



Policy Panel Meeting

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

Wednesday, 27 September 2023 at 18:00

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

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Policy Panel – Terms of Reference

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

COLCHESTER CITY COUNCIL
Policy Panel
Wednesday, 27 September 2023 at 18:00

The Policy Panel Members are:

Councillor Jocelyn Law	Chairman
Councillor Lesley Scott-Boutell	Deputy Chairman
Councillor Kevin Bentley	
Councillor Sue Lissimore	
Councillor Sam McCarthy	
Councillor Rhys Smithson	
Councillor Julie Young	

The Policy Panel Substitute Members are:

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

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

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

1 Welcome and Announcements

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

2 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.

3 Substitutions

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

4 Urgent Items

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

5 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Councillors will be invited to confirm that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 August 2023 are a correct record.

Policy Panel Minutes 2 August 2023

7 - 10

6 Have Your Say! (Hybrid meetings)

Members of the public may make representations to the meeting. This can be made either in person at the meeting or by joining the meeting remotely and addressing the Panel via Zoom. Each representation may be no longer than three minutes. Members of the public wishing to address the Panel remotely may register their wish to address the meeting by e-mailing democratic.services@colchester.gov.uk by 12.00 noon on the working day before the meeting date. In addition a written copy of the representation will need to be supplied for use in the event of unforeseen technical difficulties preventing participation at the meeting itself.

□

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

7 Future of retail vision

11 - 14

At its meeting of August 2023 Policy Panel requested for an agenda item to be included on the forward programme for 2023/24 that explored the Future of Retail in Colchester. The Colchester Business Improvement District have been invited to provide an overview to the Panel.

8 City Centre Marketing & Inward Investment

15 - 24

This report provides an overview of inward investment in the city centre. It also considers investment beyond the city centre and marketing of the Colchester proposition.

9 Cost of Living Crisis – Council Response reflection and next steps

25 - 30

This report sets out the dates of the Work Programme for 2023-2024 for the Policy Panel and gives the Panel an opportunity to consider what subjects for which it may wish to request Cabinet approval for the Panel to consider in the 2023-24 municipal year, and to formally make recommendations to put these to Cabinet for approval. Cabinet may also wish to consider what subjects it might want the Policy Panel to consider during 2023-24.

11 **Exclusion of the Public (not Scrutiny or Executive)**

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

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

POLICY PANEL

2 August 2023

Attendees: Councillors Bentley, Lissimore, McCarthy, Scott-Boutell, Smithson and J. Young.

Substitutes: Councillor Smalls for Councillor Law.

Also in attendance: Councillor King

77. Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

78. Colchester Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy

Karen Syrett, Head of Planning, provided an update on how work on the Strategy was progressing. An in-house approach had been agreed. The Local Plan covered more than just housing and included blue and green infrastructure. A report to the following week's Local Plan Committee meeting would lay out a new approach to consultation and drafting of this strategy. Key themes such as the local green network and waterways were to be investigated, with an audit of blue and green infrastructure being carried out, working with communities and parish/town councils to progress action. The Council sought ways to improve existing spaces and waterways. New housing could facilitate better spaces, green and blue infrastructure, biodiversity and wildlife conditions, working with local people who had local knowledge.

A Panel member raised issues with the grounds maintenance contracts in place for some new housing schemes, with many residents unhappy at the service received. The Head of Planning was asked how the Strategy would cover the right of residents to well-maintained green spaces, and promised to take this issue away for consideration.

A Panel member asked if there was a variable percentage of green infrastructure from ward to ward, and whether a deficit counted towards whether conditions were right for additional housing. The Head of Housing explained that Prettygate Ward had the lowest percentage of open space, and agreed that there were differences between wards. Opportunities were being identified, including where green spaces could be created or improved, plus where housing should be allocated and where to protect land.

The Panel complimented the interactive map available online, but queried how residents would be able to contribute to consultation if they did not wish to, or could not, communicate via online avenues. The Head of Housing gave assurance that the

consultations would be open to all, with a range of methods for engagement. The Panel discussed the proposed length of timescales and the Head of Housing underlined that the Local Plan process was a lengthy one, taking time to conduct proper engagement. There would be information available for people from an early stage.

Rosa Tanfield, Head of Neighbourhood Services, explained that once the guiding principles were developed, this would give consistency in the approach across the Council. It was expected that the draft Strategy would come back to the Policy Panel for further consideration in Winter of the 2024-25 municipal year.

The Panel asked how the Leader of the Council planned to manage long term financial commitments. Councillor King, Leader of the Council, spoke of the serious choices and trade-offs facing the Council, noting that having policy without funding would be pointless. Funding would be found where it could, likely from multiple sources. The County Council and its Leader, Councillor Bentley, were a partner with a visionary approach to tackling climate change and a range of charities were potential partners also. The Leader stated that the challenge was understood, and that work was ongoing to answer it.

The Head of Housing described how the initial Local Plan 'call for sites' had resulted in around 95% of sites identified being for housing. There were now increases in sites identified for increasing biodiversity and blue or green infrastructure. Work on the City Centre Masterplan had sparked responses on issues such as how to use open spaces and waterways. The detail for the Masterplan relating to the green spaces and river on a site by site basis would come later, after proposals had been worked up. Biodiversity studies and ecological assessments would then be carried out on a site-specific basis.

