions programme and looking at whether land acquisition would be a more cost effective policy. An aggressive approach to looking at sites vacated by developers should be pursued. As Shadow Portfolio Holder for Housing she looked forward to working collaboratively with the Portfolio Holder to improve the housing stock and the standard of living for residents.

Councillor Smith, Portfolio Holder for Housing, confirmed that the properties would be acquired on a freehold basis. The full cost of acquisitions did need to be considered, including the costs of bringing them up to standard,. The balance between land and property acquisition was a difficult one and the need to use receipts before they were due to be returned to central government gave opportunities for acquisitions.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The Council pursue this opportunity as set out in the Client and Business Manager's report and proceed with the offer, as outlined in the report on Part B of the agenda, for the 7 units.
- (b) Authority be delegated to the Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to agree to and negotiate any subsequent purchases of homes closer to completion, subject to normal viability and valuation considerations.
- (c) Authority be delegated to the Chief Operating Officer, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to approve the exchange of conditional contracts to acquire the units, and any other related matters, to complete the purchase when all conditions are satisfied.
- (d) Colchester Borough Homes be appointed as a "clerk of works" or "employers agent"

to supervise the quality of the construction of the homes to be acquired.

REASONS

There are approximately 2,590 households on the Council's Housing Register seeking social housing and approximately 285 households in temporary accommodation. It is a priority of the Council, as shown by its New Housebuilding Programme, to try and find new ways to provide more homes in response to this need.

The Council is delivering affordable homes, but it is still continually seeking new and innovative ways to increase the supply of affordable housing and provide good quality, affordable and secure homes for Colchester's residents who are in housing need.

Although there is a supply of new affordable housing through Section 106 provision via Registered providers, alongside Council led projects, supply is not meeting the need. The Covid impacts have slowed affordable housing delivery in the market, and for the first year the Council delivered more affordable homes through its delivery Programme (including the Acquisition Programme/100 Homes) than all other Registered Providers combined; which evidences the importance of the Council's role.

These acquisitions will increase the Council's housing stock and diversifies the methods to bring forward additional affordable housing. This will also strengthen the Council's investment partner status with Homes England and will provide more opportunities to bid for Affordable Housing Grant within the 2021/26 affordable homes programme.

In Colchester, within the priority Bands A-C, there are approximately 535 applicants on the Housing register with a need for a 3+ bed property. This makes up for 21% of the housing register need. There is an average waiting time of 16.5 months for a 3+ bed property for applicants in bands B and C (Average waiting time of 6.5 months for applicants in Band A).

There are approximately 90 families in temporary accommodation within Colchester with a 3+ bed need. Residing in temporary accommodation, over a prolonged period, may have a negative impact on the families and their support network, as well as placing the council's allocated budget under significant pressure.

There are currently 32 families, in priority bands, with a need of a 3+ bed property in the Mile End Ward alone.

Proceeding with this opportunity and other similar opportunities, to work with developers to acquire units as part of their development, will help to alleviate pressure on the housing register, temporary accommodation and relevant budgets as well as allowing developers to continue to develop within the Colchester area.

It is estimated that these units will be available between August 2023 and October 2023, providing much needed homes within a short timeframe.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The Council could do nothing, but this will mean the Council will miss out on opportunities

to maximise the delivery of newbuild social rent housing in Colchester and it will mean that households on the housing register and in temporary accommodation will wait longer for a secure affordable home.

755. New Scheme of Delegation to Officers

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

RESOLVED that:-

(a) The new Scheme of Delegation to Officers from the Leader attached to the Monitoring Officer's report be approved and come into immediate effect.

(b) Authority to make any subsequent or consequential amendments be delegated to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

REASONS

The Scheme of Delegation to Officers from the Leader is required to be updated following the completion of the review of the Senior Leadership Team and appointment of Heads of Service.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to Cabinet.

756. Appointments to External Organisations and Council Groups

The Democratic Services Manager submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) The representatives to the various external organisations and Council groups listed in Appendix A to the Democratic Services Manager's report be appointed for the 2023-24 municipal year, with such appointments to cease if representatives cease to be members of the Council during the municipal year.

(b) The Leader of the Council be authorised to make a determination, where a nomination is deemed to be in dispute, if a vacancy occurs or if an appointment needs to be made to a new organisation during the municipal year.

(c) Councillor King be appointed as the Council's Armed Forces Champion.

(d) The reports about the work undertaken by appointees to external organisations in 2022-23, as set out in Appendix B to the Democratic Services Manager's report be noted.

REASONS

It is important for the Council to continue to make formal appointments to certain organisations and council groups such as those with statutory functions, our key strategic and community partners and groups with joint working arrangements. These groups have been identified in Appendix A to the Democratic Services Manager's report.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options are proposed. It is proposed to authorise the Leader of the Council to make a determination where a nomination is deemed to be in dispute or if an appointment needs to be made if a vacancy occurs or an appointment needs to be made to a new organisation in the course of the municipal year.

757. Renewal Ballot for Colchester City Centre Business Improvement District (BID)

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

Councillor Bloomfield attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed Cabinet to stress the valuable work undertaken by charities in the city centre in the cost of living crisis. In this context, why were charities being asked to pay more towards the BID than other types of business, as this may dent their ability to provide these essential services?

Councillor Pearson attended with the consent of the Chair addressed Cabinet to welcome the report and strategic pillars identified in the BID Business Plan. However, there was some concern about the proposal in paragraph 7.2 of the Monitoring Officer's report where it was proposed that the levy on charitable organisations would be increased by a larger proportion than other businesses. This was inappropriate in the current circumstances.

Sam Good, BID Manager, attended and addressed Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) to express his thanks to Cabinet and officers of the Council for their support. The core focus of the BID had been to strengthen partnership working in the city centre between businesses, local authorities and stakeholders for the greater good of the Colchester. As a critical friend it provided a tool for the voice of business to be represented and he thanked the current and previous leaders for their engagement. The BID had supported the city centre through some of its toughest times such as the Covid 19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis. It had enabled investment of £2.5 million in the city centre through the BID levy and £865,000 of additional funding. It also helped secure funding through the Town Deal and Levelling Up Fund. It was continuing to function as a core business representative body. The new direction for the BID was set out in the Business Plan, which set out an ambitious and bold vision for the city centre.

In terms of the concerns raised about the levy for charitable organisations, the new Business Plan and regulations had been subject to considerable consultation. In April 2023 there was a national revaluation of business rates. This had seen a 66% reduction in rateable values across the city centre. Therefore, the changes in the rules and levies would see most businesses paying less. Charitable organisations were seeing on average a 3% drop in rateable value. Charities also received other benefits such as reductions in business rates. Most charities paid no business rates and therefore no levy. The BID had

its own Create Fund was used to support charitable works and had also just launched its Colchester Community Fund which had funded three charities in the city centre in the past week.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, thanked Sam Good for his comments which he hoped addressed the concerns raised. The support for charities by the BID was not well understood and there was a need for some Communications work to highlight this.

Cabinet members stressed the valuable work of the BID in supporting the city centre such as filling vacant units, attracting major brands and improving relationships with the business community.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) The Council as Billing Authority was satisfied with Our Colchester Limited's Business Improvement District (BID) Renewal Proposal for Colchester City Centre for 2023 to 2028.

(b) The ballot of non-domestic ratepayers within the BID area be agreed.

(c) The BID levy be collected in line with charges set out in section 8.2 of the Monitoring Officer's report.

(d) The Chief Operating Officer be instructed to vote "Yes" in the renewal ballot on behalf of the Council in relation to its non-domestic rate-paying Council properties located within the BID area.

REASONS

To enable the Council to formally endorse the BID renewal proposal for Colchester City Centre and proceed to the ballot of businesses in accordance with the relevant Regulations.

As the owner of 13 properties (hereditaments) in the BID area, the Council will have the opportunity to vote in the BID ballot.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The Council could vote "No" in the BID renewal ballot. The Council is one of over 456 businesses who are eligible to vote in the BID ballot and the result will be determined by a majority vote (numeric and rateable value). The Council has demonstrated its support for the BID through its funding, member and officer time and its formal endorsement at this meeting and other alternative options are not being suggested.

758. Corporate Key Performance Indicator Targets for 2023-2024

The Chief Operating Officer submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member together with the recommendation from the Scrutiny Panel meeting of 6 June 2023.

Councillor Jay, Portfolio Holder for Economy, Transformation and Performance, introduced the report. There had been a robust but constructive discussion at Scrutiny Panel and the recommendations arising were welcomed. There was a need to set realistic targets and there were sound reasons why some of the targets were being scaled back. In future the reporting would contain slightly more detail and context and set out benchmarking with comparable authorities, where appropriate.

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, highlighted that several environmental KPI targets had been included for the first time, reflecting the Council's commitment to the Climate Emergency declaration. These included targets on tree planting, increasing biodiversity and achieving the pathway to net zero. Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, highlighted that the revised KPIs were a response to the LGA Peer Review's recommendation that the Council needed to look at the Strategic Plan and linkages to delivery.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) The Corporate KPI Targets for 2023-2024 be set as proposed in the Chief Operating Officer's report.

(b) The recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel at its meeting on 6 June 2023 be accepted.

REASONS

To ensure there is a robust corporate performance monitoring framework.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

To consider alternative KPI Targets than those proposed in the Chief Operating Officer's report.

759. Councillor Personal Development Plan Proposal

The Democratic Services Manager submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Harris attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed Cabinet to support the proposal for the introduction of Personal Development Plans for Councillors and urged Group Leaders to support and implement within their Groups. Residents deserved the best Councillors and Councillors had an obligation to undertake development to represent them effectively.

Councillor Jay, Portfolio Holder for Economy, Transformation and Performance, introduced the report and endorsed the proposals. As a recently elected Councillor she had benefitted from the induction programme and the programme of Chief Executive briefings, and Councillors should undergo ongoing development.

RESOLVED that the proposed Personal Development Scheme set out in the Democratic Services Manager's report be implemented.

REASONS

The introduction of system of Personal Development Plans would help support Councillors and enable them to fulfil their duties and responsibilities effectively. It would help Councillors identify areas where training and development was required and provide a process where it is easier for those needs to be met.

Colchester City Council recently retained its Councillor Development Charter Status, and the Member Development Group has indicated that it wishes to apply for Charter Plus status, which requires the implementation of a Councillor Personal Development Plan.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were proposed to Cabinet.

760. Member Development Group Annual Report 2022-23

The Democratic Services Manager submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Rippingale attended and with the consent of the Chair, addressed Cabinet. It was noted that despite the underspend on the Member Development budget, no member had attended Leadership Academy and no general invitation had been offered to members. Two places at Leadership Academy should be funded and these should be advertised more widely amongst Councillors.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, acknowledged the need to share information about opportunities widely across all Councillors. If there was a demand for increased access to Leadership Academy this would be considered.

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, stressed the value of attendance at Leadership Academy and thanked the Democratic Services team for their work supporting the Member Development Group and delivering the member development programme.

RESOLVED that the report of the Member Development Group on the work of the Group in the 2022-23 municipal year be received and noted.

REASONS

The Member Development Group is required to report to Cabinet on an annual basis. This provides Cabinet with an opportunity to review the work of the Group and the provision of member development.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to Cabinet.

The Cabinet resolved under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Meetings and Access to

Information)(England) Regulations 2012 to exclude the public from the meeting for the following item as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

761. Minutes – Not for Publication Extract

The not for publication extract from the minutes of the meeting on 12 April 2023 was confirmed as a correct record.

The Cabinet resolved under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Meetings and Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012 to exclude the public from the meeting for the following item as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

762. Acquisition of Seven New Build Homes from a Developer as Part of the Council's New Housebuilding Programme

The Client and Business Manager submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) Council shall pursue this opportunity as set out in the Client and Business Manager's report and proceed with the offer set out in the not for publication report, for the 7 units with the ability to negotiate any subsequent sells closer to completion, subject to viability and valuations.

(b) Authority be delegated to the Chief Operating Officer, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to approve the exchange of conditional contracts to acquire the units, and any other related matters, to complete the purchase when all conditions are satisfied.

REASONS

As set out in minute 754.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

As set out in minute 754.



