

Cabinet

Wednesday, 24 January 2024

Attendees: Councillor Michelle Burrows, Councillor Mark Cory, Councillor Martin Goss, Councillor Alison Jay, Councillor David King , Councillor Andrea Luxford Vaughan, Councillor Natalie Sommers

No. Publication and Call In Arrangements

Date Published 25 January 2024

Date when decisions may be implemented (unless 'called in') 5pm 1 February 2024

NB All decisions except urgent decisions, those subject to pre-scrutiny and those recommended to Council may be subject to the Call-in Procedure.

Requests for the scrutiny of relevant decisions by the Scrutiny Panel must be signed by at least ONE Councillor AND FOUR other Councillors to countersign the call-in form OR to indicate support by e-mail. All such requests must be delivered to the Proper Officer by no later than 5pm on 1 February 2024.

826 Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 December 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

827 Have Your Say! (Hybrid Cabinet Meetings)

Sir Bob Russell attended and addressed Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) about the City Centre Masterplan. This had cost £142,000 at a time when financial prudence was imperative. It had been prepared by a firm of consultants based in London. In view of its importance it should have been considered by Full Council rather than the Local Plan Committee. The report was anti car. The Council should be looking to increase revenue through car parks rather than closing them. Concern was also raised about the suggestion that the Bingo Hall in Osborne Street should be closed.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, responded and stressed that the Masterplan had been through a robust process including an extensive consultation. Considerable further work was necessary to implement the proposals in the Masterplan but it would focus debate on the future of the city centre. Modelling of the proposals had shown that the proposed changes in car parking provision would not have a significant impact on income.

Trevor Orton attended and addressed Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1). He had campaigned on issues relating to the condition and cleanliness of the city centre since 2016. He expressed thanks to Councillor King and the Neighbourhoods Teams who were now working closely with him. Concern was expressed about the condition of telephone boxes in the city centre. Whilst he had personally cleaned some of these, they were now in poor condition again. There was some uncertainty over who was responsible for them which needed to be resolved so that they could be removed.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, indicated that he would investigate the ownership issue and had asked the Neighbourhoods Team to look at cleaning the telephone boxes. He thanked Mr Orton for his continued commitment to these issues.

Ian Drew attended and addressed Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) to highlight the perceived lack of action in response to issues residents were raising with the Council. He would take issues in relation to 5G up with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Environment and Sustainability, but Colchester should become the first city to resist the introduction of a 5G network. Concerns were also raised about the agenda being pursued by central government and international organisations such as the World Health Organisation, NATO and the United Nations.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, thanked him for attending but said his alternative viewpoint was not one that given his own experience of the organisations mentioned, that he or the Council could support.

Frances Wagstaff and Liz Austin, representing the CO1 Residents Association, attended and addressed Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) about concerns about Middle Weir. Funding should be secured to reinstate the bridge at Middle Weir as soon as possible. It was appreciated by visitors and was used as a scenic route into the town centre. The loss of the bridge was causing confusion to tourists who were still being directed to it by location apps. The adjacent Kings Meadow was sometimes used for car parking for events in the Lower Castle Park and the loss of the bridge was detrimental to the visitor experience. Whilst the initial response to the problems at Middle Weir had been quick the interim measures were causing consternation. Little monitoring of the measures was done. There needed to be more and clearer signage, more accessible options and better lighting. The view from the diversionary path was dismal with the river level low and detritus visible. The diversionary routes could be made permanently attractive. Alternative routes should also be explored, including through the cricket ground which gave access to another crossing. Funds needed to be made available for regular monitoring, to ensure signage remained in place. Residents in the riverside cottages were particularly impacted with increased foot traffic leading to more anti-social behaviour. Plans to restore the bridge should be agreed as a matter of urgency.