The Panel discussed considerations as to income generation from blue and green assets. Rosa Tanfield, Head of Neighbourhood Services, explained that this had been considered as part of the transformation savings for the Council, with part being to generate income from sites. This was planned for delivery over coming years.

RESOLVED that the Policy Panel notes the report on Colchester Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy.

79. Grounds Maintenance report

Councillor Bentley (by reason of being Leader of Essex County Council) declared a non-pecuniary interest in the following item pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 7 (5).

Rosa Tanfield, Head of Neighbourhood Services, explained the background to this item, including the consideration of different studies and options when deciding how to proceed with grounds maintenance in the future. The original idverde contract had an option for an extension of up to three years, if sufficient notice were given by the Council. This dictated the timescales in place for extending the contract and putting in place a new in-house service to follow that extension. An update was given of the work being carried out to migrate to an in-house service, and the increased

pressures on the team were highlighted.

Decisions had been taken regarding reduction in grass cutting and verge maintenance, owing to cost pressures, and the work to minimise the use of glyphosate weedkillers.

A question was asked about the 'Responder' system, as to whether elected members would have a dedicated platform to use, with a Panel member concerned at the current lack of communication between elected members and idverde. The Head of Neighbourhood Services explained that the system was now called 'Tasksmart'. Development of the system had been driven forward, working with the street care and safety teams. Councillors could log issues, generate reference numbers and receive regular updates. Details were then given as to further work to be done, including development of the website. The system was not yet in place but work was pushing forward and details with a timescale would be given as soon as possible. In the meantime, councillors could use the idverde website to see the timetable of cutting and mowing to be done.

The Panel asked whether shared service options were being considered. The Head of Neighbourhood Services related that not many conversations had been held as yet on this, due to the current contract extension for three years, but that it would be a good option to hold these conversations with potential partners. A timetable for looking at shared service options was requested by a Panel member, and the Leader of the Council explained that significant progress had been made, mindful of future devolution and aims to maximise shared services for back office functions. Examples were given, and the Leader of the Council noted that local authorities in North Essex had signed a protocol to commit to this.

A Panel member asked whether there were easier ways for councillors to access the Highway Rangers and to get information on cuttings more easily for residents. The Head of Neighbourhood Services explained that Essex County Council [ECC] had ended their funding for the Highways Rangers and that the service had been withdrawn. The City Council had retained one of the Rangers to work here, but any highways issues now had to be reported to Essex Highways. More information on location of verge cuttings would soon be available for councillors to check.

The Panel discussed concerns raised by Unison, regarding the pay for idverde staff, and asked if the issue had been resolved for the remainder of the contract. Jess Douglas, Head of People, explained that, if the terms and conditions idverde set for their staff were not equal to those of Council staff then, should they transfer to the Council, their terms and conditions would be equalised. It was explained that idverde set their own staff's pay levels, and that Council representatives would soon be meeting again with the company.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services was asked whether the in-house model of provision would be viable, with a Panel member expressing doubt as to whether the Council could fund the required capital spending. The Head of Neighbourhood Services noted that the situation now was different from that in 2022 and would change again over the next three years, so the situation and plans for service provision would need to be examined over time. The idverde contract could not be extended again, but alternative providers could be examined, if necessary.

The Panel discussed complaints regarding no-mow May. A Panel member remarked that the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services and Waste had admitted that there had been problems with idverde. The member asked what talks had been held with idverde and whether it was true that the approach had been changed now, to end the lack of maintenance. Criticism was voiced as to poor communications from idverde to councillors, who needed to know when grass cutting was planned. Detail was requested as to the geographical areas covered by the idverde contract and as to whether there were financial penalties for idverde, should they not deliver on their contractual obligations, and whether the Council enforced these penalties.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that, next year, no-mow May would only be observed in conservation areas. This year had seen unexpected levels of growth caused by a cycle of rain and sunshine. The impact of weather had been to make mowing take much longer, with worse-looking results. As the weather improved, idverde had performed better. The company's website gave information as to where they would be working in the Colchester area. The contract with idverde covered all Council and Colchester Borough Homes land, plus certain land owned by ECC and the Head of Neighbourhood Services offered to see if an online map could show the areas involved, and provide a briefing note to Panel members.

The Panel were informed that Council staff met with idverde for weekly work/contract meetings, and that Project Quality Management [PQM] checks and key performance indicators [KPIs] were used to ensure targets were met. Financial penalties would be issued where the contractor failed, and dates set by which remedial actions would need to be in place.

Information was requested regarding weed spraying, by both the Council and County Council, along with the Council's work to remove dead vegetation from the roadside following spraying. The Head of Neighbourhood Services had spoken to ECC officers about this, with ECC spraying priority roads and the Council conducting street sweeping and removal of dead weed mulch. The ECC spraying schedule would be obtained so that road sweeping could occur at the correct time to clear detritus and prevent further weed growth. Spraying would be conducted from September onward. The Council had eradicated use of glyphosate wherever possible, but officers could not confirm what products were used by ECC.