Cabinet

Item
7(i)

12 July 2023

Report of	Chief Operating Officer	Author	Richard Block richard.block@colchester.gov.uk
Title	Local Government Association Peer Challenge Action Plan Progress		
Wards affected	All wards		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Local Government Association peer challenge process provides independent and external improvement support and challenge through a peer review, conducted by a team of councillors and senior officers from other local authorities.
- 1.2 Colchester City Council had a peer challenge in September 2022 and Cabinet approved an action plan to respond to the key recommendations made in January 2023. This report provides an update on progress against the action plan.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To consider progress in responding to the Peer Challenge recommendations and identify any actions that require further attention.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

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

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 There are no alternative options.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 The Local Government Association (LGA) offers all councils the opportunity to have a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). This is free, and a tried and trusted 'critical friend' method of improvement.
- 5.2 The challenges faced by councils in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic are unprecedented. The CPC provides independent and external improvement support and challenge to not only assist councils' thinking about recovery but to also support those councils who wish to use this period to reset, reimagine and reinvent as well as rebuild.
- 5.3 Colchester invited a peer challenge team to conduct a peer challenge during the week starting 26 September 2022.
- 5.4 The resulting full peer challenge report was previously published by the City Council and a copy can be seen at appendix A.
- 5.5 Key highlights included:
- With the opportunities afforded by their plans for growth, the new Member and Officer Leadership team and, most crucially, city status, the City Council and Colchester, the place is on the cusp of something great.
 - Colchester City Council has good self-awareness and understands the communities it serves and the economy across the borough.
 - Colchester has an incredible heritage and culture offer that competes nationally and Colchester City Council has worked hard over the years to develop resilient and productive relationships and partnerships to ensure this heritage and cultural offer can thrive.
 - Colchester City Council is driven and has a strong desire for achievement and delivery, with fantastic people, including staff, councillors, and partners.
- 5.6 The report also identified 8 key recommendations as follows:
1. Focus on city status. Use this as an opportunity to galvanise partners, improve the borough's economic and cultural strength and raise the voice of Colchester;
 2. Get a firmer grip on the capital programme – manage all risks and improve your planning to ensure you have appropriate strategic finance, programme and project capacity and the resources to deliver;
 3. Co-design a compelling and longer-term place-based narrative/city vision to define Colchester for the future;
 4. Strengthen your political and officer 'leaders of place' roles and look beyond Colchester – map your anchor institutions, partners and stakeholders;
 5. Review your priorities and projects and refocus on delivering 'Brilliant Business As Usual' and strengthen your corporate resources;
 6. Strongly consider whether changing your election cycle will help you achieve your goals, ambitions and deliver improved services for Colchester's communities;
 7. Better define with your staff what 'hybrid working' means for CBC and provide a clear definition. Also, clarify how the new CBC values will be designed and embedded, communicating to staff how these define the Council and will help achieve Colchester's

ambition; and,

8. Commission an independent review of Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd, and its subsidiaries, also undertake an internal review of Colchester Borough Homes to assess whether the companies are realising the benefits they were established to deliver.
- 5.7 In order to further improve and maximise opportunities available to the Council, it is vital the key recommendations are responded to appropriately. A full proposed action plan was approved by Cabinet in January 2023 following consideration by the Scrutiny Panel.
- 5.8 In addition to the key recommendations, several other areas of advice were provided by the Peer Challenge Team. Although not part of the main recommendations covered in this report, this additional advice has also been captured.
- 5.9 Significant progress has now been made in delivering against the action plan and additional advice. An update is provided at appendix B.
- 5.10 A follow up visit by part of the team that conducted the original peer challenge is planned for 27 July 2023. It is therefore timely for Cabinet to review progress in responding to the peer team's recommendations.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 The peer challenge team identified a positive approach taken by the Council to equality and diversity making reference to an external audit commissioned to help improve in this area. The team also identified Colchester has a young, diverse and dynamic community and emphasised the Council should work to harness that diversity better.

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 Several of the key recommendations and findings of the peer challenge report will support the creation of the new strategic plan and subsequent delivery plan.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 The consultative nature of the peer challenge process has meant that a broad group of staff, councillors and partner organisations have been involved and have contributed to the final recommendations. The action plan has also been developed in consultation with appropriate staff and Councillors.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 An end-to-end publicity process has ensured that the peer challenge and resulting report have been widely publicised. Once the action plan is approved, it will also be publicised.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 Several of the recommendations will have financial implications which will need to be carefully considered e.g. external review of wholly owned companies. There will also be some additional initial costs in implementing the action plan and provision has been made in the 23/24 budget for these.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

11.1 Delivery against several of the recommendations from the peer challenge will have a positive direct and indirect impact on, health, wellbeing and community safety.

12. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

12.1 There are no specific implications but in responding to the key peer challenge recommendations, the Council will have an even stronger focus on key priorities such Environment and Sustainability.

13. Health and Safety Implications

13.1 There are no direct health and safety implications associated with this report.

14. Risk Management Implications

14.1 In responding to the recommendations from the peer challenge the Council will be better placed to mitigate key strategic risks.

Appendices

Appendix A – Peer Challenge Report

Appendix B – Peer Challenge Action Plan update

Background Papers

None

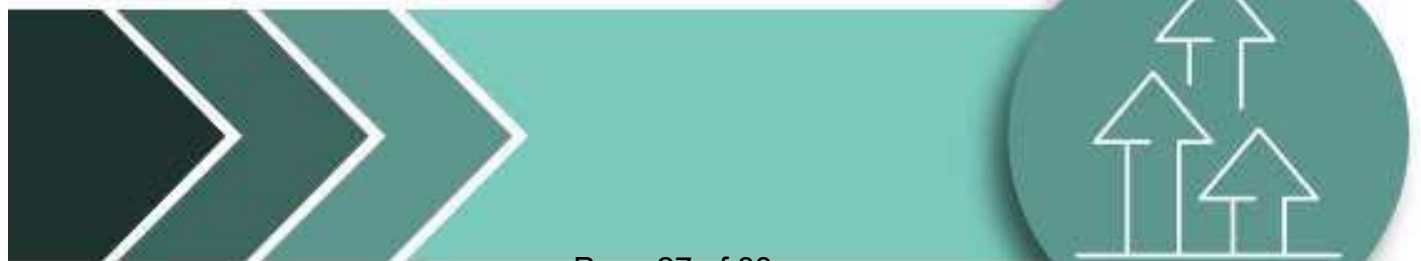


Colchester Borough Council

Corporate Peer Challenge

26 – 29 September 2022

Feedback report





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1. Executive summary

Following the May 2022 local government elections, Colchester Borough Council (CBC/the Council) has a new and strong political partnership in place with an administration consisting of an alliance between Liberal Democrat, Labour, and Green Councillors. This approach to political partnerships has served the Council well for many years and it is clear that the Strategic Plan for 2020-23 has maintained this and provided a strong focus for the Council.


CBC also has a new Chief Executive, who is quickly setting her own culture of people centred leadership alongside building her officer leadership team.

In November 2022, Colchester will become a city, presenting considerable opportunities for the economic and cultural development of the area. In addition, the CBC has ambitious plans with partners in Tendring District Council and Essex County Council, to deliver a 7,500 home Garden Community on Colchester's eastern border. They have also secured an £18.2m investment in the town centre through the Towns Fund and, with strategic partners, has a large capital investment programme including delivery of the Northern Gateway.

The peer team believes that with the opportunities afforded by their plans for growth, the new Member and Officer Leadership team and, most crucially, city status, the CBC and Colchester the place is on the cusp of something great.

CBC has good self-awareness and understands the communities it serves and the economy across the borough. Colchester has an incredible heritage and culture offer that competes nationally and CBC has worked hard over the years to develop resilient and productive relationships and partnerships to ensure this heritage and cultural offer can thrive. The Council has many compelling stories to tell about what it has achieved and should ensure it celebrates this both internally and externally.

It was clear during the corporate peer challenge that CBC is a driven Council and has a strong desire for achievement and delivery, with fantastic people, including staff, councillors, and partners. However, the drive for delivery would benefit from the focus that an overall vision and clear corporate delivery plan would bring. A corporate delivery plan would support CBC to refine its priorities and ensure sufficient resource is available to achieve its goals.



The peer team recommends that the Council along with its partners and communities quickly come together to discuss and agree what city status really means for Colchester. This approach will help inform the narrative and vision for Colchester the place. It will also enable the Council to develop a clear understanding of its priority areas and to subsequently undertake a stakeholder mapping exercise against them, identifying key anchor institutions, partners and stakeholders across the borough and beyond. This will enable the Council to focus on those areas that are of most benefit to the communities of Colchester.


The new leadership team also needs to maximise the opportunities that city status brings and seek to extend their focus beyond Colchester. For example, the Devolution/Local Government Reform (LGR) agenda is very live in Essex and requires immediate attention. CBC needs to quickly agree its position to ensure it can advocate for a deal that works for Colchester. The peer team understands that to undertake this activity appropriately the Council will need to identify the required resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its ambitions whilst maximising the opportunities that Devolution/LGR can bring.

CBC has an impressive and very well engaged set of partners. Many of these partners consider CBC to “punch above its weight” and provides the “glue” that holds them together. The NE Essex Health and Wellbeing Alliance is an exemplar and should be used as a tool and model to guide your approach to further develop your key stakeholder relationships.

We heard throughout the CPC that resources and capacity across the council are stretched and that in some areas this is impacting on performance. There is, therefore, an urgent need to refocus on delivering ‘Brilliant Business As Usual’ services that maintain the high standards expected by the communities of Colchester.

One area the peer team recommends the Council urgently addresses is its capital programme. With the current external financial environment this has never been more important.

The senior leadership team and Cabinet should undertake an urgent review of the entire capital programme and, as part of this review, consider all the risks including commercial risk to projects or programmes.



To enable the Council to deliver its ambitious agenda it must, as a matter of urgency, implement changes to improve planning, prioritisation, management, oversight and delivery of all capital projects and programmes.

The Council's housing stock of 5,905 homes is managed by an arm's length housing management organisation, Colchester Borough Homes (CBH). The Council's wholly owned group of commercial companies Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd (CCHL) is delivering on the Council's commercial trading, housing and energy activities.

CBH has been operating since 2003 and it would be timely to undertake an internal review to understand if there is an overlap between Council services and the work of CBH.

CCHL and its three subsidiaries has been operating for over four years and, and whilst delivery has no doubt been impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic, it is recommended that an independent review is commissioned to assess whether the companies are realising the benefits they were established to deliver, that the risks associated with the companies are understood and that the governance arrangements are robust.

There is a lack of clarity how about what hybrid working will mean for the Council when the Council's headquarters Rowan House reopens. The Council needs to define what 'hybrid' means for Colchester and provide a clear definition and communication of where the Council aims to be, and what this means for staff.

Finally, the peer team heard from a wide range of both internal staff and councillors and external partners and stakeholders, including business partners, that the current election cycle of election by thirds, is holding back the Council and making it difficult to make the tough decisions that are needed. The peer team therefore strongly encourages CBC to consider whether moving to a quadrennial election cycle may help build stability.

2. Key recommendations

There are number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report, but following completion of this corporate peer challenge the peer team recommends that Colchester Borough Council should urgently:

1. Focus on city status. Use this is an opportunity to galvanise partners, improve the borough's economic and cultural strength and raise the voice of Colchester;
2. Get a firmer grip on the capital programme – manage all risks and improve your planning to ensure you have appropriate strategic finance, programme and project capacity and the resources to deliver;
3. Co-design a compelling and longer-term place-based narrative/city vision to define Colchester for the future;
4. Strengthen your political and officer 'leaders of place' roles and look beyond Colchester – map your anchor institutions, partners and stakeholders;
5. Review your priorities and projects and refocus on delivering 'Brilliant Business As Usual' and strengthen your corporate resources;
6. Strongly consider whether changing your election cycle will help you achieve your goals, ambitions and deliver improved services for Colchester's communities;
7. Better define with your staff what 'hybrid working' means for CBC and provide a clear definition. Also, clarify how the new CBC values will be designed and embedded, communicating to staff how these define the Council and will help achieve Colchester's ambition; and,
8. Commission an independent review of Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd, and its subsidiaries, also undertake an internal review of Colchester Borough Homes to assess whether the companies are realising the benefits they were established to deliver.

3. Summary of the peer challenge approach

The Peer Team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected based on their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- Lead Member Peer – Cllr Steve Darling, Torbay Council
- Chief Executive Peer – Donna Nolan, Watford Borough Council
- Member Peer – Cllr Natalie McVey, Malvern Hills District Council
- Member Peer – Cllr Steve Siddons, Scarborough Borough Council
- Officer Peer – Verna Connolly, Hastings Borough Council
- Officer Peer – Claire Upton-Brown, New Forest District Council
- Peer Challenge Manager – Gary Hughes, LGA
- Project Support Officer – Rachel Stevens, LGA

Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all corporate peer challenges. These areas are critical to councils' performance and improvement:

1. **Financial planning and management** - Does the council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the council have a strategy and a plan to address its financial challenges?
2. **Local priorities and outcomes** - Are the council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the council delivering effectively on its priorities?
3. **Organisational and place leadership** - Does the council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
4. **Governance and culture** - Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of challenge and scrutiny?
5. **Capacity for improvement** - Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the council have the capacity to improve?

In addition, CBC asked the peer team to provide feedback on the following:

6. **Transformation and Organisational Development** – CBC needs to reset and realign its organisation to reflect resource pressures and significant changes in working arrangements to support residents effectively, as Colchester’s communities grow.
7. **Regeneration and Growth** - Colchester, now a city, plays into some important strategic arrangements and has a strong place-based focus when exploring the opportunities ahead for devolution through the Levelling Up and Shared Prosperity Funds.

The peer challenge process

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals or to undertake a forensic analyses of CBC’s financial situation. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and reviewed this through a strategic lens.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information, including a Position Statement prepared by CBC, to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing.

The team deployed a hybrid approach with four days on site in Colchester but with some interviews conducted remotely. During this time, they gathered information and views from more than 45 meetings, in addition to further research and reading, meeting either virtually or in person with over 150 people across the period of the challenge.

This report provides a summary of the peer team’s findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government members and officers.

4. Feedback

Local priorities and outcomes

The borough of Colchester is the largest in Essex with a population of over 192,000 and covers an area of 324 square kilometres in North East Essex. It borders Suffolk in the north, along with three Essex districts – Tendring, Braintree and Maldon. At its centre is the historic soon to be awarded city of Colchester, surrounded by villages and smaller market towns of distinct and complementary character. The city centre of Colchester is a focal point for the whole borough – containing one of the East of England's busiest shopping destinations, as well as nationally important heritage including Colchester Castle, Firstsite - a visual arts organisation based in Colchester which was voted the national Art Fund's Museum of the Year in 2021, the Mercury Theatre producing highly regarded original work under the title "Mercury Productions" and also receiving touring shows and many other notable culture and arts attractions.

Colchester also hosts the University of Essex with 17,000 students, predicted to rise to 25,000 in 10 years and is also a Garrison Town, home to the 16 Air Assault Brigade.