Councillor Goss, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services and Waste responded and explained that it was appreciated that the situation was frustrating but the solution would not be simple or quick. A stakeholder group of officers had been established which was working with specialist engineers to look at options. Once costed options has been received, the Council would be in a better position to assess the way forward and seek funding. When this information was received it would be published. The comments and suggestions made about the diversionary routes were welcomed and would be explored. In terms of alternative routes, there may be issues in terms of land ownership. Some clean-up of the river had been undertaken and more was planned.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, and Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, also explained that there was an opportunity to look at the usage of the river and to work and engage with interested groups, and as Essex County Councillors, would raise the issues of the condition of the footpaths with Essex County Council.

Councillor Scordis attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed Cabinet. In view of the issues Middle Weir and at Fieldgate Quay was the Council monitoring the condition of such sites frequently enough? Concern was also expressed about the proposals in the budget to close the café at Leisure World. Further information should be made available about how long it had been losing money and why efforts had not been made to modernise or to review its pricing. It was heavily used. The expertise of the Council's commercial companies should be utilised to evaluate how it could be improved and further income generated.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy explained that several Councillors had raised concerns about Leisure world café, and at least two petitions on the issue was in circulation. The proposal to close the café would be paused to give time to look at alternatives and the café would stay open in the meantime.

Councillor Goss, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods, provided a timeline for the events leading to the closure of Middle Weir. This demonstrated that concerns had been raised with Essex County Council by City Council officers but they had decided to take no action. Councillor King indicated that in respect of maintenance of assets, it was the case that in view of financial pressures and the need to support frontline services, the Council had not invested heavily in the maintenance of its assets. This would now change and a review of assets and a comprehensive Asset Management Strategy were being brought forward.

Councillor Scordis responded that if he was provided with a copy of the timeline, as an Essex County Councillor he would raise the lack of action with the County Council as he regarded it as a very serious matter.

The Section 151 Officer submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member together with the recommendation from the Scrutiny Panel meeting of 23 January 2024.

Christina Reed-Welham attended and addressed Cabinet pursuant to the provisions of Meetings General Procedure Rule 5(1) to express concerns that members of Leisure World had about the proposed closure of the café at Leisure World and to highlight the petition in support of keeping the café open. The Council should stop and reconsider and work with staff and members to enable it to remain part of the community. The Council 's Strategic Plan highlighted the importance of health, wellbeing and happiness, and the Council had received £3.5 million in health funding to address these issues. There was now greater awareness of the link between exercise and mental health. Social connections combined with exercise contributed to wellbeing. The café was uniquely placed to encourage both social connections and exercise for a wide demographic range and was a key part of the attraction of Leisure World. If the café was kept open for a further period of six months it would allow the talented staff to review the model and work towards a more profitable operation.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, expressed his thanks and reiterated the assurance he had given earlier that the decision to close the café had been paused and it would remain open whilst alternative options were explored. Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, explained that the decision had arisen in the context of the tough choices the administration faced. However, there had been some miscommunication about the nature of the proposal. Nevertheless the administration had listened to the concerns raised and would explore alternatives.

Councillor Law attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed Cabinet to express concern about how some of the proposals to reduce services would impact on Highwoods. Highwoods Country Park Visitor Centre provided key facilities to visitors to the Country Park, and staff from the visitor centre were important in helping with emergencies or countering anti-social behaviour. Less resources at the Visitor Centre could lead to increased anti-social behaviour and flytipping, which need further resource from elsewhere in the Council. Cuts were also proposed to Highwoods Sports Centre. This was an accessible site right at the heart of the community and made an important contribution to the health and wellbeing of the community. There were also cuts proposed to community facilities at St Marks, which helped provide important social connections contributing to health and wellbeing. The overall impression that would be given to residents would be that the Council did not care about providing good accessible, community facilities, and were not supportive of their health and wellbeing, contrary to Strategic Plan priorities.

Councillor King responded that the scale of the challenge facing the Council meant hard choices. It would look to cause the least harm it could. He would ask officers to look at the points raised about the Visitor Centre and the impact the proposals could have on other areas of the Council. However Highwoods was well served with sporting and community facilities.