The Panel discussed the weed spraying conducted, with the belief that ECC conducted spot weedkilling, avoiding wildflower verges and not spraying where weeds were not found. Incidents where ECC officers had sprayed and killed plants on private property/in gardens. The Head of Neighbourhood Services agreed to raise these concerns with colleagues at the County Council.

80. Work Programme 2023-24

The Panel noted that two items had not been added to the work programme, as officers had received advice that these were almost wholly dictated by statute or national regulations. These items were the Licensing Food Health and Safety Policy, and the Council's approach towards supporting community bids to purchase community assets which were being put up for sale.

RESOLVED that the Panel approved its work programme for 2023-24.



Policy Panel

Item

7

September 2023

Report of	Head of Neighbourhood Services	Author	Rosa Tanfield
Title	Future of retail vision		☎ 0330 053 8047
Wards affected	Castle Ward		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 At its meeting of August 2023 Policy Panel requested for an agenda item to be included on the forward programme for 2023/24 that explored the Future of Retail in Colchester. The Colchester Business Improvement District have been invited to provide an overview to the Panel.

2. Action Required

- 2.1 For information

3. Reason for Review

- 3.1 Requested agenda item by the Policy Panel and agreed by Cabinet.

4. Background Information

4.1 At its meeting of August 2023 Policy Panel requested for an agenda item to be included on the forward programme for 2023/24 that explored the Future of Retail in Colchester. The Colchester Business Improvement District have been invited to provide an overview to the Panel.

4.2 Our Colchester Business Improvement District (BID) commissioned Savills Place to carry out research into the changes needed to support retail businesses in the City Centre now and in the future. The research included a review of the national trends being seen across many towns and cities, of existing demographics, strategies, funding, and plans that are already in place to support the City Centre's development both short and long term. This was supplemented by bespoke Colchester specific research into footfall, dwell, spend and vacancy rates. The in-depth research report is available as a supplementary document to this retail strategy. The strategy is broken down into four strategic pillars, these are:

- **Brilliant Basics** - Clean, green, safe, and bright – well maintained street scenes and public realm which creates a pleasant backdrop for a great visitor experience.
- **Repurposed Retail** - Empty space does not need to be empty space, it just needs to be repurposed in ways that mirrors today's consumers 'wants and needs.' Providing alternative uses will support existing retail, bring in new, relevant retail and residents for today and the future.
- **Environmental Experiences** - Net zero does not have to be zero-fun. Social value, well-being and community are no longer secondary matters. Create a City Centre which Builds Back Greener, understands that sustainability is beginning to play a part in consumer buying decisions and gives people space to breathe.
- **Creative Communications** - We know Colchester is a great City, but we need to spread the word. Not only to other residents but to visitors and investors alike. Stand apart and be seen.

4.3 CACI data found that Colchester is expected to have high appeal to residents within its core catchment, demonstrated by a very strong market share of 79.1% and a comparison goods Market Potential of £191 million. This is also shown in the Visa data, with local postcodes having the highest levels of spend. Average Transaction Values (ATV) has decreased over the last couple of years however the number of transactions has increased alongside the total number of cards. Over 75% of the spend in the City Centre is expected to originate from within the core catchment of the City with its primary and secondary catchment areas reaching a population of over 360k people and a potential spend of over £254.7 million.

4.4 A core piece of work that the BID is working on is an Inward Investment Plan for the City Centre to ensure that we have the resources to demonstrate to potential businesses and investors that Colchester is ready and suitable for their business. With 65% of our vacant units in the City Centre now being vacant for 11 months or more, this demonstrates a need to support more change of uses to potential offices or residential; however, we need to ensure that Retail is still in prime position for our visitors. So how do we do this and how can the City Council enable change:

- Enable a pro-retail approach to communications. The recent City Centre Masterplan did not talk about improving and enhancing retail, instead it talked about opportunities of out-of-town developments taking footfall from the City Centre

- Invest with the BID in a detailed Inward Investment Plan to begin approaching a wider range of potential retailers to the City Centre
- Invest in the City Centre Market to enable it to be more of an incubator for small retail businesses to test their product in the City Centre
- Support the BID in creating accessible and cost-effective pop-up schemes for new businesses to test their business models in vacant units through business rates relief and use of unused, council-owned premises in the City Centre

5. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

5.1 As no recommendation or decision is being requested, this section does not apply.

6. Standard References

6.1 There are no particular references to the Strategic Plan; consultation or publicity considerations or financial; community safety; health and safety or risk management implications; environmental and sustainability implications.

27 September 2023

Report of	Matthew Sterling, Head of Economic Growth	Author	Karen Turnbull
Title	City Centre Marketing & Inward Investment		
Wards affected	All wards		

1. Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an overview of inward investment in the city centre. It also considers investment beyond the city centre and marketing of the Colchester proposition.

1.2 It takes as its basis the findings and recommendations from the City Status Task and Finish Marketing Group, which was led by the Our Colchester BID over the Spring of this year.