CBC is a driven and ambitious Council, with a notable track record of delivery and accessing funding. The award of £18.2m funding from the Government's Town Deal for the town centre and the Council's successful bid for £20m as part of the Government's Levelling Up Fund illustrates this drive.

The Council understands its communities and throughout the Coronavirus pandemic was recognised and valued by all partners. In response to the pandemic, the Council and its partners developed a comprehensive programme and action plan to help the borough, residents, businesses, and the Council itself recover from the impact of the pandemic and national lockdown regulations.

The Council is in the final year of delivering a three-year Strategic Plan. The 2020-23 plan sets out how the Council will address the key challenges facing the borough through five strategic priority themes:

1. Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability
2. Creating safe, healthy and active communities
3. Delivering homes for people who need them

4. Growing a fair economy so everyone benefits
5. Celebrating our heritage and culture.

The Strategic Plan is recognised throughout the borough as the glue that provides a shared purpose, binding partners and politicians together. It was positive to hear that the Council has started the process to develop a new Strategic Plan for adoption in February 2023. The process CBC will use builds on the learning from their current plan and has a greater focus on prioritisation and co-production with partners and residents. This approach is to be applauded.

As part of this approach, it was clear that CBC acts as a proactive convenor bringing together partners and resources from a wide range of sectors. The peer team heard throughout the corporate peer challenge, the value that partners and stakeholders place on the Council's role and the Council is encouraged to continue this. Colchester was amongst a small number of towns granted city status as part of the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee Civic Honours. This will be a great boost for the communities of Colchester as it will no doubt open up new opportunities. The peer challenge team have concluded that city status presents a timely opportunity to strengthen Colchester economically and culturally; an opportunity to take the borough to a new level in terms of its identity and harnessing its unique character.

The peer team recommends that the Council harnesses the excitement and benefits that city status offers and seizes this opportunity with both hands, using it as the platform to raise Colchester's voice - why not convene a cross borough event or summit to celebrate and start dialogue across the city on a new place narrative and vision?

A new vision or place-based narrative will in turn support the development of CBC's new four to five-year strategic plan, which should be developed following engagement with councillors, staff, and stakeholders.

This strategic plan should be clearly linked to a robust resourcing plan for people and finance as well as the Council's wide portfolio of programmes and projects. Having an annual delivery plan will help monitor delivery but will also enable the Council to be fleet of foot. It is also timely to review the authority's KPIs to ensure they are relevant for the future.

The need for a 'golden rope' linking all the Council's strategies and operations is critical if all staff and councillors are to be enabled to buy-in to the future direction and decisions regarding resourcing. This is critical due to CBC's stretched resources.

The peer team use the term 'Golden Rope' as opposed to golden thread as it reflects the scale of the multi-layers and multi-faceted approach the Council will need to consider in achieving the full breath of its ambitions.

Organisational and place leadership

The new Chief Executive has established positive and valued relationships across partnerships with trust and respect from both staff and partners. We heard that

“Pam is a catalyst for change” and “my ideas are welcomed and valued”

In addition, the political leadership is also highly valued and respected, and we heard that:

“The Leader is appreciative and wants to help”

The new leadership team brings complementary styles and should work together across the borough, County and wide sub-region to promote Colchester.

The Council has a range of innovative and inclusive partnerships and is well regarded in the system by statutory and local partners. We heard that the Council 'punches above its weight' and 'is the dollop of glue that binds us together'. However, there are times when resources are stretched, and the peer team recommends that CBC maps its key anchor institutions, partners and stakeholders to ensure the relevant resources and engagement is focused on the relationships that will have most impact on the residents of the borough and enables the delivery of the Strategic Plan.

It was clear that councillors across the borough bring passion, enthusiasm, drive and a real a love for Colchester. This needs to be harnessed better to ensure that all the authority's councillors are aware of, engaged in and supportive of the Council's future plans, particularly the opportunities that city status bring.

The North East Essex Health and Wellbeing Alliance is an exemplar and could be used as a tool to guide Colchester's approach to further develop its key stakeholder

relationships. Having the Alliance Director on the Council's Senior Leadership Team provides opportunities to continue the great work on health, but the Alliance has a challenging agenda to fundamentally change the lives of local people and it is now critical to identify additional internal strategic resource to work alongside the new Alliance Director.

There is also a need to strengthen the Council's political and officer 'leaders of place' roles. It is time for the Council to look beyond Colchester and beyond Essex and to look nationally and internationally.

A new place narrative or vision will give CBC the platform to paint a picture of the future, inspiring and carrying the community and focussing its energy into those partnerships that will improve the lives of local people and fundamentally transform communities for the better. It is important to ensure that members lead, and officers deliver this exciting agenda.

Many in local government will know that the Devolution and Local Government Reform (LGR) debate switches on and off on a regular basis. However, it seems that the devolution agenda is very much alive in Essex. It requires attention by the Council. CBC must assess its position to advocate for a deal that works for Colchester. Active participation in LGR can be resource intense and therefore the peer team recommends that CBC fully consider the resources required to ensure that it can continue to deliver its priorities whilst maximising the opportunities that devolution/LGR could bring for Colchester.

Governance and culture

It was clear that the political partnership in Colchester is strong and in a good place. There is mature cross party-political relationships and considerable respect for the new Leader of the Council. The example of the Leaders' Alumni session is positive and supported by the peer team.

There are positive relationships between officers and councillors, as well as trust and respect between councillors. The peer team welcomes that scrutiny in Colchester is led by the opposition group.

With the recent elections, officers have introduced some new engagement methods with 'all councillor briefings' being delivered and being well regarded.

The peer team also heard strong recognition of the support to Members and Parish Councillors received from the Democratic Services Team and Planning Team.

This cross party, mature political working is to be congratulated and demonstrates the positive focus on Colchester the place rather than the politics of the area.

During the days on site in Colchester, the issue of the current election cycle, and the feasibility of moving to quadrennial all-out elections, was raised. The peer team was struck by the number of times and by the variety of people that raised this issue. The peer team also recognises that this is a significant political decision for the Council, but the overwhelming feedback from staff, partners and stakeholders is that greater political stability would help deliver better outcomes for the communities of Colchester.

If the Council is going to explore a move to quadrennial elections, the peer team recommends that CBC engages with all councillors across the Council on this immediately, to avoid the risk of using precious officer time investigating an option for which there is no political appetite.

Linked with the peer team's recommendation regarding ensuring a steady external focus, it also recommends that CBC further strengthen political and officer leadership engagement with Essex County Council. The peer team heard it is getting better, however there is still more opportunity for improvement.

As is common in three tier local government areas, there can be confusion about responsibilities and a risk of duplication. The peer team encourages CBC to lead the development of a working framework. The peer team does not view this as an action for CBC alone, but one to develop with Essex County Council and parish/town councils to provide clarity to the community on how all the constituent parts will work together.

The peer team also recommends that CBC consider how scrutiny can add greater value and impact through effective programming. This will take resource, but with support scrutiny can provide an invaluable mechanism to challenge and drive forward the work of the administration. Proactive scrutiny can help shape the future direction of the Council and be effective in changing lives in the community.

To enhance the equality and diversity work, and to ensure the Council continues to

comply with its duty under the Equality Act, CBC commissioned an independent external audit in 2021. As part of the audit, an external consultant reviewed the existing HR policies and processes including recruitment, learning and development, the profile of CBC's workforce by protected characteristics and how far equality and diversity was embedded in the Council at all levels and across all services. This is a very positive piece of work that is driving improvement and, in conjunction with the Council's 'Communities Can' approach, building on the strengths that already exist to make improvements or changes that are important locally. The developing work on Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is also to be supported. However, CBC has identified that it needs to be more proactive in dealing with equality and diversity issues – Colchester has a young, diverse and dynamic community and it should work to harness that diversity better.

Financial planning and management

The strategic approach to the Council's 2023/24 budget and MTF 2023-28 was agreed by July 2022 by Cabinet. In setting the 2023/24 budget, CBC is taking the following approach:

- Collaborative rather than siloed across services and system partners
- Working in tandem with setting a new Strategic Plan 2023-28
- Including a comprehensive review of the capital and investment programme
- Requiring savings to be generated progressively through the Council's transformation programme
- Revising its strategy to use reserves to balance short term temporary issues but aiming to achieve a long-term sustainable position.

Although the Council has significant savings to identify (£1.5m in 22/23 and £5m in 23/24), it has a good record of delivering agreed savings and councillors and officers fully understand the budget gaps and challenges ahead to close them.

Colchester has a positive approach to financial management and has effective governance and controls in place, nevertheless the financial challenges ahead will be difficult. It is critical that everyone is prepared to tackle these challenges.

External audit delays have caused some disruption to CBC. The Council has yet to

receive an audit opinion for 2020/21 due to long delays with the auditor's BDO. The audit of the 2021/22 accounts is also currently not scheduled to begin by BDO until Summer 2023. In this challenging environment, it is important that external auditors support councils to deliver their savings.

There is one area about which the peer team had significant concerns. The Council's capital programme requires immediate attention. There is a record of underspending on its capital programme. The peer team understands that this is due to a lack of planning, as well as to insufficient strategic finance capacity and resource to progress capital projects. This is crucial and with the current external financial environment has never been more important.

To enable the Council to deliver its ambitious agenda it must, as a matter of urgency, implement changes to improve planning, prioritisation, management, oversight and delivery of all capital projects and programmes. The Council should implement a benefits realisation approach to ensure that it is monitoring the benefits that its projects and programmes deliver.

The senior leadership team and Cabinet should also undertake an urgent review of the entire capital programme and given the external economic environment, as part of this undertake a commercial risk assessment to appropriate projects and programmes.

The peer team understands that there would be a strong appetite from both councillors and partners to take part in budget discussions, and in an exercise to prioritise the scheme of capital projects and programmes. Some partners felt that relationships had matured, and it was now the "time to put our cards on the table", be more honest and share the challenges with them to collectively problem solve.

Capacity for improvement

As the peer team has referenced elsewhere, CBC has great staff who feel valued and are committed and loyal. The Council's focus on wellbeing and the Cost of Living is positive and staff value this.

It was also clear that senior managers and staff across the Council value councillors' insight and engagement. The peer team heard of several examples of where councillors bring new ideas and positive engagement to service areas – with this

there is always a risk of a 'grey area' of roles and responsibilities and councillors should always be aware that their role is to represent their wards and make decisions, whereas the role of officers is to give advice, to deliver services and to carry out the decisions of councillors.

There are many exemplars of best practice across the Council, such as the work during the Coronavirus pandemic, the support and work with refugees and asylum seekers, and the Neighbourhood Model being deployed across the town centre, with system partners working collaboratively to tackle the complex needs of Colchester's most vulnerable residents. It would be powerful if this practice was shared more widely throughout the organisation and across services. There is an opportunity to use this approach as a peer-to-peer support network and to bring the organisation together. Consider initiatives such as 'lunch and learn' sessions, with a balanced focus on the lunch as well as the learning. When this is embedded, assess whether this approach could be shared wider to include partners and to provide an opportunity to share projects across the system.

The Council has impressive project and performance management systems, but these systems are not used as effectively as they could be across the organisation. The peer team asks whether they are becoming overly bureaucratic and could be streamlined, or whether there is insufficient resource to make best use of the project and performance management systems already in place?

It was clear that the Council has some excellent and highly engaged voluntary and third sector partners who also want to step up and lean in to support the Council. CBC should therefore continue to capitalise on its ABCD way of working and utilise the passion and support that is available.

During the verbal feedback, the peer team shared its concerns regarding stretched resources, declining performance and too many projects and the need to focus on delivering 'Brilliant Business As Usual' and strengthening corporate resources.

The peer team does have concerns about capacity. To be successful in delivering a new strategic plan and achieve the ambitions for the borough, there is a need to focus on priorities and resourcing.

CBC should consider if it is possible to deliver all the programmes successfully and how and where it can build extra capacity and resilience within the organisation.

There are many ways this could be achieved, but based on the peer team's conversations and reflections the following is recommended:

- Undertake a review of all services, and make some difficult decisions about future levels of service delivery – the peer team heard enthusiasm from both officers and councillors to focus on delivering basics brilliantly
- Avoid continually chipping away at corporate support services as the impact of this is being felt across the entire Council. Proactively involving corporate support services at the project initiation stage will also ease capacity, as the services will spend less time solving problems that would not have arisen with earlier engagement.

As previously mentioned, the peer team would strongly recommend CBC bolsters strategic finance and reflects on the capacity within its Human Resource and Organisational Development teams to ensure there is sufficient capacity to change and achieve continuous improvement and deliver the authority's People Strategy. In terms of the Council's people approach, the peer team suggests further developing a corporate apprentice and graduate programme – great for Colchester's young people and great for CBC.

CBC has recruitment and retentions challenges; like many Councils' and with the current external environment this is not unusual. The peer team recommends that CBC develops its 'employer of choice' approach whilst also working with partners to identify and develop opportunities for shared services – this might not only be in Essex, but beyond county boundaries.

As mentioned, CBC is not alone with its recruitment and retention challenges. Shared services discussions with other Essex Councils should continue to be pursued, and the agenda around devolution/LGR could also be used as a route to look more strategically at the issues.

Throughout the visit to Colchester, the peer team have seen excellent performance and project management systems. However, we would recommend that the Council considers developing its project and programme management approach. With the depth and breadth of CBC's ambition it does not appear that programme and project management methodology have been adequately defined. Given the issues with delivery of the capital programme, we would recommend that the Council reflects on

its approach and investigates the option of re-creating the project management office (PMO) in the corporate centre of the organisation.