Councillor Dundas attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed Cabinet. Further funding for local government had been announced by the government today.

It was noted that whilst it had been proposed to close the café at Leisure World, another café run by the Council was losing significantly more money and further information for the basis of that decision was sought. Further information on the position on the reserves was necessary in order to make a judgement on whether the budget was prudent. Further information was sought about an outstanding debt from Colchester Amphora Energy Ltd to the Council and whether this had been paid. The position on reserves was important as the Medium Term Financial Forecast showed an accumulated deficit of £7.35 million, which could only be met from reserves. Further detail was needed on the Fit for the Future programme as there was not enough information for Councillors to make a judgement on the impact of the programme. Without this information informed judgements could not be made about whether to support the budget or how to propose meaningful amendments.

Councillor King and Councillor Cory responded and emphasised the importance of Councillors having sufficient detail to make decisions. The administration had had to make a judgement on how much information to provide. The proposals had been informed by member briefings and Alumni meetings and had not come unexpectedly. The budget strategy was supported by a great deal of information and was clearer and went further than previous budgets. Further information about the Fit for the Future programme would be forthcoming in February. Advice would be sought on the point raised about the coffee shops. In terms of the point made about deficits and reserves the budget proposed putting funding back into reserves in 2024/25. A deficit was forecast in the following year but this would be addressed as the Council had a legal duty to set a balanced budget. It was not proposed to build up a deficit in the way that had been suggested. Reserves would be used in a limited way to provide a contingency in case there was slippage in the Fit for the Future programme. The administration was open to further suggestions and discussion in the run up to the Council meeting on 21 February 2024.

Councillor J Young attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed Cabinet to express thanks to officers for their work in bringing forward the budget proposals. The budget needed to be seen in the national context where many Councils were facing very difficult decisions. The Council had lost two-thirds of its direct funding grant from government since 2009. Added to this were issues of inflation, the cost of living crisis and increased homelessness demands. Did the Leader of the Council agree that the funding from central government since 2010 had been inadequate to meet the needs of the community?

Councillor King indicated that he agreed and noted that the LGA estimated that one in five authorities privately believed that they may need to issue a section 114 letter.

Councillor Pearson attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed Cabinet and indicated Councils nationwide were faced with problems not of their own making. Whilst it was right that Councils should look for efficiencies and review the way services were run as part of the normal course of events, this was not what was happening now. The House of Commons Library showed that the National Audit Office had estimated in 2018 that local authority spending power had fallen by 29% in real terms between 2010-2018. Issues of inflation and the cost of addressing homelessness also needed to be taken into consideration. A further recommendation should be made that the Council should work collaboratively with other authorities

nationwide to make representations to central government for fair funding for local authorities.

Councillor King indicated that this proposal would be considered. The Council was a part of a number of local authority networks that could be used to help push this message, and lobbying was always most effective when it was cross party.

Councillor Sunnucks attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed Cabinet. He supported the recommendation from the Scrutiny Panel for further information. He was concerned by the budget and considered that this was an opportunity to take the Council in a different direction. In view of the comments about the national context, it was important to focus internally and not blame others. The Council was an inefficient organisation and there was scope for cuts that would not impact on frontline services. Further funding from central government was forthcoming. The following questions were asked of Cabinet:-

- Did Cabinet believe that it could convert this year's deficit into a small surplus next year without doing anything specific?
- Did Cabinet believe that Fit for the Future would work within a year?
- Could the budget be properly evaluated without information about the reserves?
- Were Cabinet aware that by approving this budget it was approving doubling the debt, largely through spending on social housing, and the cost of running the deficit would be £3-5 million per annum?

Councillor King and Councillor Cory responded and stressed that the budget was properly constructed and was based on high quality work. Further information about the position on the reserves and on Fit for the Future was being provided. The administration was not seeking to blame others and accepted its responsibility to take the necessary decisions to set a balanced budget. Difficult decisions had already been taken, such as on garden waste, which had had an impact on staffing.