1.3 The group comprised key business people and stakeholders who assessed the current approach to investment, how it is marketed, who to, and how enquiries are handled and who by. They concluded one key message for Colchester’s proposition and have made recommendations about how the process around inward investment and marketing could be improved.

1.4 What follows is a digest of the City Status Marketing Task and Finish Group’s report which recommends these responses to these tasks:

- 1. Develop Vision Pillars** - upon which other visions, such as the Masterplan, the BID Business Plan and funding applications’ visions, can be compared, tested and formulated. The three vision pillars recommended are that:

**The City of Colchester should be:
Memorable, Liveable and Viable.**

- 2. Develop an overarching narrative – aka the Colchester ‘Elevator Pitch’** – a common theme for us all to ‘talk up’ Colchester when businesses talk about their products, services, target markets, investments and aspirations. The recommended overarching narrative is that:

**A ‘tech’ theme came through strongly and should be a NEW comms message for Colchester.
The infrastructure investment, digital and tech companies and the innovation taking place means that the ‘product’ is here. It’s a product which complements the history and heritage messages well and positions Colchester as a forward-thinking, open orientated, city.**

3. Identify Target Audiences and Key Messages – in broad terms are:	
<i>Target audience</i>	<i>Key message</i>
Existing residents	Colchester Connections: creating the next generation of Colchester and connecting it through stories with its long and important history
Would-be residents (Generation Y 'Millennials', Generation Z are 'the next generation')	Colchester: for next generation living
Visitors (Celebrating Colchester's important past)	Dig Deeper: Connect with Colchester's Past Generations
Businesses who are already here and need to be retained here	Colchester: for next generation businesses
Investors (whoever they are)	Colchester: for next generation businesses

4. Develop an Action Plan to improve Colchester's approach to (inward) investment and marketing

Working in partnership to:

- Understand market demand and supply
- Coordinate marketing activities and reinforce shared narrative
- Identify opportunities through networks
- Be more confident together about Colchester's strong offer
- Influence the future of the city whenever opportunity presents
- Challenge negatives from a position of understanding

BID to evolve the role of the City Status Marketing Task and Finish Group into an (inward) investment and marketing coordination group which would form the basis for the partnership.

Undertake a review of the Colchester Ultraready website, its content in terms of investment prospectuses, and change its name.

Work together to assess whether Colchester could be termed a 'SMART City' following numerous tech projects and initiatives taking place.

2. Action Required

2.1 Policy Panel is asked to consider the report and to take a view as to whether recommendations to Cabinet are required.

3. Reason for Scrutiny

3.1 Investment is key to the economic resilience and growth of Colchester and the surrounding area. This injection of capital shows belief in a place, supports business confidence, enhances its productivity, competitiveness and distinctiveness and provides the right conditions for economic growth.

3.2 From the business/organisation's perspective growth offers the potential for good returns to shareholders, investors and stakeholders from increased productivity. This can be in the form of increased profits but also in the way companies and organisations support local communities. This can be by offering new job opportunities and the chance for people to realise their personal and economic potential through the skills they acquire and the local spend they invest themselves.

3.3 From the place's perspective investment demonstrates confidence in the place. More companies or growth of existing companies diversify the local economy which in turn makes it more resilient to economic shocks. In this way it also contributes to the image and reputation of a place and can be one of the factors which make a place distinctive.

4. Reason for Review

4.1 The Councils' Local Government Association Peer Review, which took place last Autumn, identified that there was an opportunity to review inward investment. City Status also provided a new context to look at this important subject as one of the rationales for applying was that city status would enable Colchester to fulfil its economic and cultural potential of a growing place.

4.2 This challenge was endorsed by The Ambassadors' Group, a group of local business people and key stakeholders, and the content of this report is based on the outcomes of the work it commissioned.

4.3 Colchester City Council approved a new Economic Strategy in February 2023. One of the four priorities identified was in the Place theme where inward investment was identified as a key objective to capitalise on Colchester's new status as a city.

5. Background Information

1. Colchester: an inward investment hot-spot

Between 2014 and 2021, the life of Colchester's previous Economic Strategy, an estimated £333.8m had been invested in the former Borough by the public and private sector.

This investment brought new jobs, new learning opportunities, added choice to improve the quality of life in and the experience of Colchester and have made the city even more investable.

The investments were spent over a variety of sectors:

- Tourism, hospitality, leisure - £86.4m
- Creative, digital, tech - £2.6m
- Sustainable energy - £3.5m
- Supporting retail - £55.1m
- New retail beyond the town centre - £72m
- Construction – new offices for start-ups £7.3m, University of Essex £85.5m, Parkside offices at the University £27m (part of an overall £250m investment at the University of Essex)
- New office space: Amphora I and II

4.2 The Inward Investment Landscape

Just as there are many factors which determine where an organisation chooses to invest (availability of land, premises, labour with the right skills, supply chain businesses, raw materials, distribution network, digital infrastructure, quality of life for staff, financial incentives etc) there is a structure which has a role to play in influencing investment, whether that be foreign direct investment (FDI), relocations from within the UK, or investment by businesses already in a place. That framework is outlined below:

- Government policy is a major influence in determining how the UK competes globally. A recent example is the estimated £500m incentive to Tata, Jaguar Land Rover for a new gigafactory in Somerset. The 616 acre factory is expected to supply 40% of UK car battery needs by 2033
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) have traditionally channelled EU Structural Funds into projects in places. An example locally would be the development of the Creative Business Centre at 37 Queen Street, operated by SPACE Studios
- Counties: Essex County Council is currently developing an inward investment campaign titled: *Extraordinary Essex*
- Partnerships: NEEB North Essex Economic Board / Freeport East / Our Colchester BID – have aspirations around (inward) investment, as do
- Colchester: Council, anchor organisations, individual company activities and Board decisions

4.3 Investment: so much more than ‘inward’

The Ambassadors Group of local influential business people and stakeholders were keen to discuss how Colchester, as a new city, was positioned in marketing terms. What should the ‘overarching narrative’ be?

This was both timely and relevant. City status offered the opportunity to talk about Colchester in a new way. The Ambassadors tasked the Our Colchester BID to gather business interests into a Task & Finish Group to look at inward investment, the overarching narrative and marketing and to make recommendations.

City Status Marketing Task & Finish Group came to some clear conclusions.

1. Investment is so much more than ‘inward’ because to focus only on external injections of investment overlooks the important contribution of investment by existing companies and organisations in and around Colchester.

These investments by local companies have the same desirable outputs in terms of new jobs, new skills, innovation in processes and products and services,

positive impacts on local supply chains and fundamentally, growth of the local economy.

Investment takes place beyond the city centre because people choose to travel to work in Colchester and therefore contribute to the local economy and there are a significant number of businesses which are based in and support rural communities.

The group concluded that investment is about:

- Driving new businesses to locate here / remain here, including foreign direct investment (FDI)
- Growing businesses already here: new jobs, capital investment, productivity growth
- Creating new jobs and retaining jobs already here
- Developing staff and training them with new skills
- Securing other types of funding: Section 106 funding, Grant funding
- Market driven investment by firms to remain competitive– new products/services, innovation
- Infrastructure Investment to provide the conditions where businesses can thrive, like high capacity Ultrafast Broadband and 5G
- Tech investment into skilled people, infrastructure, business networks and clusters
- Investing lives here – choosing to move to Colchester to live here / remain here
- Visiting Colchester – investing discretionary household income and precious time here – making memories
- Retaining students here / attracting new students here

4.4 Colchester: the offer/'product'

Colchester – the place. All the aspects of Colchester which make it distinctive, which together, are more than the sum of its parts and therefore make it a compelling place to invest compared to other places.

- The city centre and all of its heritage, cultural, leisure and retail assets
- The rural hinterland
- Location: close to the coast, near to air and sea ports, good road network
- Skills base and pipeline: good education, training, Further and Higher Education offering
- Premises – right quality, right location, right price/rent
- Project pipeline: the £40m regeneration of the city centre is an inward investment programme of projects being delivered out to 2030
- Record of delivery of investment projects: Colchester has an excellent reputation among Grant providers for delivering the projects funded
- Investor and business confidence: there is strong confidence in Colchester, however, like many places it has difficulty providing the right premises in the right location at the right price for investors
- Land availability
- Infrastructure (transport and digital)
- Housing mix and affordability
- Other investments planned/taking place which complement
- Business support offering
- Quality of schools
- Leisure mix – quality of life
- Other support services: care homes, nursing homes
- Commercial heritage

- Proximity to markets
- Policy framework – how Colchester is open to business

4.5 Marketing

Colchester has two very different approaches to 'place marketing'

The www.visitcolchester.com website is the official marketing resource for tourism and leisure which targets visitors and residents alike.

The Marketing Task and Finish Group was impressed at the sophistication and creativity of the tourism marketing campaign and the promotions it included both by the VisitColchester team on social media for instance and also in partnership with other organisations such as VisitEssex and VisitEngland.

The www.colchesterultraready.co.uk website is the official website for business. It has two aspects: firstly to serve existing businesses in and around Colchester with signposting to business support services so that they can invest and grow here, and secondly, to showcase Colchester for inward investment purposes.

The Marketing Task and Finish Group had recommendations for improvement based around shared information, updating, adding content and renaming this website.

4.6 The importance of networks

- 4.6.1 The purpose of the Ultraready website is to be a more of a reference library rather than an advert which delivers enquiries. It is more likely to be used as support after an enquiry is received by sending specific links to enquirers and their agents.
- 4.6.2 Investment enquiries are most often discreet or confidential, and can sometimes even be fully undisclosed. Share prices, competitive positions and company reputations can often be at stake and so most of the work around investment is carried out discreetly through the connections people have.
- 4.6.3 These networks can be personal and professional and enquiries can come into any point at any time. Typically they come in to:
- Commercial agents: eg: Savills, Knight Frank, Whybrows, Strutt Parker and Fenn Wright
 - Senior Council Management
 - Government Departments
 - Essex County Council
 - Business support organisations such as the Colchester Business Enterprise Agency
 - Through sector, personal and professional networks
- 4.6.4 Enquiries are then handled responsively, discreetly and knowledgeably by all these contact points who work with each other to develop bespoke prospectuses for enquirers and to further the relationship with them.
- 4.6.5 An anonymised case study would be a Council investment project a few years ago to develop work space for start-ups. The project required an operator and a discussion was held with a local company in the same sector. They contacted

key interests in their sector network, a visit to Colchester was arranged, meetings held to discuss their requirements and how they could be matched. Ultimately the operator located to Colchester, the first expansion outside of London for them.