Re-establishing a strong corporate PMO would enable the Council to improve the rigour, of its monitoring and provide strategic oversight and better control of resources across all it's projects and programmes. It would enable the Council to clearly identify the inter-dependencies between projects and provide clear identification of any pinch points or duplication. One area the peer team identified would be to improve and share lessons learned and identify good practice across projects, to ensure a high level and consistent approach which would improve the management of risk and create manageable workloads, allowing effective prioritisation and creating a strong framework for the golden rope.

In terms of governance, the peer team recommends that there should be more councillor oversight of the delivery of projects and programmes, this could be achieved via a councillor led Major Projects Board.

There is a lack of clarity about what hybrid working will mean for the Council when Rowan House reopens. The Council needs to define what 'hybrid' means for Colchester and provide a clear definition and communication of where the Council aims to be, and what this means for staff.

For example, options could be that centralised staff are told when they must come into the office; team by team, whereby individual teams devise their own patterns to meet service demands; and fully distributed where every individual makes the decision about where and when they work.

In addition, there are some LGA resources that CBC may find useful. These include a roundtable event with over 135 local authorities to discuss the challenges and opportunities of hybrid working - [Feedback from the LGA hybrid working roundtable events May 2021 | Local Government Association](#)

A regularly updated new ways of working website - <https://www.local.gov.uk/new-ways-working-local-government>

And a recent blog from the LGA's Head of Workforce - [June 2021: Hybrid working will be the new normal . . . sort of | Local Government Association](#)

CBC should consider the creation of corporate apprenticeship and graduate schemes

and continue to promote the grow your own approach. The apprenticeship levy is used in some service areas and more use is anticipated particularly for staff at the lower entry level. But the levy should be considered for existing staff to help them advance their careers or to move into a new field such as planning, project management or leisure management.

Finally, the peer team urgently encourages CBC to review its Waste Service. The peer team understands that there are differing models of delivery across the borough so there is a need to consider rationalising the model of delivery to enable increased resilience across the fleet and staff resources moving forward.

Also, as an area of significant cost and budget pressure, every opportunity should be explored to recover reasonable costs associated with delivery of the service. The peer team understands that this will be tough, but we encourage CBC to do it.

Transformation and Organisational Development

The new Chief Executive's people centred approach and focus on wellbeing is welcomed by staff:

- Consultation on the values through the Speak Up Now (SUN) Ambassadors is positive
- The focus of the new Internal Communications Officer with an updated approach to communications which is more inclusive and targets frontline staff
- And the Chief Executive and her senior managers are more visible than ever before.

The new people strategy and management toolkit provides an opportunity to improve training and development and new ways of working across the Council.

The reopening of Rowan House, the Council's Headquarters, provides significant opportunities and staff are looking forward to understanding what the new hybrid working policy will mean. The peer team heard that the new booking system is welcomed.

A new management development programme has begun, and it will be critical that all teams across the Council have a clear understanding of the values and are united

behind them. It is important that the Council's future values are bold and reflect the opportunities city status brings and that they are not just words on a page, they should be lived. To achieve this, it is critical that the SUN group engages across the Council to develop the values and leads the future drive to enact them in everything the Council does.

CBC's People Strategy is critical to enabling the Council to move forward. It should complement the new Strategic Plan by acting as the enabler for improving workforce capability and engagement. There are several areas where the peer team consider there is an opportunity to strengthen the approach:

- Revisit the Reward and Recognition programme to ensure it is inclusive and open regarding nominations and decisions;
- Review ways of improving career progression opportunities through the internal movement and promotion – look at other innovative options and maximise the use of the apprentice levy to support this;
- Become an employer of choice by refocussing on the employee value proposition, repackaging the Council's offer and focussing on what it can provide for future employees;
- CBC has a commitment to talent management but needs to shout about that more – increase the amount of staff information and guidance regarding talent management;
- Finally, to support CBC's internal staff, consider ways of balancing internal upgrading with external recruitment.

Regeneration and Growth

It is clear that CBC has a great team who have a proven record of delivery and a strong track record of accessing funding.

This is underpinned by a strong ethos of collaborative team working across staff, partners, other councils, and the business community. Some examples are

- Staff and partners are committed with a genuine positivity about Colchester the place

- The business community is positive and engaged – messages can always be shared and officers are always accessible
- Work with adjoining authorities has enabled collaborative working to progress – such as the Garden Community initiative,

Impressive growth has been delivered with Colchester one of the fastest growing places in the UK. The council is not sitting on its laurels, rather it is continuing to explore different ways of delivering growth.

The council has high aspirations for Colchester and there are multiple projects and programmes being delivered across services. It would be helpful to develop a plan to link and prioritise these projects and programmes, ensuring a direct link to your new Strategic Plan. This will enable the Council to determine the best approach to resourcing these priorities.

The Council should also take a more proactive approach to target the sectors it wants to attract to its area through its regeneration and growth agenda. Further consideration should be given to how it could use its large asset base to support focused key sector growth. This should be supported by additional work targeting the sectors it wants to attract; engagement with key businesses and investors in the borough on this focused issue would support this approach.; This work would align with work to develop a skills plan for the borough. There would also be merit in considering whether the Council wants to or should play a landowner role within the new garden Community.

The Council's wholly owned group of commercial companies Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd (CCHL) is delivering on the Council's commercial trading, housing and energy activities. Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd and its three subsidiaries have been operating for over four years and, whilst delivery has no doubt been impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic, during the corporate peer challenges issues were expressed regarding CCHL as follows:

- that the risks to which the Council was exposed as a result of CCHL were not clear and/or understood.
- there was little evidence that the benefits for which CCHL had been established had been realised or that there were the mechanisms in place to

- ensure that there was alignment with the Council's priorities
- the board membership of CCHL could be strengthened by the appointment of independent directors
 - senior councillors sitting on the board of CCHL risked conflict between their duty to the company and the interests of the Council, and therefore may be more appropriate for members to act in the capacity of a Shareholder Board (which would need to be established as part of a governance review of the company structure).
 - Senior officers sitting on the board questioned whether they had full visibility of the activities of the companies to enable them to make informed decisions as part of the Board and whether they had the appropriate skills and experience to perform this role effectively

With the current challenging external environment, and a number of high-profile failures of council-owned companies it is timely for the Council to take stock of their businesses. The appointment of the new Chief Executive creates an opportunity to refocus on the effectiveness and appropriateness of the existing governance and risk management arrangements in relation to CCHL. A review also provides an opportunity for the Council to obtain external assurance that CCHL is meeting the Council's expectations, delivering real benefits, and providing value for money.

Due to the complexity of the companies, it is recommended that an independent external review is commissioned to assess whether the companies are realising the benefits they were established to deliver, that the risks associated with the companies are understood and that the governance arrangements are robust.

The Council's housing stock of 5,905 homes is managed by an arm's length housing management organisation, Colchester Borough Homes (CBH). CBH has been operating since 2003. Work is underway to recruit a joint post with CBH for an equality and diversity specialist and a dedicated joint post for safeguarding is also now in place.

Similarly, to CCHL it would be timely to undertake a review to understand if there is an overlap between Council services and the work of CBH. The peer team believe the Council has the capacity to undertake this review in-house.

5. Next Steps

It is recognised that senior political and managerial leadership will want to consider and reflect on these findings.

To support openness and transparency, the council is expected to publish this report within six weeks. There is also an expectation that an action plan is publicly available alongside the report's publication.

Both the peer team and LGA are keen to build on the relationships and the corporate peer challenge process includes a six-month progress review currently scheduled for June/July 2023. This will be a facilitated session which creates space for the council's senior leadership to update peers on its progress against the action plan and discuss next steps and any further support required.

CBC is already progressing certain aspects and is seeking best practice and working collaboratively with the peer teams' councils.

Rachel Litherland, Principal Adviser for the East of England and Gary Hughes, Peer Challenge Manager are the main contacts between CBC and the Local Government Association. Rachel and Gary are available to discuss any further support. rachel.litherland@local.gov.uk or gary.hughes@local.gov.uk .

Appendix B – Update on response to Peer Challenge recommendations

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
<p>City Status Focus on city status. Use this as an opportunity to galvanise partners, improve the Borough’s economic and cultural strength and raise the voice of Colchester Harness the excitement and benefits - that city status offers and seize the opportunity with both hands, using it as the platform to raise Colchester's voice</p>		
<p>Legacy and longer-term place making – A year of meeting and listening to our partners/ local businesses/Town and Parish Councils/ Uni/schools/residents to find out what City Status means to them and what they need from it.</p>	<p>Lucie Breadman</p>	<p>The approach agreed by ‘Board of Chairs’ City Status Group (external leads of partnerships and Leader of Council). Legacy bound together with wider City Centre plans labelled ‘Colchester City Centre the next 100 years’. £50m of investment and extensive engagement including face to face, online, workshops with young people overseen by our creative sector partners. Participation in Key Cities Group for networking, knowledge, best practice and lobbying opportunities. Joined up marketing group to consider future vision and message has been successful, wide range of businesses participating, including big players like Zoo and Tiptree Jam (for the first time). Engagement with more rural areas (Town and Parish Councils) ongoing, debate at both scrutiny and policy panels with wider Cllrs and public. Tangible infrastructure change already underway in City Centre and engagement happening at all levels along with development of vision. Work still to do on ensuring rural communities feel connected to new City Status.</p>
<p>Year of Celebration – Commencing 1 January 2023. Focusing on Heritage and cultural events already happening + Big Siege Event and establish a clear marketing strategy.</p>	<p>Lucie Breadman</p>	<p>Year of Celebration – Business Improvement District early adopter with Marketing Campaign followed by City Council Toolkit and Year of Celebration events and collaborative marketing approach. City Council including investment into two major events in calendar. Overall, 37 events in programme spanning city centre and rural areas, Link to events calendar Year of Celebration marketing image utilised widely by partners and now picked up in legacy work. In addition to these there has also been a Civic Ceremony, Royal Visit, Coronation Celebration linked, Creative Events Fund, Compassionate City Status, Celebration of Volunteering, and free heritage tours for residents.</p>
<p>Civic – Award of City Status on 23 November 2022 and possible Royal visit, governance arrangements, branding and comms.</p>	<p>Lucie Breadman</p>	<p>Year of Celebration – BID early adopter with Marketing Campaign followed by City Council Toolkit and Year of Celebration events and collaborative marketing approach. City Council including investment into two major events in calendar. Overall, 37 events in programme spanning city centre and rural areas, Link to events</p>

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
		<p>calendar Year of Celebration marketing image utilised widely by partners and now picked up in legacy work. In addition to Year of Celebration events, Civic Ceremony, Royal Visit, Coronation Celebration linked, Creative Events Fund, Compassionate City Status, Celebration of Volunteering, and free heritage tours for Colchester residents.</p>

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
<p>Capital Programme Get a firmer grip on the capital programme – manage all risks and improve your planning to ensure you have appropriate strategic finance, programme and project capacity and the resources to deliver.</p>		
<p>Review of Capital Programme</p>	<p>Lucie Breadman</p>	<p>Review of Capital programme including agreed approach by leadership board, formation of dedicated project group, workshops to investigate issues and quick wins. Review included analysis of each project and programme, risk analysis and has led to additional financial resources, support for creation of Project Management Office to oversee, new Gateway process, new prioritisation tool, reduction in programme size, new Buildings Maintenance data tool development, new KPI on forecasting. Report and findings agreed with Officer and Political Leadership and available.</p> <p>Key areas of ongoing work - New interim S151 officer overview and input in relation to Treasury Management / MTF. Governance and Audit update planned for September 2023, along with workshop with PFH and shadow PFHs along with key wider member group. Forecasting work is ongoing – new KPI introduced given importance of this. Northern Gateway Programme is also still being progressed due to interdependencies and complexities, interim CCHL and S151 officers working together on the complex financial picture with relevant officers and All Member Briefing took place Feb 23 to improve wider awareness and transparency.</p>
<p>New strategic asset strategy: Commission and develop a new asset strategy and Delivery Plan to cover occupational corporate assets, future investment strategy and regeneration and surplus land</p>	<p>Mandy Jones / Andrew Tyrrell</p>	<p>Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting have been commissioned to develop an overarching Asset Management Strategy and Investment Plan for the organisation which is in progress - includes comprehensive staff, Member and some stakeholder engagement. Due to report end July 2023 and will include recommendations for models for delivery and future focus</p>

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
		(including the beginning of an action plan to provide future direction.) Alongside this a review of a corporate delivery framework is taking place to ensure the delivery of the strategy is supported by an operating model that ensures decisions and processes support the strategy. This strategy will ensure future use and maintenance of our assets supports the strategic plan and underlying strategies.
<p>Energy consumption and use of assets: Reduction in consumption of energy, possibility of use of renewables, retrofit opportunities.</p>	<p>Mandy Jones / Mel Rundle / Andrew Tyrrell</p>	<p>An Energy Manager has been appointed and 6 properties have decarbonisation analysis plans prepared. We have started to scope further opportunities for carbon reduction in our estate and a first intervention has already been implemented to reduce electricity consumption from motors inside Leisure World. Smarter metering is also being planned, alongside better monitoring and management systems to inform behaviour changes. LED bulb replacements are now costed and will be one of several business cases prepared for some capital and revenue projects to be considered in budgeted setting processes that may also include solar PV additions to planned roof maintenance works. We are also developing a business case for a new water filtration system at Leisure World, which will save a significant volume of water and energy used to heat pool top-up. Plans have also been developed to upgrade the Building Energy Management System at the Town Hall.</p>
<p>Asset / Estates partnerships involvement: Review partnership involvement and identify future cross boundary opportunities (to align with cross council mapping of partnerships)</p>	<p>Mandy Jones</p>	<p>This will take place as part of the strategy development. In addition, a North Essex Energy Working Group has been set up to investigate opportunities in relation to the use of assets to support joint decarbonisation between Northeast Essex local authorities and the Health and Well Being Alliance, including funding opportunities and the use of solar PV.</p>
<p>Investment strategy: Develop to inform our future programme</p>	<p>Mandy Jones (asset strategy element) Lucie Breadman (capital programme review)</p>	<p>Broad principles for investment will emerge from work on the future Asset Strategy for future direction for asset investment and regeneration (see above and work on the city centre). Further work will involve alignment with the Capital strategy and programme.</p>
<p>Role review of CCHL and CBH: To define CCHL and CBH future role in capital projects. To be picked up in CCHL and CBH reviews.</p>	<p>Lindsay Barker</p>	<p>The future role of Colchester Commercial Holdings Limited in the delivery of capital projects is being explored as part of the review</p>

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
		of the companies. A recommendation will be considered by Colchester Commercial Holdings Limited Board and Cabinet in June 23. The relationship between Colchester Borough Homes / Colchester Commercial Holdings Limited and Colchester City Council in terms of assets and facilities management is being explored as part of the asset strategy.
Increased finance capacity: Through an additional capital accountant	Andrew Small	Additional capital accountant recruited and in place.
Put in place new strengthened programme management office	Richard Block	New Programme Management Office and gateway process established with additional project resources secured through strategic plan delivery plan resource allocations.