Andrew Small, Section 151 Officer made a presentation to Cabinet. The presentation set out:-

- The financial context of one of the most challenging years for local government finance and the actions taken to address the budget gap.
- The scale of the budget gap and how this had been identified and how this would be addressed.
- The Medium Term Financial Forecast.
- The savings anticipated through the Fit for the Future programme and the contribution they would make to balancing future budgets. This would require some investment and this would be done by creating a Fit for the Future reserve.
- General Fund balances and the proposal to increase the minimum level of general fund balance to £3 million in view of the heightened volatility.
- A summary of earmarked reserves. These were being reviewed and were now better understood. The position was generally healthy but there were many demands on them.
- The Capital Programme had been reviewed and updated. Several schemes had been removed but there were also some key additions such as the repair to the Moot Hall.

- Housing Revenue Account was balanced and proposed an increase in rents of 7.7%. The income generated would remain within the HRA. A detailed review of the HRA would be undertaken in 2024.
- The Section 151 Officer was reassured that the budget was robust with a clear ambition to address future challenges. A section 25 report on the robustness of the budget would accompany the budget when it was referred to Council.

Councillor Goss, Portfolio for Neighbourhoods, sought clarification on the issues raised about the outstanding liabilities from the Heat Network project. The Section 151 Officer explained that these issues had been raised at Governance and audit Committee and it was recognised that there were risks around the ending of the project, particularly around the BEIS grant. This would be addressed as part of the closure of accounts but it was estimated that the level of potential loss was around £200,000.

In discussion Cabinet indicated that it accepted the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Panel, which it considered useful and fair. The requested further information would be addressed and some information on reserves had been part of the section 151 officer's presentation. In terms of the Treasury Management information, it was more likely this would be further information rather than the full Treasury Management Strategy Statement, in view of the timescales.

Cabinet noted that the issues raised by the budget had largely been discussed in response to the speakers. The advice of the section 151 officer on the robustness of the proposals was noted. It offered its thanks to those officers who had worked hard to bring the proposals forward and to those who would be implementing and impacted by the Fit for the Future programme and other cost savings. It was appreciated that the proposals would be challenging for both officers and residents.

Cabinet welcomed the proposal from Councillor Pearson that a further recommendation be made in respect of pushing collaboratively for a fair approach to local government finance.

RESOLVED that:-

(a) The final revenue and capital budget proposals for 2024/25 as presented in Appendices A to D of the Section 151 Officer's report, be agreed, subject to a pause on the proposal for the closure of the Leisure World Coffee Shop set out in Appendix D, whilst alternative options were explored.

(b) The recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel meeting on 23 January 2024 be agreed.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:-

(a) The budget for 2024/25 (including Revenue and Capital in Appendices A, B and the confidential and not for publication Appendix D to the Section 151 Officer's report) subject to the removal of the proposal for the closure of the Leisure World Coffee Shop set out in Appendix D.

- (b) The updated Medium-Term Financial Forecast (MTFF) 2024/25 to 2028/29 (covering General Fund and Housing Revenue Account in Appendix C)
- (c) The level of Council Tax increase for 2024/25 (as set out in paragraph 2.6 of Appendix A of the Section 151 Officer's report)
- (d) The level of Housing Rent increase for 2024/25 (as set out in paragraph 3.3, of Appendix A of the Section 151 Officer's report); and
- (e) The Management Fee payable to Colchester Borough Homes (CBH) in 2024/25 (as set out in paragraph 3.4 of Appendix A of the Section 151 Officer's report).
- (f) The Council work collaboratively with other councils nationwide to make representations to central government for fair funding for local government.

REASONS

To enable Cabinet to recommend a final budget for 2024/25 to the Council in February 2024.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The proposals in the Section 151 Officer's report represent Cabinet's recommended position on the 2024/25 General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets (both Revenue and Capital).