4.7 The power of data and research to identify market opportunities

4.7.1 Sometimes research and insight offers an opportunity to explore potential future investments, often through Government grants. Colchester has been active in this area for many years and this approach is delivering or has delivered:

- Care Tech project – evidence points to market opportunity, market research to develop feasibility studies to take to potential funders. A long term aspiration
- The Ultrafast Broadband ‘Digital Strategy’ delivery - £50m+ in partnership with Swedish company, VX Fiber. This is thought to be Colchester’s largest ever foreign direct investment (FDI)
- Destination Development – converting day trips into short breaks to improve the economic impact of tourism. A Feasibility Study in 2008 identified the need for four new hotels. This provided the evidence developers needed for investment. Between 2010 and 2016 six new hotels, worth around £40m investment, brought an additional 67,500 bednights to Colchester and all existing hotels remained with no closures.

4.8 The power of ambition: project pipelines, Grant Applications and the City Centre Masterplan

4.8.1 Colchester has for many years been proactively developing a ‘wish list’ of projects for delivery. This long term aspiration has been an anchor for this fast-growing place.

4.8.2 Such an approach facilitates the assembly of funding packages, the assembly of partnerships such as We Are Colchester which is overseeing the Town Deal regeneration programme and ensures readiness when funding opportunities present themselves.

Examples include:

- The Levelling Up Fund and Town Deal regeneration programme which are collectively seeing an investment of more than £40m into Colchester city centre currently and out to 2030.
- The regeneration of St Botolph’s has been an ambition of the Council for around 30 years. It has been partially delivered with the development of Firstsite, Greyfriars Hotel, the Curzon Cinema and the Creative Business Centre at 37 Queen Street. The development of the old Bus Depot with funding from the Town Deal and Local Growth Fund is a current project in delivery which will add to the transformation of this area of the city.

4.8.3 The emerging City Centre Masterplan identifies opportunities for future development and has recently gone to public consultation. This will be an important document for future investment.

4.9 Company and organisational autonomy

4.9.1 Investment decisions are made autonomously by Boards, Trusts, Government Departments and individuals. There will be drivers for these decisions and objectives which may or may not be shared with other parties.

4.9.2 This means that decisions can be changed at any time for any reason. A recent example being the withdrawal of Vattenfall from the development of the Norfolk Boreas Wind Farm due to significantly deteriorating market conditions (increased costs and supply chain delays).

4.10 Conclusion

4.10.1 Thanks to the work of the City Status Marketing Task and Finish Group we now have an agreed:

- Set of vision 'pillars' for Colchester
- An overarching narrative around 'tech'
- Identified target audiences
- An Action Plan to improve our collective investment approach going forward
- And partnerships in place to make it all resonate

4.10.2 Colchester is open to the development of its economy, both from existing businesses and from new, incoming businesses because both bring new employment opportunities, skills and network development opportunities, and to enhance the diversity of the local economy and the resilience that can bring.

5. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

5.1 This report considers the national, regional and local approach to inward investment and marketing and identifies the potential to be realised offered by people in underrepresented groups.

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

6. Standard References

4. There are no particular references to community safety; health and safety, environmental and sustainability or risk management implications.

7. Strategic Plan References

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

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

6 Consultation



- 6.2 The Ambassadors Group of local influential business people and stakeholders were keen to discuss how Colchester, as a new city, was positioned in marketing terms.
- 6.3 The Ambassadors tasked the Our Colchester BID to gather business interests into a Task & Finish Group to look at inward investment, the overarching narrative and marketing and to make recommendations.
- 6.4 At the time of writing the recommendations of the City Status Marketing Task & Finish Group are being shared with The Ambassadors and the BID as well as being used to engage Council service leaders and Members.

7 Publicity Considerations

- 7.2 The Marketing Task and Finish Group had no recommendations for improvement or change in tourism marketing plans.
- 7.3 However, there are recommendations to improve the Ultraready website and also how we could work more effectively together to create an even stronger network for enquiries in Colchester.

8 Financial implications

- 8.2 It is anticipated that the improvement to the content of the Ultraready website can be achieved within current financial resources.

	Policy Panel		Item 9
	27 September 2023		
Report of	Head of Health Partnerships & Wellbeing	Author	Michelle Tarbun & Zoe Raven
Title	Cost of Living Crisis – Council Response reflection and next steps		07890 397164
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. In September 2022 the Council identified the need to monitor inflation, increased interest rates and rising fuel costs that were pushing our resident's basic costs to unaffordable levels. The Cost-of-Living Crisis was expected to disproportionately affect those on the lowest incomes and to likely worsen existing inequalities across the city.
- 1.2. The Employment & Financial Support team lead on the Council's response to the Cost-of-Living Crisis but increasing in-person support, delivering discretionary funds, identifying the proximate cause of hardship and maximising resident's income.
- 1.3. The Council worked as part of a system with partner organisations and CBH to provide thorough advice, support and signposting advice to our residents.
- 1.4. A significant communications campaign was launched which included a 'One Colchester' response video, social media case studies and Cost-of-Living webpages on the Council's website.