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
<p>City Vision Co-design a compelling and longer-term place-based narrative/city vision to define Colchester for the future</p>	Lindsay Barker	Linked to City Status Legacy work and update above. Collaborative Marketing Group established to consider narrative and vision and have run workshops to discuss and debate options, looked at from different perspectives (business, tourism, community). Capacity and resources to develop this work being recruited – senior Marketing role. Co-designed narrative and toolkit will be developed and agreed through Team Colchester.

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
Leaders of Place Roles Strengthen your political and officer 'leaders of place' roles and look beyond Colchester – map your anchor institutions, partners and stakeholders and effectiveness		
Strategic discussions at Senior Leadership Board	Pam Donnelly	Regular strategic horizon scanning including key relationships now conducted at Senior Leadership Board
Focus: On resources and engagement on the relationships that will have most impact on residents and enable delivery of Strategic Plan.	Richard Block	Partnership strategy reviewed including evaluation updated approach to annual cycle. In addition, reflection and evaluation of existing partnerships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual review of partnerships and external bodies completed, and some removed from 2022 list. • New leadership structure focus on lead for key partnerships and reduction in duplication of Council officer attendance. • Key existing partnership reviews – Health Alliance – comprehensive review including workshops and agreed future approach to focus. • New broader partnership involvement – key cities, shared services, Team Colchester
Councillors: Ensure aware of, engaged in and supportive of CCC's future plans, particularly the opportunities that city status bring.	Pam Donnelly	Monthly Chief Executive Update briefings as well as subject specific briefings e.g. finance, North Essex Garden Communities, Capital Programme review. Scrutiny Panel received peer challenge action plan and recommended changes. Further specific peer challenge update to Cabinet on 11/7 as well as an all Member briefing on 24/7
Exemplar: Use Alliance as exemplar/tool to guide approach to further develop key stakeholder relationships.	Rory Doyle	Review and reset of the Alliance commenced with support and facilitation through the Local Government Association. Purpose to develop stakeholder relationships further and go “beyond partnership” to joint structures, shared resource, pooled budgets. Colchester City Council participation in national Kings Fund research into District roles with Integrated Care Systems in recognition of exemplar approach
Resource: Identify additional internal strategic resource to work alongside new Alliance Director.	Rory Doyle	Strategic Directors appointed as part of new Senior Leadership Board - Alliance & Inequalities identified as lead role within Rory Doyle's 'portfolio' in support of Alliance priorities. Colchester City Council and Essex City Council agreed to provide formal strategic

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
		capacity into the Alliance up to 2 days per week to work alongside Alliance Dir and support Alliance Review and health system work. Proposals in development to establish permanent joint strategic roles to lead Place based health system work joint funded between Colchester City Council and Integrated Care Board
Look beyond Colchester and Essex: Time to look nationally and internationally.	Pam Donnelly	The Leader was invited to attend an audience with King Charles at the request of the British Ambassador in Paris (rescheduled because of public disorder in Paris) The Mayor and other City figures represent us widely in Europe through a series of well established twinning events. The Chief Executive with other senior officers takes every opportunity to speak at local and national conferences and Local Government Association, District Council Networks. In addition, our work is showcased in academic publications most notably with the University of Essex and Anglia Ruskin University. This includes frequent reference through the Kings Fund to our leading work with health and wider system partners which is regarded to be excellent nationally. It remains an ambition to increase and broaden Colchester representation at national events.
Equality and diversity: Be more proactive. Harness Colchester's diversity better.	Mandy Jones / Jess Douglas	Work progressing on developing an equalities framework and policy for community engagement and workforce, informed by the Local Government Association equalities framework.
ABCD / Communities Can: Support this developing work within CCC. Also capitalise on willingness of partners to step up and lean in on ABCD.	Michelle Tarbun / Tom Taylor	External funding secured for staff & member training as well as a Communities Can full time post to be hosted by Community 360 (recruitment underway). Training was paused last year due to the structural changes and the build up to Elections but is being progressed again in Summer 2023
Effectiveness of Partnerships: Review of Partnership Strategy and evaluation of partnerships approach	Lucie Breadman / Michelle Tarbun	Partnership strategy reviewed including evaluation updated approach to annual cycle. In addition, reflection and evaluation of existing partnerships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual review of partnerships and external bodies completed, and some removed from 2022 list. • New leadership structure focus on lead for key partnerships and reduction in duplication of Council officer attendance. • Key existing partnership reviews – Health Alliance – comprehensive review including workshops and agreed future approach to focus.

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
		New broader partnership involvement – key cities, shared services

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
<p>Hybrid Working and New Values Better define with your staff what ‘hybrid working’ means for CCC and provide a clear definition. Also, clarify how the new CCC values will be designed and embedded, communicating to staff how these define the Council and will help achieve Colchester’s ambition</p>		
<p>Define and communicate hybrid working</p>	<p>Jess Douglas</p>	<p>Action delivered Rowan House working group has worked together to develop Hybrid principles and Rowan House Guidance: <u>Link to Principles for working well together in a hybrid world</u> <u>Link to Rowan House Hub guidance - making the Hub work for all</u></p>
<p>New CCC values: Clarify how these will be designed and embedded. Communicate to staff how these will define the Council and help achieve Colchester's ambitions.</p>	<p>Jess Douglas</p>	<p>New values have been developed with the Speak Up Now Group and have been featured in all staff webinars Culture change programmed embedded in Organisational Development plan which is progressing</p>
<p>SUN group: To engage across CCC to develop the values/lead drive to enact them in everything the Council does.</p>	<p>Amanda Mann</p>	<p>Vision, Purpose and Values agreed. Speak Up Now employee engagement group engaged to identify ways to promote the values. Recruitment review underway to ensure inclusion. Values incorporated into new Appraisal App.</p>
<p>New management development programme: All teams to have clear understanding of values and are united behind them.</p>	<p>Jess Douglas</p>	<p>Organisational Development Plan action plan in place to embed new vision purpose and values alongside an internal communications plan. Values will be embedded in recruitment Employees Value Proposition, induction, appraisal and talent management and management development programmes.</p>
<p>People Strategy: Should complement the new Strategic Plan as enabler for improving workforce capability and engagement.</p>	<p>Jess Douglas</p>	<p>People Strategy and new Organisational Development Plan prioritises improving workforce capability and engagement. Business Partners are about to start work on service workforce plans with Head of Service following the new senior leadership team review.</p>
<p>Reward and Recognition programme: Revisit to ensure inclusive re nominations and decisions.</p>	<p>Jess Douglas</p>	<p>Work has started on reviewing the reward and recognition programme to align with new vision, purpose and values.</p>
<p>Talent Management: Shout about it; increase amount of staff information and guidance.</p>	<p>Jess Douglas</p>	<p>Talent management programme to be re-launched alongside the launch of the new appraisal App which bring performance and talent management together. Talent management will also be a theme in the service workforce plans.</p>
<p>Internal upgrading: Consider ways to balance this with external recruitment.</p>	<p>Jess Douglas</p>	<p>This is already in place. A key priority in the People Strategy is to consider internal talent and succession before any external</p>

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
		recruitment. This has been facilitated by the recruitment freeze also.

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
Review priorities and projects		
Review your priorities and projects and refocus on delivering 'Brilliant Business as Usual' and strengthen your corporate resources		
New Strategic Plan to be developed with prioritised delivery plan and a “golden rope” linking all CCC’s strategies and operations; critical to stretched resources. This should be developed following engagement with councillors, staff, and stakeholders. The strategic plan should be clearly linked to a robust resourcing plan for people and finance, plus CCC's wide portfolio of programmes and projects.	Richard Block	New Strategic Plan developed and adopted at Full Council in February 2023. This was developed following an extensive “Future of Colchester” consultation including a public survey, councillor survey, focus groups and Councillor Policy Panel engagement. Delivery plan developed and adopted by Cabinet in March 2023. Clear resource allocations made to support delivery.
Define 'Brilliant Business as Usual' through reviewing service provision and ensure this is appropriate for a modern green city and is deliverable with the resources available.	Richard Block	“Developing Modern Services for a Modern City” now a key priority within the new Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan. Service levels and models being redefined across several key services e.g. Neighbourhood Services, Customer Contact Centre, Sport and Leisure.
Review all projects and prioritise against the following tests: Delivery against new strategic plan and delivery plan objectives Support for refined “Brilliant Business as - Usual” services Available capacity to deliver	Richard Block	Updated Capital Project Prioritisation Tool and existing Project Prioritisation checklist embedded into Project Initiation Documents address this at a high level. Pre-Project and Feasibility Gateways which specifically challenge colleagues to think about outcomes, scope and funding including maintenance and human resources address this for new projects.
Strengthen corporate resources: Develop a business case - for strengthened Corporate Services and deliver by consolidation of services. Avoid continual chipping away at CS as impacts entire CCC. Services to proactively involve CS at project initiation stage to save services' time solving foreseeable problems.	Richard Block	Business case developed and additional resources secured in finance, Project Management Officer, Human Resources and Communications through Strategic Plan Delivery Plan. Project Management Office set up with gateway process with oversight from Programme Delivery Group which includes Corporate Services. Shared Services programme with Braintree District Council and Epping Forest District Council commenced which aims to further strengthen corporate services through partnership and collaboration.
Project Management Office: Re-establish to improve monitoring/oversight/control of resources across all projects and programmes. Define methodology and develop approach - will benefit delivery of CCC's ambition, workloads, prioritisation, risk management.	Richard Block	New Programme Management Office and gateway process established with additional project resources secured through strategic plan delivery plan resource allocations.

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
People Strategy: Reflect on capacity within HR/OD to deliver this.	Jess Douglas	Organisational Development Project Co-ordinator appointed and started Monday 5 June.
Grow your own: Consider more use of apprenticeship levy and other innovative options for existing staff across CCC. Use to advance careers or move to new field within CCC. Corporate apprentice and graduate programme - further develop this.	Jess Douglas	We have a well-established and regarded apprenticeship programme in place. We currently have 20 staff working utilising the levy to gain professional qualifications and advance their careers including town planning, project management, chartered management, Human Resources, accountancy and data analysis. We are signed up to the Local Government Association graduate programme and intending to recruit our first cohort this year. We have also created a career progression route for frontline staff in Neighbourhood Services. This has supported 5 Recycling and Waste Loaders to become HGV drivers for the Recycling & Waste Service and drivers to become Route Coordinators.
'Be 'Employer of choice': Develop this approach. Refocus on employee value proposition, repackage CCC's offer and focus on what it can provide for future employees.	Jess Douglas	Recruitment "squad" has started work on defining our employee value proposition and branding as part of a comprehensive review of recruitment. This is a priority in the Organisation Development Plan.
Key Performance Indicators: Review to ensure relevant for the future.	Richard Block	Full review of Key Performance Indicators conducted and new Key Performance Indicators linked to new Strategic Plan adopted by Cabinet in June.
Regeneration and growth agenda: Take a more proactive approach to target the sectors CCC wants to attract to its area.	Lindsay Barker	The new Economic Strategy was adopted by Council in March 2023 and outlines the key sectors and opportunities. Colchester City Council has also contributed to the North Essex Economic Strategy refresh which will identify regional opportunities to progress. Colchester City Council supported the launch of the Care Tech sector initiative in May 2023 which it developed and is now appropriately led by Essex County, Essex University and the Integrated Care Board.
Assets: Consider usage of large asset base to support focused key sector growth.	Mandy Jones	This is being considered as part of the commission to Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy for an Asset Management Strategy outlined under the Capital Programme item above. The report on the strategy will be delivered end July 2023.