829 Delivery of Colchester Northern Gateway (South) Development

The Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director Place submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Dundas attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Cabinet. This element of the Northern Gateway project had proved challenging and as a result the Council had an additional £20 million of capital funding which it had anticipated would have been paid off by now. This was a drag on the Council. He had previously received assurances on the resilience and viability of the project. It should be recognised that a project conceived in 2016 was no longer suitable in 2024 and that the Council did not have the skills or resources to deliver such a complex scheme. Whilst the recommendations at 2.2. and 2.3 of the Deputy Chief Executive's report were supported, the Council should not commit further capital funding to a project which might not be necessary. This would also have an impact on the revenue budget and expose the Council to potentially volatile market forces. The section 278 works were for the old scheme and may no longer be relevant for any new scheme that was brought forward. There was no longer demand for the office space envisaged in the project and therefore it was possible that a housing development could be brought

forward for the site, which would generate less traffic and therefore the works on this scale may not be needed. Clarification was sought as to whether negotiations with the healthcare provider were still ongoing, the state of the power supply to the site and how the evaluations in the Part B appendix were arrived at as they differed from the viability assumptions used in the Tendring Colchester Garden Communities Garden Community.

Councillor Sunnucks attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed the Cabinet to support Councillor Dundas' comments. There was no plan of the proposed road development. The Council should not be acting as a developer and should be looking to sell the site and let a master developer take it forward and accept the risks of the development.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, agreed that the market had changed since the initial vision. The Council had had some success at Northern Gateway acting as a developer but it was right to take another look. This was a well-placed site with great potential for the right scheme. The proposal was just to make provision for a possible capital spend not a commitment to spend it as this point. Further discussions would take place cross party as matters developed.

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, supported Councillor King's comments. He understood the caution proposed by Councillor Dundas. The questions and concerns would be looked at and discussed with officers. However, the proposal would keep the door open for the section 278 works and potential development. This was an opportunity to improve the infrastructure as the junction was already over capacity. He would address the specific questions raised in a separate meeting.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The inclusion of £7.7 million in the Council's capital programme for 2024/25 to fund the enabling works and some construction works required to Junction 28 of the A12 be approved.
- (b) To revisit the delivery strategy for Colchester Northern Gateway (South) (CNGS) acknowledging that the Council has taken on the leadership and responsibility for delivery from Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd and needs to review the development strategy and retest the market and site options both within the context of the current planning permission and potentially a new planning approach. It is intended that this work will be completed by summer 2024 culminating in a new delivery strategy for the site.
- (c) Authority be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources, the drawdown of the earmarked reserve (the Revolving Investment Fund (RIF)) to fund resourcing within the emerging Corporate Landlord Team, which is being established as part of the Fit for the Future transformation project on Assets to progress the necessary due diligence, a review of the development strategy, market and potential delivery options and to fund any viability and feasibility work needed to progress the delivery of the site.

REASONS

CNGS is a key site in delivering some of the Council's priorities in the Strategic Plan.

It will directly contribute to the improvement of health, wellbeing, and happiness:

- With a key new active travel route through the site: The Walk, already delivered and enabling a high-quality walking, cycling, and wheeling option.
- A new health hub providing a private hospital, GP surgery, and a care home.

As a key employment site in the Local Plan, it will support growing the local economy so everyone benefits.

It will also make a significant contribution to delivering homes for those most in need with a minimum of 30% affordable, as well as supported housing options.

In addition, the whole Northern Gateway is a key gateway to the City of Colchester, and it will also be a community hub providing access and services to residents across the city area and beyond.