2. Background Information

- 2.1. "The cost-of-living crisis needs an immediate response, from every level of Government, with partners and at pace. This Cabinet will prioritise support for those faced with terrible choices, between food or warmth or other essential needs, working with communities and through our community partners to build community wealth. This will include working with partners, strengthening the capacity of the Council's high performing welfare support team and leveraging resources to provide targeted help for those in extreme difficulty, acknowledging rising demand for help and support for the most vulnerable." – Cabinet Vision and Priorities 8 June 2022.

3. The Employment & Financial Support Team

- 3.1. The team moved from Customer to Communities- now Health Partnerships and Wellbeing. This meant they could work closely with the Communities and Partnerships team to deliver a Cost-of-Living response.
- 3.2. The Employment & Financial Support team currently has 7.9FTE. The team has some employees on core budget contracts, some fixed term funded positions and some seconded positions. There has been a recent staff leaver in the Welfare Benefit team which has increased the demand on the team service to an unsustainable level. Due to the complex cases that specialised officers deal with and the level of training this entails, it is difficult to recruit to these positions for short contracts.
- 3.3. The existence of the Employment & Financial Support team at Colchester City Council means that we can provide a higher level of support to our residents compared to other local authorities. We can provide support in addition to that which the Revenue & Benefits team are able to deliver.
- 3.3. The support delivered by the team includes:
- Budgeting advice
 - Signposting for debt advice and energy saving advice.
 - Direct financial assistance to help with housing costs, council tax costs and energy costs.
 - Full benefit checks and support completing applications.
 - Welfare benefit mandatory reconsiderations, appeals and tribunals.
 - CV writing, interview skills and other employment support
 - The team are currently distributing the Household Support Fund and the Discretionary Council Tax Rebate. They are offering support for residents in completing the online form providing bank details.

4. Delivery of Financial Support

4.1 Financial support is delivered by different Government bodies:

- **Colchester City Council**
 - **Housing Benefit-** for existing customers on legacy benefits, pensioners and residents in supported or temporary accommodation and with a low income
 - **Council Tax Support-** for homeowner or tenants on a low income
 - **Discretionary Housing Payments-** to assist residents in rented accommodation stabilise affordable tenancies. (Housing Benefit or Universal Credit housing element needs to be in payment)

- **Exceptional Hardship Payments-** means tested benefit that reduces the cost of Council Tax bills. (Council Tax Support has to be in payment)
- **Council Tax Support Hardship Fund-** This was extra funding we had to assist residents who are struggling financially. It is likely that this funding will be diminished in September 2023.
- **Department for Work and Pensions**
 - **Universal Credit-** New style benefit for working aged customers. Replacing previous legacy benefits
 - **Legacy Benefits-** Old style benefits such as ESA & JSA which is being replaced by Universal Credit
 - **Cost-of-Living Support Payments-** lumpsum payment to assist with rising costs of living. Residents had to get benefit payments between certain dates to qualify.
 - **Welfare Benefits-** Disability benefits such as PIP, DLA and Attendance Allowance. Payments specifically for residents with living with a condition that affects their daily living needs and mobility.
- **Essex County Council**
 - **Household Support Fund-** Extra Government help awarded to County Councils to assist low-income households, particularly those who may not be eligible for other Government support schemes. ECC has decided to incorporate a substantial amount of this money into their existing Essential Living Fund.

5. Cost of Living Response Statistics

The statistics shown below cover the period September 2022 Until March 2023.

	Number	Financial Help
New referrals to the Welfare and Employment Support Teams	1057	
Discretionary Housing Payment	645	£181,223
Exceptional Hardship Payment	108	£13,686
Foodbank Referrals	261	
Emails Actioned Benefits.advice@colchester.gov.uk	1806	
Phone Calls Actions	3037	
Cost of Living Webpage Views	16,486	

6. Cost of Living Outreach Roadshow

6.1 A key priority for the Council, Policy and Public Initiatives Panel was that in person support was provided to all parts of the City including the rural areas. This would ensure assistance is accessible for residents who could not afford to travel to the City Centre. A roadshow was organised to cover January 2023- March 2023. This included the following locations:

- **ASDA- Turner Rise**
- **Abberton & Langenhoe Community Centre Coffee Morning**
- **Abbey Field Medical Group**
- **Boxted- Harpers Caffe**
- **C3 Impact Hub- Ypres Road**
- **C360 Community Hub**
- **Greenstead Housing Office**
- **Job Centre Plus- Chapel Street**
- **Monkwick- Foodbank**
- **Langham- Community Centre Coffee Morning**
- **Tiptree Library**
- **Tollgate Foodbank**
- **Town Market**
- **Warm & Toasty Club- Shrub End and Greenstead**
- **West Mersea Library**

Findings from this roadshow highlighted that customer contact was lower in rural areas that were more affluent. However, leaflets with information and contact details for the Employment & Financial Support Team, Housing Solution Team and C360 were left in location with community partners aware of our services so they can signpost.