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
<p>Change Election Cycle Strongly consider whether changing your election cycle will help you achieve your goals, ambitions and deliver improved services for Colchester's communities</p>		

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
<p>Full Council Motion: To explore the alternative electoral arrangements, whether as now or 'All Up', or a variation. The Council will set up a cross-party working group to explore all options with findings to be presented to Full Council in February. Council can then review findings collectively and discuss next steps forward.</p>	Andrew Weavers	<p>Cross party working group created to consider issue. A key issue is the forthcoming electoral boundary review. The group recommended to that consideration of changing the Council's electoral cycle be deferred until the forthcoming electoral review of Colchester has been completed and implemented in 2026.</p>
<p>Political engagement: Immediate, with all councillors, to avoid risk of investigating option for which there is no political appetite</p>	Andrew Weavers	<p>Cross party working group created to consider issue and make a recommendation to Full Council.</p>

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
<p>Review of CCHL and CBH Commission an independent review of Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd, and its subsidiaries, also undertake an internal review of Colchester Borough Homes to assess whether the companies are realising the benefits they were established to deliver</p>		
<p>CCHL review: Get independent external assurance that CCHL is meeting CCC's expectations; delivering real benefits; providing value for money. Also, that risks are understood, and governance arrangements are robust</p>	Lindsay Barker	<p>A risk assessment was commissioned in November 2022 by Ethical Consulting which reported in December 2022 identifying clear risks and issues that needed addressing.</p> <p>A full review of Colchester Commercial Holdings Limited and its subsidiary companies was commissioned in January 2023 aligned to the departure of the Managing Director of Colchester Commercial Holdings Limited and will clarify strategic objectives in Summer with Colchester City Council and conclude in Autumn 23. An interim Managing Director was recruited in January 2023 (started March 2023) to lead the review of Colchester Commercial Holdings Limited and the development of the Board.</p> <p>A Shareholder team of senior officers was established to develop the action plan in response to the outcomes of the risk assessment and review and a short term 'Oversight' group comprising Executive members, Chair of Governance and Audit, Chairs of Colchester Commercial Holdings Limited and Colchester Borough Homes Board and leader of the Opposition was set up to consider the emerging action plan and response to the reviews.</p> <p>Immediate changes to the constitution were made and Governance and risk support and training has started with the Colchester Commercial Holdings Limited team.</p>
<p>CBH review: Undertake a review to understand if there is an overlap between CCC services and the work of CBH. Can be in-house review</p>	Lindsay Barker	<p>A risk assessment was commissioned in December 2022 by Housing Quality Network. It identified risks, issues and opportunities in partnership with Colchester City Council and Colchester Borough Homes.</p>

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
		<p>A new chair of Colchester Borough Homes was appointed in May 2023</p> <p>An action plan to respond to the Housing Quality Network recommendations has been agreed and is mainly completed. It has been developed with the shareholder team and reported into the oversight member group (outlined above)</p>
<p>CCHL Annual Report: For both the Risk Assessment and the CCHL Peer Review</p>	<p>Lindsay Barker</p>	<p>The Risk Assessment and Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy full review and response have both been reported confidentially into Governance and Audit Committee.</p>

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
<p>Devolution and Government Reform</p>		
<p>Devolution and Local Government Reform - the devolution agenda is very much alive in Essex. It requires attention by the Council</p>		
<p>Active participation: Assess CCC's position to advocate for a deal that works for Colchester</p>	<p>Pam Donnelly</p>	<p>Post election the current Chief Executive and Leader represent continuity in the discussions with Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Essex partners. We have been involved from the beginning and have consistently made the case for second tier engagement at all levels and a broadening of the devolution agenda to include health and housing. Our elected members are fully appraised of progress as a result of regular engagement and briefings</p>
<p>Resources: CCC to fully consider the resources required to ensure that it can continue to deliver its priorities whilst maximising the opportunities that devolution/LGR could bring for Colchester</p>	<p>Pam Donnelly</p>	<p>Currently the leadership of this responsibility lies with the Chief Executive and Leader. However, we are fully supported by the current economic strategy team and the Executive Director for Place in ensuring our strategies respond to the opportunities for devolution. Relationships (e.g. Team Colchester) are well established to accept any future devolved powers re skills and transport.</p> <p>It is difficult to see what the devolution deal for Essex means for City, Borough and District Authorities which is why we stay fully engaged and ensure our resources are in a place which allows us to maximise to the opportunities associated with devolution.</p>
<p>Recruitment and retention: Use devolution/LGR as a route to look more strategically at these challenges</p>	<p>Jess Douglas</p>	<p>Currently working with North Essex partners and Braintree and Epping separately on recruitment and retention challenges. Colchester City Council is involved in the project looking at Planners which is being supported by the Local Government Association. Currently have an agreed arrangement in place with</p>

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
		Epping and Braintree as part of the shared services work to share vacancies and looking for joint working opportunities.
Active involvement: In the development of the devolution pitch for Greater Essex by the Leader and Chief Exec	Pam Donnelly	Chief Executive attends fortnightly meetings with selected Chief Executives from across South and North Essex to participate in the collaboration and co design of our devolution officer with colleagues from Southend, Thurrock and Essex. We participate in Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities workshops and are actively involved in supporting the Chief Executive at Braintree with the development of the Governance arrangements to support a future Combined Authority. In addition, we make a strong case for second tier authorities in ensuring a place perspective is reflected in the ultimate deal and the resources which will flow to communities.
Shared services: Discussions progressing across Essex	Richard Block	Shared Service programme launched with Epping and Braintree with interim shared Section 151 officer and shared Service Director for Digital and Transformation now in place. Further opportunities being considered across a range of services including finance, Human Resources, Revenues and Benefits, Building Control and Waste.

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
<p>Strengthen engagement with ECC CCC further strengthen political and officer leadership engagement with Essex County Council. The peer team heard it is getting better, however there is still more opportunity for improvement</p>		
<p>Working framework: CCC to lead development of this with ECC and town/parish councils, to provide clarity to the community on how all the tiers/constituent parts will work together</p>	<p>Rory Doyle</p>	<p>Facilitated Town and Parish Forum with a focus on key workstreams cutting across tiers of local government. Other examples include working with Essex County Council on waste Strategy development and City Master Planning.</p>
<p>Shared services: Work with partners to identify and develop opportunities; in Essex and beyond</p>	<p>Richard Block</p>	<p>Shared Service programme launched with Epping and Braintree with interim shared Section 151 and shared Service Director for Digital and Transformation now in place. Further opportunities being considered across a range of services including finance, Human Resources, Revenues and Benefits, Building Control and Waste.</p>
<p>Team Colchester: Established in 2022 to lead regeneration in the City Centre. Chaired by Leader of City Council</p>	<p>Lindsay Barker</p>	<p>Team Colchester is a cross party collaborative team comprising Leader of Colchester City Council and Essex County Council as well as lead Portfolio Holders for Regeneration and opposition members. It is now well established and has led the commissioning and development of the masterplan and transport strategy for the City Centre – extensive public consultation and engagement started 19 June 2023.</p> <p>Team Colchester was successful with its Levelling Up Fund Bid of £20m in Jan 2023 and is already underway with delivery of the schemes within the bid.</p> <p>Team Colchester is now exploring the wider regeneration opportunities underpinned by shared assets to deliver economic benefits, new public realm and new housing including the opportunities for a joint delivery vehicle to deliver.</p>
<p>Joint levelling up fund submitted: We are awaiting the outcomes of this</p>	<p>Matt Sterling</p>	<p>This bid was submitted on time and was successful. As above circa £20m was awarded and mobilisation work is underway to deliver this programme.</p>

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
<p>Review Waste Service</p>		

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
Mode of delivery: Consider rationalising this across the borough	Rosa Tanfield	A consultant has been contracted to undertake a review and the development of a new Recycling & Refuse Strategy. A workshop has been undertaken with the Environment & Sustainability Panel but will need to be revisited following the elections. It is proposed to launch the new strategy in 2024, concurrent to a new Essex strategy.
Recover costs: Explore every opportunity to recover reasonable costs of waste service delivery.	Rosa Tanfield	<p>The 'free' bulky collection service has now stopped, with only a chargeable bulky collection available.</p> <p>The Saturday Household Drop Off Service has changed to target only areas of low disposable income.</p> <p>Both schemes have reduced revenue budget pressure by £51k.</p> <p>Introduced new services for third parties (Parish Councils, housing associations, etc) to pay for residual or garden waste drop off services.</p> <p>Introduced new a product offer for business waste customers through refurbishing bins.</p> <p>Increased food waste collection costs for business waste customers to reflect true costs of disposal.</p> <p>Full Council have agreed to the introduction of a chargeable garden waste scheme. Work is underway and plans are in place for it to be implemented in January 2024.</p>

Recommendation	Lead	Update/status
<p>Scrutiny Consider how scrutiny can add greater value and impact through effective programming</p>		
Resource: With support, scrutiny can provide challenge, help shape CCC's future direction and be effective in changing lives in the community	Mel Rundle	Scrutiny Panel Work programme reviewed at start of municipal year to identify areas where the Panel can achieve this. Scrutiny Panel is supported through a Senior Leadership Team lead officer, Democratic Services Officer and other Senior Board input (for example - Chief Operating Officer). Chief Executive also meets with the chair of the Scrutiny Panel on a monthly basis to identify opportunities to achieve this.
Effective Scrutiny of Partnerships	Lucie Breadman / Mel Rundle	Picked up as part of the review of partnerships strategy and included in that as well as Member Development lead looking specifically at programme of development to consider relevant content and support.

Cabinet

12 July 2023

Item
8(i)

Report of	Client Services Manager	Author	Terri Hamilton ☎ 03300 538007
Title	Acquisition of four New Build Homes from a Developer as Part of the Council's New Housebuilding Programme		
Wards affected	Mile End		

1. Executive Summary

1.1 In 2019 the Council committed to deliver up to 350 additional social homes owned by the Council over 5 years. It is currently on track to meet this target although the Covid pandemic has had some impact on some of the original projects. In July 2020 the Council agreed a report that set out further options for new delivery options. In June 2023, Cabinet gave approval for 7 “off the shelf” units to be acquired directly from a developer on the Boxted Road site.

This report takes a lead from those further options and recommends that the Council acquires 4 completed “off the shelf” units directly from the developer of the Chesterwell site, within the Mile End ward as another method of delivering new social housing owned by the Council within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

1.2 The developer has previously obtained planning permission to build 156 units on the site as part of the development. The units are in the construction phase; with completion estimated for August 2023. There is a mix of 1-5 bed units throughout the site, most of which will be sold on the open market. Within this phase, four units have been allocated as affordable housing as part of the Section 106 agreement. The developer has agreed to sell the four units directly to the Council, subject to Cabinet Approval, with the possibility of further negotiations for additional units closer to the completion date.

1.3 Colchester Borough Homes will manage the homes once they are handed over and have confirmed that the property specifications are suitable for social housing stock. The properties will be high quality and energy efficient. Colchester Borough Homes will provide the service of Clerk of Works and continue to work with the Developer to ensure the required standards are met through their construction phase.

2. Recommended Decision

2.1 To agree that the Council shall pursue this opportunity as set out in the report and proceed with the offer, as outlined in Part B of this report, for the 4 units.

2.2 To delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to agree and negotiate any subsequent purchases of homes closer to completion, subject to normal viability and valuation considerations.

2.3 To delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to approve the exchange of conditional contracts to acquire the units,

and any other related matters, to complete the purchase when all conditions are satisfied.

- 2.4 To agree to the appointment of Colchester Borough Homes as a “clerk of works” or “employers agent” to supervise the quality of the construction of the homes to be acquired.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 There are approximately 2,560 households on the Council’s Housing Register seeking social housing and approximately 285 households in temporary accommodation. It is a priority of the Council, as shown by its New Housebuilding Programme, to try and find new ways to provide more homes in response to this need.
- 3.2 The Council is delivering affordable homes, but it is still continually seeking new and innovative ways to increase the supply of affordable housing and provide good quality, affordable and secure homes for Colchester’s residents who are in housing need.
- 3.3 Although there is a supply of new affordable housing through Section 106 provision via Registered providers, alongside Council led projects, supply is not meeting the need. The impact of Covid slowed affordable housing delivery in the market, and for the first year the Council delivered more affordable homes through its delivery Programme (including the Acquisition Programme/100 Homes) than all other Registered Providers combined; which evidences the importance of the Council’s role.
- 3.4 These acquisitions will increase the Council’s housing stock and diversifies the methods to bring forward additional affordable housing.
- 3.5 In Colchester, within the priority Bands A-C, there are approximately 640 applicants on the Housing register with a need for a 1 bed property. This makes up for 24% of the housing register need. There is an average waiting time of 11.7 months for a 1 bed property for applicants in bands B and C (Average waiting time of 4.4 months for applicants in Band A).
- 3.6 There are approximately 156 applicants in temporary accommodation within Colchester with a studio/1 bed need. Residing in temporary accommodation, over a prolonged period of time, may have a negative impact on the residents and their support network, as well as placing the councils allocated general fund budget under significant pressure.
- 3.7 There are approximately 14 applicants, in priority bands, with a need of a 1 bed property in the Mile End Ward alone.
- 3.8 There are approximately 13 applicants on the housing register with a Code 1 need (fully Wheelchair accessible), in priority bands A-C, who require a 1 bed property. These applicants can often be waiting for an extended period of time, in unsuitable properties, due to a lack of supply of adapted properties, within the councils housing stock.
- 3.9 Proceeding with this opportunity and other similar opportunities, to work with developers to acquire units as part of their development, will help to alleviate pressure on the housing register, temporary accommodation and relevant budgets as well as allowing developers to continue to develop within the Colchester area.

3.10 It is estimated that these units will be available between August 2023 and October 2023, providing much needed homes within a short timeframe.

4. Alternative Options

4.1 The Council could do nothing, but this will mean the Council will miss out on opportunities to maximise the delivery of newbuild social rent housing in Colchester and it will mean that households on the housing register and in temporary accommodation will wait longer for a secure affordable home.

5. Background Information

5.1 In January 2019, the Council agreed to explore a range of potential projects that could deliver an additional 350 new affordable council homes over 5 years, borrowing up to £75m in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and delivering the first newbuild Council Homes since the "Phase 1 Garage Sites" were developed in 2015.

5.2 The projects that have been progressed include "Phase 2 Garage Sites" and "Phase 3 Garage Sites", alongside developing 100% affordable homes at Military Road, purchasing former Council Homes through the "Right to Buy Back" or the open market, and reinvigorating the Sheltered Housing Improvement Programme which has involved the redevelopment of Elfreda House.