The Colchester Commercial Holdings Ltd (CCHL) review recommended the delivery strategy for CNGS needs to be reviewed for the following reasons:–

- A change in the Council's appetite for financial risk given the financial context and significant financial challenges facing Councils across the Country.
- Change in the property market since it was originally approved, for example the significantly reduced market demand for office space following the Covid Pandemic.
- The economic slow-down, cost of living crisis, inflationary pressures and increased interest rates affecting developer, investor, and occupier confidence during 2023.
- Master developer approach to the site has not progressed due to the investment challenges and significant cost escalation on build and infrastructure costs. The market is starting to show signs of returning to some normality as the latest BCIS forecast for 2024 projects a 2% increase (compared to 10.7% annual increase in previous years). Therefore, from a high-level perspective, the confidence in the market is expected to start to improve as prices settle and risk exposure to build costs reduce.
- The CCHL review recommended hibernation of Colchester Amphora Housing Ltd and Colchester Amphora Energy Ltd which were both delivery vehicles for elements of the site.

CNGS is a strategic site of significant socio-economic and financial value which will facilitate delivery of some of the Council's key Strategic Plan priorities. As a key employment site in the Local Plan, it will support growing the local economy, so everyone benefits as well as providing inward investment. It will also make a significant contribution to delivering homes for those most in need with a minimum of 30% affordable housing. As well as the improvement of health, wellbeing, and happiness with the facilitation of active travel options, the site also has designated community open space. A key strategic gateway site into the City of Colchester, CNGS is also of great financial significance and value.

Delivery of the whole of the CNGS consented scheme is predicated (via Condition 8 of

the planning consent 190665) around the physical completion of the offsite highway works. A cost estimate was prepared in 2019 associated with the highway works and therefore given the market material and labour costs, alongside the development of the highways detailed design works now requires a refresh. The refresh will capture both legal and technical due diligence to feed into the cost plan estimate to provide a robust and complete analysis of the highway works project. Until this work is completed it is proposed the latest working assumption detail in Part B will be included in the Capital Programme.

Technical due diligence will also identify location, issues and solutions relating to existing utilities within the sites which are a significant risk and a key dependency upon time and cost to the delivery of CNG.

It is recognised specialist advice will be needed to review and develop delivery strategy options to meet the strategic objectives of CCC, access the occupier, developer, and investor markets, ensure the delivery of high-quality developments, facilitate infrastructure works and explore options to leverage potential third party investment.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Do nothing – if the S278 highways work is not completed then it will not be possible for any part of the development to be occupied. It is also highly unlikely that any developer would be willing to purchase the site, or part thereof, without this work being completed.

If the delivery strategy is not reviewed, in light of the significant social and economic changes that have occurred in the last 5 years, any development is less likely to meet current needs or deliver the maximum benefits for residents or the Council and will increase risk to the Council in relation to its investment and successful delivery of the expected outcomes.

Dispose of the site “as is”. This option is likely to prove very difficult without the completion of the S278 highways work as market interest will reduce due to increased cost and risk for developers and, if achievable, will return significantly less capital than if the work is completed. It will also mean that the Council will lose control over the development of the site and the outcomes that can be achieved.

830 Officer Pay Policy Statement 2024-25

The Head of People submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Cory, Portfolio Holder for Resources, introduced the report and highlighted the Council’s commitment to the Living Wage and the positive gender pay gap.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL that the Officer Pay Statement for 2024/25 be approved and adopted.

REASONS

The Localism Act requires “authorities to prepare, approve and publish pay policy statements articulating their policies towards a range of issues relating to the pay of its workforce, which must be approved by full Council annually. An authority’s pay policy statement must be approved by a resolution of that authority before it comes into force”.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The only alternative would be to not recommend the approval of the Pay Policy Statement, but that would be contrary to the requirements of the Localism Act.

831 Managed Service Solution for Temporary Workers

The Head of People submitted a report a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

RESOLVED that the Council sign up to the Essex County Council Managed Service Solution framework for temporary workers for 3 years from 1 April 2024.

REASONS

This decision is submitted to Cabinet in accordance with the Council’s Contract Procedure rules to seek approval to proceed to tender for a contract with a whole life cost valued above £500k.