The roadshows created valued partnerships which we have continued through the summer at locations with the most customer contact.

As well as the listed locations, we also attended community events and organisational events to provide support and advice.

6.2. Community groups that were funded by the ECC warm space initiatives within Colchester were listed and mapped on our website and the Employment & Financial Support team information was left in location. If this funding opportunity continues for 23/24 this will be updated on our website.

6.3. Outreach will continue but in a more targeted way so we can utilise our limited resources in the best way.

7. Communications

7.1. As we are relying on social media communications to promote our services, we are working with the Digital Access Support Team who can assist with basic

technology skills and show residents how to find information and make applications online.

- 7.2. A video was created last winter explaining the Cost of Living Support available from a collective of organisations known as 'One Colchester'. We will be reviewing this video to see it is appropriate for re-distribution across the city. The video can be viewed here: [One Colchester: Here to help you and your family - YouTube](#)
- 7.3. More leaflets will be distributed across the city to organisations and community groups.

8. Forward Plan

- 8.1. As the cost-of-living remains high, the support we deliver will be implemented as Business as Usual. This means that the support we deliver will be as standard to all residents. The poverty our residents are experiencing is subjective to each of them and a full triage will be needed to identify the proximate cause of their hardship.
- 8.2. A new winter resilience plan is being developed for autumn/winter 23/24. This will include staggering our discretionary funds, so they last until the end of Mar 2024.
- 8.3. A contract has been signed with The Fuel Bank. An organisation which takes referrals for people in fuel poverty and can issue vouchers for per-paid meters. We are the first Local Authority to pilot this scheme.
- 8.4. We will continue our partnership working with organisations such as the Job Centre and the Foodbank, but outreach will be on a reduced scale due to resource pressures.
- 8.5. Working with the Neighbourhoods Team in the delivery of the Garden Waste Scheme and providing support to residents who cannot afford the service.
- 8.6. We will be utilising some of the external resettlement support funds received by Colchester City Council to secure resource and capacity in the team. We will be able to assist this cohort of the community with their benefit entitlement and employment opportunities and prepare residents waiting for their settled status.
- 8.7. We will look at all other funding options to boost the team and the support we can offer without increasing the council's budget.



Policy Panel

Item
10

27 September 2023

Report of	Group Manager – Neighbourhood Services	Author	Owen Howell ☎ 282518
Title	Work Programme 2023-24		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the dates of the Work Programme for 2023-2024 for the Policy Panel and gives the Panel an opportunity to consider what subjects for which it may wish to request Cabinet approval for the Panel to consider in the 2023-24 municipal year, and to formally make recommendations to put these to Cabinet for approval. Cabinet may also wish to consider what subjects it might want the Policy Panel to consider during 2023-24.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 The Panel is asked to note the dates of the Panel's Work Programme for 2023-2024 as set out below and to consider the proposed scheduling and whether it wishes to request Cabinet approval for work items to be added.

3. Alternative Options

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

4. Background Information

- 4.1 The Policy Panel's Work Programme will evolve as the municipal year progresses. Items can be added to the Work Programme by request of Portfolio Holders and/or Cabinet requesting policies, strategies or other issues to be reviewed.
- 4.2 At its meeting of 12 July 2023, Cabinet approved a number of requests by the Panel for permission to examine topics in this municipal year, but cautioned that the Panel might wish to prioritise which it chooses to take on, given the number of topics raised. Following that meeting, relevant senior officers were informed of the subjects raised within their remits, and offered scheduling advice.
- 4.3 Two items were approved by Cabinet, but have not yet been scheduled, as officers have noted that the Council's approach in these areas is dictated by national statute and regulations, leaving extremely limited scope for the Policy Panel to make recommendations. These two items are:
- The Licensing, Food and Health and Safety Policy
 - Policy on rights to bid on assets of community value, when up for sale

Policy Panel may still add these to the Work Programme if it wishes to do so, but colleagues in the Licensing and Planning Teams have stated that these would be more for information and discussion, rather than having scope for recommendations to be made to Cabinet.

5. Standard References

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

6. Strategic Plan References

6.1 Policy review is integral to the delivery of the Strategic Plan's priorities and direction for the City as set out under the themes of:

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

Policy Panel Work Programme 2022-23

28 June 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work Programme 2023-24
2 August 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounds Maintenance Contract update • Landscape, Nature and Waterways Strategy development update • Work Programme 2023-24
27 September 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial inequalities and cost of living • Future of Retail Vision • Levelling Up Fund and Town Deal [TBC] • Work Programme 2023-24
29 November 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality, Diversity and Inclusion • Future of Sports and Leisure Strategy [TBC] • Work Programme 2023-24

10 January 2024

- The Council's Policy on Procurement
- Mapping and examination of community assets and asset-based community development approach;
- Work Programme 2023-24

6 March 2024

- Parking Policy
- Approach to local commemorations, including benches, flags and statues