5.3 Bringing forward additional housing was agreed by Cabinet in 2020, including options such as "Package Deals", "Targeted" acquisitions and/or changes of use where proposed, which would include strategies such as purchasing vacant units and approaching landholders in the borough or establishing new partnership working. This included the Council contacting housebuilders who may require more certainty over sales in order to deliver sites.

5.4 This report has followed one of those lines of exploration and proposes to bring forward additional affordable housing supply through an agreement with a developer to acquire completed "off the shelf" units, that will meet the councils' standards. This project would be in keeping with what was previously proposed at Cabinet in July 2020 where the Council can pursue "targeted acquisitions".

5.5 This project will be in line with the Cabinet Approval in June 2023 to acquire 7 off the shelf units directly from the developer at Bosted Road, acquiring 3 and 4 bed homes, providing a range of units to meet the councils diverse housing needs.

5.6 In leading and delivering the New Council Housebuilding Programme, the Council achieved "Investment Partner Status" with Homes England in 2021. The Council can now bid for grant from Homes England to subsidise the affordable housing developments. The Council have been successful in obtaining grant for Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Garage Sites Phase 2 (Buffett and Scarfe Way and Hardings Close), Military Road and Elfreda House, and more recently HRA Garage sites Phase 3 (Cross Cottages and Wheeler Close). The grant makes the delivery of newbuild social rent housing more viable to deliver and reduces the Council's Housing Revenue Account borrowing (and overall debt).

- 5.6 The Council intends to continue to utilise its Investment Partner status by bidding for grant for subsidy towards all qualifying affordable schemes in the development programme going forward.

Proposal

- 5.7 The Council has been exploring avenues to work with developers to acquire suitable units, at a discounted rate, directly from the developers as “off the shelf” acquisitions. As a result, the Council has been approached by the developer in regard to a development within the Chesterwell site in Mile End. The developer was seeking a suitable Affordable Housing provider to acquire the affordable housing units.
- 5.8 This site will provide a total of 156 units with a mix of 1 to 5 bed properties. The Council has provisionally agreed to acquire 4 of the units, with the potential to agree further acquisitions closer to the completion date. This includes 4 x 1 bed maisonettes, with the two ground floor properties meeting Cat 3 standards (fully wheelchair accessible). In addition, the homes are energy efficient, with an estimated Energy Performance Certificate EPC rating of B81. The homes will be fully fitted and ready to let, with low maintenance and repair costs going forward.
- 5.9 A viability appraisal has been completed to ensure that the offer for the 4 units is viable. A red book valuation, by an external agent, has been instructed to provide the open market value of the units, and the offer is subject to the valuation report to ensure that the acquisitions are value for money.
- 5.10 Colchester Borough Homes will provide the service of the “Clerk of Works” and will work closely with the council and the developer to ensure that the units are delivered to a high standard and meet the Council’s specification. The homes will be designed to meet nationally described space standards and will be as energy efficient as possible with an estimated EPC rating of B81.
- 5.11 The Council can choose to subsidise the project through other internal subsidies.
- 5.12 Any offer to the developer would be subject to satisfactory valuation, clean freehold title and all necessary due diligence.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 The New Council Housebuilding Programme has an existing EQIA. The proposals are considered to have an overall positive impact on protected groups and they will have a positive impact on the availability of housing in Colchester, especially the availability of affordable housing.
- 6.2 Maximising the supply of new homes is part of the Council’s commitment to improving communities and our city as a place to live. By implementing the recommendations, the Council will have due regard to its Public Sector Duty and will continue to work to tackle discrimination and inequality and help to create a fairer society, improve housing choice and social mobility (including for protected groups).

- 6.3 The proposals will help to improve the housing conditions and life chances of people with protected characteristics, including homeless people, low-income households, people with disabilities and families on the housing needs register. They will therefore have a positive impact on Equality and Diversity.

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 The services and projects delivered by the Council and Colchester Borough Homes contribute directly to the following Strategic Plan 2023-2026 priority areas:

- **Respond to the climate emergency**

Reduce our carbon footprint.

Ensure Council homes benefit from increased energy efficiency.

- **Deliver Modern Services for a Modern City**

The Colchester Council family of organisations work together to a shared and ambitious vision for the future of our city.

Continue to invest in our homes to deliver quality social homes and services for tenants and leaseholders.

Put communities and their needs at the heart of our vision and support local areas as they help shape and deliver services which are most important to them.

Work closely with partners, charities and organisations to add value.

- **Improve health, well-being, and happiness**

Tackle the causes of inequality and support our most vulnerable people.

Work with residents and partners to address quality of life and issues of happiness.

- **Deliver homes for those most in need**

Increase the number and quality and types of affordable homes.

Meet our duty to prevent or assist those facing homelessness.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 This report does not require public consultation. Consultation took place at the planning stage of this development.

9. Publicity Considerations

- 9.1 This report does not require any publicity considerations. The units will be advertised for applications via the Gateway to Homechoice.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 A provision for further Council new build schemes was included for 22/23 and 23/24 in the Housing Investment Programme agreed by Cabinet on 26th January 2022 and 25th January 2023. It is intended that that this will support expenditure arising from this project in this financial year.
- 10.2 The total cost of the project to the Housing Revenue Account for the units is outlined in Part B of this report.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 Health, wellbeing and community safety would be positively influenced by the provision of new affordable and well-designed affordable housing that help improve the quality of life for future occupants.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 There are no particular health and safety implications attached to the decision. Construction health and safety is managed by the developer and will be monitored by Colchester Borough Homes on behalf of the Council.

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 There is a risk that the development could be delayed or construction is not completed. This will be mitigated through legal contracts, with the completion of contracts being subject to relevant terms and conditions. The developers solicitor will retain the deposit as a stakeholder, which would be fully refundable to the Council, if the development does not meet the conditions stipulated.
- 13.2 The effects of Covid and Brexit have delayed newbuild projects and increased cost due to lack of labour, materials, components and delivery drivers. This risk will be mitigated by a set offer being agreed for the units, and with a completion long stop date being included in the contract.
- 13.3 The site may have issues that affect the deliverability and viability of the units, such constraints due to Rights of Way and Easements. Contracts will not be exchanged until all due diligence is complete, and the solicitors can confirm a good freehold title for each unit.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 14.1 The units are being developed to a high standard and the developer has a good reputation for the standard of their properties. The units have an estimated EPC rating of B81 which will help achieve our goal of all Council owned housing stock having at least a Band C by 2030.

Cabinet

12 July 2023

Item
8(ii)

Report of	Client Services Manager	Author	Terri Hamilton ☎ 03300 538007
Title	Acquisition of 6 additional New Build Homes from a Developer as Part of the Council's New Housebuilding Programme		
Wards affected	Mile End		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 In 2019 the Council committed to deliver up to 350 additional social homes owned by the Council over 5 years. It is currently on track to meet this target although the Covid pandemic has had some impact on some of the original projects. In July 2020 the Council agreed a report that set out further options for new delivery options. In June 2023, Cabinet agreed to The Council acquiring 7 "Off the Shelf" units within the Boxted Road development, following on from the further options report. Delegation was approved, for the Portfolio Holder and Chief Operating Officer to agree further units to be acquired. This report takes a lead from the June 2023 Cabinet report and recommends that the Council approves an additional capital budget within 2023/2024 to acquire 6 additional completed "off the shelf" units directly from the developer at a site off Boxted Road, Mile End as another method of delivering new social housing owned by the Council within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- 1.2 The developer has obtained planning permission to build 26 units on the site and is already in the construction phase; with completion estimated for late October 2023. There is a mix of 3 and 4 bed units, most of which will be sold on the open market and a Section 106 agreement securing 5 homes allocated as affordable housing. The developer previously agreed to sell 7 units directly to the Council and Cabinet Approval was confirmed. The developer has agreed to sell an additional 6 x 3 bed family homes to the Council, subject to Cabinet approval and a red book valuation.
- 1.3 The developer has agreed to meet the required Council specifications provided by Colchester Borough Homes, who would manage the homes once they are handed over. Thus, the properties will be high quality and energy efficient. Colchester Borough Homes will provide the service of Clerk of Works and continue to work with the Developer to ensure the required standards are met through their construction phase.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To agree the additional HRA capital budget that will allow the Council to pursue this opportunity as set out in the report and proceed with the offer, as outlined in Part B of this report, for the additional 6 units.
- 2.2 To delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to approve the exchange of conditional contracts to acquire the units,

and any other related matters, to complete the purchase when all conditions are satisfied.

- 2.3 To agree to the appointment of Colchester Borough Homes as a “clerk of works” or “employers agent” to supervise the quality of the construction of the homes to be acquired.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 There are approximately 2,590 households on the Council’s Housing Register seeking social housing and approximately 285 households in temporary accommodation. It is a priority of the Council, as shown by its New Housebuilding Programme, to try and find new ways to provide more homes in response to this need.
- 3.2 The Council is delivering affordable homes, but it is still continually seeking new and innovative ways to increase the supply of affordable housing and provide good quality, affordable and secure homes for Colchester’s residents who are in housing need.
- 3.3 Although there is a supply of new affordable housing through Section 106 provision via Registered providers, alongside Council led projects, supply is not meeting the need. The Covid impacts have slowed affordable housing delivery in the market, and for the first year the Council delivered more affordable homes through its delivery Programme (including the Acquisition Programme/100 Homes) than all other Registered Providers combined; which evidences the importance of the Council’s role.
- 3.4 These acquisitions will increase the Council’s housing stock and diversifies the methods to bring forward additional affordable housing. This will also strengthen the Council’s investment partner status with Homes England and will provide more opportunities to bid for Affordable Housing Grant within the 2021/26 affordable homes programme.
- 3.5 In Colchester, within the priority Bands A-C, there are approximately 535 applicants on the Housing register with a need for a 3+ bed property. This makes up for 21% of the housing register need. There is an average waiting time of 16.5 months for a 3+ bed property for applicants in bands B and C (Average waiting time of 6.5 months for applicants in Band A).
- 3.6 There are approximately 90 families in temporary accommodation within Colchester with a 3+ bed need. Residing in temporary accommodation, over a prolonged period of time, may have a negative impact on the families and their support network, as well as placing the councils allocated budget under significant pressure.
- 3.7 There are approximately 32 families, in priority bands, with a need of a 3+ bed property in the Mile End Ward alone.
- 3.8 Proceeding with this opportunity and other similar opportunities, to work with developers to acquire units as part of their development, will help to alleviate pressure on the housing register, temporary accommodation and relevant budgets as well as allowing developers to continue to develop within the Colchester area.
- 3.9 It is estimated that these units will be available between August 2023 and October 2023, providing much needed homes within a short timeframe.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council could do nothing, but this will mean the Council will miss out on opportunities to maximise the delivery of newbuild social rent housing in Colchester and it will mean that households on the housing register and in temporary accommodation will wait longer for a secure affordable home.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 In January 2019, the Council agreed to explore a range of potential projects that could deliver an additional 350 new affordable council homes over 5 years, borrowing up to £75m in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and delivering the first newbuild Council Homes since the “Phase 1 Garage Sites” were developed in 2015.
- 5.2 The projects that have been progressed include “Phase 2 Garage Sites” and “Phase 3 Garage Sites”, alongside developing 100% affordable homes at Military Road, purchasing former Council Homes through the “Right to Buy Back” or the open market, and reinvigorating the Sheltered Housing Improvement Programme which has involved the redevelopment of Elfreda House.
- 5.3 Bringing forward additional housing was agreed in 2020, including options such as “Package Deals”, “Targeted” acquisitions and/or Changes of Use were proposed, which would include strategies such as purchasing vacant units and approaching landholders in the borough or establishing new partnership working. This included the Council contacting housebuilders who may require more certainty over sales in order to deliver sites.
- 5.4 This report has followed one of those lines of exploration and proposes to bring forward additional affordable housing supply through an agreement with a developer to acquire completed “off the shelf” units, that will meet the Council’s standards and specification. This project would be in keeping with what was previously proposed at Cabinet in July 2020 where the Council can pursue “targeted acquisitions”, and approved by Cabinet in June 2023 to consider the acquisition of additional units within this development.
- 5.5 In leading and delivering the New Council Housebuilding Programme, the Council achieved “Investment Partner Status” with Homes England in 2021. The Council can now bid for grant from Homes England to subsidise the affordable housing developments. The Council have been successful in obtaining grant for HRA Garage Sites Phase 2 (Buffett and Scarfe Way and Hardings Close), Military Road and Elfreda House, and more recently HRA Garage sites Phase 3 (Cross Cottages and Wheeler Close). The grant makes the delivery of newbuild social rent housing more viable to deliver and reduces the Council’s HRA borrowing (and overall debt).
- 5.6 The Council intends to continue to utilise its Investment Partner status by bidding for grant for subsidy towards all qualifying affordable schemes in the development programme going forward.