Signing up to the ECC Managed Service Solution framework for temporary workers will ensure:

- Compliance with procurement regulations.
- Best value is achieved, giving the Council the cost reduction opportunities.
- Quality agency worker resources are easily available.
- Simplify oversight and control of spend through management information.
- Council resources to engage agency workers and to manage the contract are minimised.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

Consideration has been given to use the Eastern Shires Procurement Organisation (ESPO) agency framework, owned, and governed by a consortium of six-member local authorities including Leicestershire, Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Warwickshire County Councils and Peterborough City Council. This procurement process would be more complex and lengthier and would not offer any additional benefit to the ECC solution.

In addition, signing up to the managed service solution will promote closer partnership

working with Essex County Council and supports business development within the Essex council family.

832 Half Year April - September 2023 Performance Report: Key Performance Indicators, Other Performance News and Strategic Plan Action Plan Monitoring Report

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

Councillor Jay, Portfolio Holder for Economy, Transformation and Performance, introduced the report and thanked officers for the more detailed report with improved comparative and benchmarking information. Of the 26 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), the majority were met, with performance exceeded in 12 KPIs. Customer facing staff should be congratulated for the excellent performance in respect of payment of benefits and Local Council Tax support.

In terms of those where performance was not met, the latest data indicated that performance in respect of rent collection was improving. Bereavement Service income was in line pre Covid levels and in terms of the household waste KPI the Council remained below the median and was 35th out of 333 authorities. The review of the Waste Strategy would improve performance further and move the Council closer to government targets. There had also been improvements in some of the performance on housing related KPIs and the Portfolio Holder for Housing was monitoring performance very carefully. Proposals for KPIs for 2024-25 would be brought to Cabinet in March.

The Senior Leadership Team were looking at those elements of the Strategic Plan Action Delivery Plan that were missing their target. The overall good performance of the Council was reflected in a number of accreditations including Green Flags for open spaces and a Customer Service Excellence award for the Customer Contact team.

The Council's transformation programme was ongoing and further transformation would be driven by the Fit for the Future programme. Whilst it was recognised this would have an impact on staff it would help the Council perform effectively and efficiently and drive the necessary scale of change. It would be supported by ICT and technology changes.

RESOLVED that performance against Key Performance Indicators be noted and that where Key Performance Indicators had not been met, appropriate corrective action had been taken.

REASONS

To review half year performance for 2023 – 2024 and ensure robust performance management of key Council services.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to Cabinet.

833 Asset Based Community Development and Asset Mapping Update

Cabinet considered the recommendation made by the Policy Panel at its meeting on 10 January 2024, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Law, Chair of Policy Panel attended and with the consent of the Chair, addressed the Cabinet to introduce the recommendations from the Panel. The Panel had been pleased to see the progress of Asset Based Community Development within communities through training and wanted any barriers to this to be removed to maximise its impact. It was also suggested that in the future Cabinet look again at its dog ownership policies due to the impact of irresponsible dog ownership.

Councillor King, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, indicated that the request on dog ownership policies seemed a reasonable request and could be looked at in future.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Training on Asset-Based Community Development be cascaded out to communities, partner organisations and local groups.
- (b) The Council works to assist local groups by removing barriers and red tape currently affecting Asset-Based Community Development work.
- (c) The request that Cabinet look again at dog ownership policies be noted.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

It was open to Cabinet not to agree to the recommendation from the Policy Panel.

834 Progress of Responses to the Public

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

RESOLVED that the contents of the Progress Sheet be noted.

REASONS

The progress sheet was a mechanism by which the Cabinet could ensure that public statements and questions were responded to appropriately and promptly.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

No alternative options were presented to the Cabinet.

835 Minutes - Part B

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.

RESOLVED that the not for publication extract from the minutes of the meeting on 19 December 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

836 Draft Budget Proposals 2024/25 (Including General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Revenue and Capital and Updated Medium Term Financial Forecast - Part B

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.

This minute is not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person, including the authority holding the information).

837 Delivery of Colchester Northern Gateway (South) Development - Part B

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.

This minute is not for publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (information relating to the financial or business

affairs of a particular person, including the authority holding the information).