- 5.7 The Council has been exploring avenues to work with developers to acquire suitable units, at a discounted rate, directly from the developers as “off the shelf” acquisitions. As a result, the Council was made aware of a potentially suitable development off Boxted Road in Mile End. The developer was seeking a suitable Affordable Housing provider to acquire the section 106 units.
- 5.8 This site will provide a total of 26 units with a mix of 3 and 4 bed properties. With Cabinet approval provided in June 2023, The Council agreed to acquire 7 of the units, with the potential to agree further acquisitions closer to the completion date. Cabinet delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder of Housing along with the Chief Operating Officer to authorise further acquisitions within the development.
- 5.9 A viability appraisal has been completed to ensure that the offer for the additional 6 units is viable. A red book valuation by an external agent has been instructed to ensure the acquisitions are value for money, and the offer is subject to this valuation report.
- 5.10 Colchester Borough Homes will provide the service of the “Clerk of Works” and will work closely with the council and the developer to ensure that the units are delivered to a high standard and meet the Council’s specification. The homes will be designed to meet Nationally Described Space Standards and will be as energy efficient as possible with an estimated Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of B83.
- 5.11 This opportunity will enable the Council to bring forward additional affordable housing which may qualify for Homes England Grant funding under the Affordable Homes Programme 2021-2026. The Council will submit a bid for grant funding towards the costs of this scheme. In the unlikely event that the bid to Homes England is unsuccessful, the Council can choose to subsidise the project through the Right to Buy Receipts reserves or other internal subsidies.
- 5.12 Any offer to the developer would be subject to satisfactory valuation, clean title and all necessary due diligence.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 The New Council Housebuilding Programme has an existing EQIA. The proposals are considered to have an overall positive impact on protected groups and they will have a positive impact on the availability of housing in Colchester, especially the availability of affordable housing.
- 6.2 Maximising the supply of new homes is part of the Council’s commitment to improving communities and our city as a place to live. By implementing the recommendations, the Council will have due regard to its Public Sector Duty and will continue to work to tackle discrimination and inequality and help to create a fairer society, improve housing choice and social mobility (including for protected groups).
- 6.3 The proposals will help to improve the housing conditions and life chances of people with protected characteristics, including homeless people, low-income households, people

with disabilities and families on the housing needs register. They will therefore have a positive impact on Equality and Diversity.

7. Strategic Plan References

7.1 The services and projects delivered by the Council and CBH contribute directly to the following Strategic Plan 2023-2026 priority areas:

- **Respond to the climate emergency**

Reduce our carbon footprint.

Ensure Council homes benefit from increased energy efficiency

- **Deliver Modern Services for a Modern City**

The Colchester Council family of organisations work together to a shared and ambitious vision for the future of our city.

Continue to invest in our homes to deliver quality social homes and services for tenants and leaseholders.

Put communities and their needs at the heart of our vision and support local areas as they help shape and deliver services which are most important to them.

Work closely with partners, charities and organisations to add value.

- **Improve health, well-being, and happiness**

Tackle the causes of inequality and support our most vulnerable people.

Work with residents and partners to address quality of life and issues of happiness.

- **Deliver homes for those most in need**

Increase the number and quality and types of affordable homes.

Meet our duty to prevent or assist those facing homelessness.

8. Consultation

8.1 This report does not require public consultation. Consultation took place at the planning stage of this development.

9. Publicity Considerations

9.1 This report does not require any publicity considerations. The units will be advertised for applications via the Gateway to Homechoice.

10. Financial implications

10.1 A provision for further Council new build schemes was included for 22/23 and 23/24 in the Housing Investment Programme agreed by Cabinet on 26th January 2022 and 25th January 2023. This funding provision has now been allocated for the year. This report is seeking authorisation for additional HRA capital funding required to acquire the 6 units.

10.2 The total estimated cost of the project to the HRA, for the units is outlined in Part B of this report.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

11.1 Health, wellbeing and community safety would be positively influenced by the provision of new affordable and well-designed affordable housing that help improve the quality of life for future occupants.

12. Health and Safety Implications

12.1 There are no particular health and safety implications attached to the decision. Construction health and safety is managed by the developer and will be monitored by Colchester Borough Homes on behalf of the Council.

13. Risk Management Implications

13.1 There is a risk that the development could be delayed or construction is not completed. This will be mitigated through legal contracts, with the completion of contracts being subject to relevant terms and conditions. The developers solicitor will retain the deposit as a stakeholder, which would be fully refundable to the Council, if the development does not meet the conditions stipulated.

13.2 The effects of Covid and Brexit have delayed newbuild projects and increased cost due to lack of labour, materials, components and delivery drivers. This risk will be mitigated by a set offer being agreed for the units, and with a completion long stop date being included in the contract.

13.3 The site may have issues that affect the deliverability and viability of the units, such constraints due to Rights of Way and Easements. Contracts will not be exchanged until all due diligence is complete, and the solicitors can confirm a good freehold title for each unit.

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

14.1 The units are being developed to a high standard, with input on the specifications from Colchester Borough Homes. The units have an estimated EPC rating of B83.



Cabinet

12 July 2023

Item
8(iii)

Report of	Client Services Manager	Author	Terri Hamilton ☎ 03300 538007
Title	Disposal of 106/106a Shrub End Road		
Wards affected	Shrub End		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 106/106a Shrub End Road is a property owned by the Council within the Housing Revenue Account. It was most recently leased and used by a local charitable housing provider, as a house in multiple occupation (HMO) (No. 106A), with a small ground floor area retained as support worker office space (No. 106). Before that it was a doctor's surgery.
- 1.2 In February 2023, an options paper was provided to the previous Portfolio Holder for Housing and Communities, with information on the different options available for the future use of this site. It was agreed that further information was required on two of the options; to sell the site and recycle the money into acquiring two x 4 bed homes, or to remodel the site into two x 4 bed homes.
- 1.3 A Portfolio Holder decision report was provided in March 2023, recommending that the site was advertised for sale on the open market, for a period of 8 weeks for offers over an agreed amount.
- 1.4 By 14th June 2023, cash offers had been received over this asking price. The agent sought best and final offers.
- 1.5 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to progress with the sale of 106 / 106a Shrub End Road for the amount stated in the report in Part B of the agenda and to recycle the money from the sale into acquiring two x 4 bed houses for letting as a general needs property, in addition to the Acquisitions Programme previously agreed by Cabinet.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To approve the recommendation to dispose of 106/106a Shrub End Road, Colchester by open market sale for the amount stated in the report on Part B of the agenda.
- 2.2 To authorise the Head of Strategic Housing in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to agree offers made on the property, if the offer stated in the report on Part B of the agenda withdraws, and settle final terms and consequential matters to complete any sale.
- 2.3 To recycle the money gained from the sale of the site, to acquire two family homes, with a preference of 4 bed properties, within the acquisitions programme, in addition to the annual target for acquisitions.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 Significant investment would be required to bring the energy performance of the two properties up to the Council's average Band C energy rating. The estimated cost to refurbish the property into one x 4+ bed house, remodelling the current layout, is included in the report on Part B of the agenda.
- 3.2 The estimated cost to redevelop the unit into two x 4 bed houses is included in the report on Part B of the agenda.
- 3.3 If the property was sold for the amount offered, and two x 4 bed houses were acquired recycling these proceeds, the cost of the acquired units is in the report on Part B of the agenda. *(based on average market values)*.
- 3.4 By disposing of 106 / 106a Shrub End Road on the open market, the Council would be ensuring that the most value for money process is followed and this would likely be the quickest route to gaining the much-needed family homes.
- 3.5 By providing two further four-bedroom properties the Council would be providing secure larger accommodation to two families in housing need that is currently in short supply.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 To refurbish the property into a 4+ bed home. This option would only meet the needs of one family on the housing register rather than two families.
- 4.2 To remodel the unit into two x 4 bed homes, project managed by Colchester Borough Homes. There is a possibility that this option may not achieve planning permission, proving to be a costly exercise with no guarantee of the outcome.
- 4.3 Do nothing and leave the property as is. However, the property would fall into disrepair with further costs for keeping it in a dilapidated state.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 The site was originally valued in August 2022 (Appendix A to the report in Part B of the agenda). Since this date, the estate agents have confirmed that property values are decreasing and as at 13th March 2023, Fenn Wright have suggested the value is more likely to be in the region of the price stated in the report on Part B of the agenda.. There are concerns that the value may continue to decrease.
- 5.2 Below is a table that shows the need for a 4-bed property, in each ward of Colchester. The table includes the average cost of a lower quartile 4 bed property in each ward, alongside the estimated cost of acquiring two x 4 bed properties in that ward. The rows highlighted show the wards with highest need for 4 beds, as well as the Shrub End Ward.

(Property cost information according to Hometrack March 23).

Ward	Applicants in need of 4+ bed	Average cost of 4 bed house in ward	Cost of 2 x Av 4 bed
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Berechurch	6	£360,000	£720,000
Castle	17	£448,125	£896,250
Greenstead	17	£255,625	£511,250
Highwoods	5	£396,250	£792,500
Lexden and Braiswick	3	£462,500	£925,000
Marks Tey and Layer	3	£431,000	£862,000
Mersea and Pyefleet	0	£552,500	£1,105,000
Mile End	16	£414,877	£829,754
New Town and Christ Church	3	£425,000	£850,000
Old Heath and the Hythe	13	£442,500	£885,000
Prettygate	1	£417,520	£835,040
Rural North	7	£482,500	£965,000
Shrub End	6	£330,000	£660,000
St Annes and St Johns	3	£411,250	£822,500
Stanway	7	£410,000	£820,000
Tiptree	2	£415,000	£830,000
Wivenhoe	4	£425,000	£850,000

5.3 The acquisition costs do not include any potential refurbishment works that may be required to an acquired property. The current average for refurbishment works to the properties within the acquisition programme is confirmed in Part B of the report.

5.4 The properties have poor energy ratings below the Council's average Band C for all social housing stock. 106 Shrub End Road has an energy performance certificate of D57 and 106a Shrub End Road has an energy performance certificate of E46. The estimated costs for refurbishing the property are shown in Part B of the report.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

6.1 The New Council Housebuilding Programme has an existing EQIA. The proposals are considered to have an overall positive impact on protected groups and they will have a positive impact on the availability of housing in Colchester, especially the availability of affordable housing.

6.2 Maximising the supply of new homes is part of the Council's commitment to improving communities and our city as a place to live. By implementing the recommendations, the Council will have due regard to its Public Sector Duty and will continue to work to tackle discrimination and inequality and help to create a fairer society, improve housing choice and social mobility (including for protected groups).

6.3 The proposals will help to improve the housing conditions and life chances of people with protected characteristics, including homeless people, low-income households, people with disabilities and families on the housing needs register. They will therefore have a positive impact on Equality and Diversity.

7. Strategic Plan References

7.1 The services and projects delivered by the Council and Colchester Borough Homes contribute directly to the following Strategic Plan 2023-2026 priority areas:

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- **Deliver homes for those most in need**

Increase the number and quality and types of affordable homes.

Meet our duty to prevent or assist those facing homelessness.

8. Consultation

8.1 This report does not require public consultation.

9. Publicity Considerations

9.1 This report does not currently have any publicity considerations.

9.2 Although if left for a period of time could cause some concern for local residents and become a target for anti-social behaviour causing the Council negative publicity.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1 The disposal of the properties would result in an ongoing loss of annual rental income to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). However due to the current condition of the properties they are currently empty and thus no income is being produced. The Housing Revenue Account will benefit from the income generated from the two newly acquired family homes.
- 10.2 The disposal of the properties will remove the requirement to undertake substantial capital works on them over the life of the 30 year Asset Management Strategy and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan.
- 10.3 The property has been independently valued by a local agent and the details of the appraisals are in Appendix A to the report in part B of the agenda. The offer is substantially over this valuation amount.
- 10.5 The income generated from the sale of the properties will be recycled into the Housing Revenue Account and used to acquire two x family homes, increasing the supply of council homes.

11. Health, Wellbeing and Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 Health, wellbeing and community safety would be positively influenced by the provision of new affordable housing, improving the quality of life for future occupants.

12. Health and Safety Implications

- 12.1 There are no particular health and safety implications attached to the decision.

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 There are no particular risk implications attached to the decision

14. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 14.1 It is recognised that the performance of housing assets has a significant impact on the Council's overall contribution to net carbon targets. Removing poor performing assets from the Council's estate is a step towards meeting the Council's goal of delivering all our homes to an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of Band C by 2030. Work to these homes will contribute to delivering this goal.

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Background Papers

PFH Options paper – Feb 2023:

PFH Decision Report – March 2023

Policy Panel Work Programme: Recommendation from the Policy Panel meeting of 28 June 2028

RESOLVED that the Panel receive the following updates:

- a) Colchester Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy, on 2 August 2023;
- b) Financial inequality and cost of living, on 27 September 2023

RECOMMENDED to CABINET that the Policy Panel be given approval to examine the following subjects:

- a) Equality and Diversity Policy;
- b) The Council's Policy on Procurement;
- c) Commemorations locally, including benches, flags and statues;
- d) Ways to support an increase in the retail offer of Colchester and economic draw of its shops;
- e) Sport and leisure facilities and provision;
- f) Mapping and examination of community assets and asset-based community development approach;
- g) The Council's Licensing, Food and Health and Safety Policy;
- h) Policy on rights to bid on assets of community value, when up for sale;
- i) The Council's Parking Strategy.

PETITIONS, PUBLIC STATEMENTS, QUESTIONS

(i) Have Your Say submissions from members of the public

Date of Meeting	Details of Members of the Public	Subject Matter	Form of Response	Date Completed
Council, 24 May 2023	Angel Kalyan	Progress of her dispute with the Council	Verbal response and invitation to meet provided at the meeting provided by Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy.	24 May 2023
Council 24 May 2023	The High Steward, Alderman Sir Bob Russell, Alderman Lewis, Alderman Higgins	Honorary Alderman Eligibility Criteria	Issue raised were discussed in the debate	24 May 2023
Cabinet 7, June 2023	Sir Bob Russell	The legitimacy of the administration	Verbal response at the meeting provided by Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy	7 June 2023
Cabinet 7, June 2023	Linda Gaine, Louise Davey	Netball Courts at Highwoods	Verbal response provided at the meeting by Cllr Burrows, Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Culture and Heritage.	7 June 2023; full written response to follow.
Cabinet, 7 June 2023	Piter Vera	Location for pilot of Change Recycling	Verbal response provided at the meeting by Cllr Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources.	7 June 2023

