
Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 11am on Monday, 4 March 2024 in Committee Room 1, County Hall, Chelmsford.

Present:

County Councillors:

Chris Pond (Chairman)

Lewis Barber

Simon Crow (left at 12.48pm)

Jane Fleming (substitute)

Mike Garnett

Mike Mackrory (Vice Chairman)

Aiden McGurran (substitute)

Anthony McQuiggan

Jaymey McIvor (left at 1pm)

Wendy Stamp

Councillor from another scrutiny committee:

Carlo Guglielmi, Vice Chairman – People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, and Maise Riley, Democratic Services Officer, were also present.

1 Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

The report on Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations was received and it was noted. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Ivan Henderson (for whom Councillor McGurran substituted), Sam Kane, Sue Lissimore, Clive Souter (for whom Councillor Jane Fleming substituted), and Marshall Vance.

2 Minutes and Matters Arising

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 25 January 2024 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman of the meeting.

3 Questions from the public

There were no questions from the public.

4 Performance discussion – July to September 2023-24

The Committee considered report CPSC/04/24 incorporating an update on progress being made against key performance indicators within the Everyone's Essex Strategy based on 2023-24 Quarter 2 performance report with some core updates up to December 2023 and the opportunity

to discuss the wider operational landscape of Essex, including other factors affecting residents.

The following joined the meeting for the duration of the item:

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader
Councillor Louise McKinlay, Deputy Leader and Cabinet
Member for Levelling Up, Communities and Business
Engagement.
Richard Puleston, Director: Policy
Suzanne Barcz, Head of Performance and Business Intelligence

The report identified four key areas of ECC performance that were below target (strategically or functionally) and represented a risk to the Council:

- The number of homes retrofitted under the Sustainable Housing Decarbonisation Fund. Reductions in the Home Upgrade Grant budget were impacting on delivery.
- The number of children subject to Child Protection Plans had risen since March 2023 and continued to be slightly above the target range although Essex continued to have a lower proportion of children on child protection plans than similar authorities.
- The volume of successful interventions for Family Solutions between July 1st 2023 and September 30th 2023 was slightly below target at 84.9% but represented a significant improvement on the previous quarter (79.7%). ECC was continuing to see a high level of demand for the service.
- Two of the coastal path 'part approved' stretches were pending Secretary of State approval (Harwich to Shotley Gate and Wallasea Island to Burnham). The Mersea Island stretch was dependent on the finalisation of a report from Natural England prior to submission to the Secretary of State for approval.

Key points raised during the introductory presentation and subsequent discussion included:

- (i) The impact of housing affordability and the overall cost of living pressures were also highlighted as issues that could impact on policy areas, services and wellbeing.
- (ii) The Oflog confirmed 'launch' metrics (July 2023) were highlighted. The aim was to provide accessible data, insight and analysis around the performance of local government, to be more transparent as well as to support service improvement. Oflog had initially focused on a small number of metrics, with the four areas being Waste management, Adult Social Care, Adult skills and Finance. Children's Social Care, Homelessness and

Rough Sleeping, Public Health and Youth Justice and Accommodation were the next reporting areas proposed for development.

- (iii) An LGA -Led Corporate Peer Challenge was expected in the Summer.
- (iv) The Year 2 Levelling Up Annual Report was due to be launched in the next week and particular thanks were expressed by the Cabinet Member to staff who had contributed and helped support levelling up initiatives and projects in the past year.
- (v) Cllr Mackrory highlighted a constituent grievance relating to hospital discharge and subsequent delay in contact from Adult Social Care to identify ongoing support that was needed. This would be taken up outside of the meeting with the appropriate Cabinet Member.
- (vi) ECC's strategy was to support residents in their own home if possible and robust child protection planning was an important part of that approach. Quarter 3 data was now available which indicated a downward trajectory on the number of child protection cases.
- (vii) Some members highlighted that the Local Government Ombudsman had been critical of ECC SEND processes in relation to four Essex child protection cases. It was stressed that such case detail was not within the strategic measures performance reporting of Everyone's Essex but would be scrutinised in other governance processes including at the Corporate Governance Board. The People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee was also currently looking at SEND services.
- (viii) Some members queried the crime and feeling safe disclosure and cited the number of recent burglaries that were unresolved. This was an issue that could be pursued with the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner.
- (ix) There could still be some ongoing monitoring of Family Solutions cases after successful interventions but it would depend on the circumstances of each individual case and any necessary de-escalation.
- (x) A Multi-Disciplinary Team approach trialled in Tendring had brought together various partners and provided a wraparound service for families. ECC would welcome further liaison and co-partnering in other district areas when the opportunities arose.

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- (xi) The next performance update (for Q3) would include some of the anticipated Care Quality Commission focused performance measures.
 - (xii) Whilst the Leader considered that the roll-out of LED street lighting had generally been good, there could be parts supply and ring main issues that could delay repairs.
 - (xiii) Members encouraged further use of banking and community hubs, and other similar initiatives, to provide support and advice for residents. Through the Levelling Up programme ECC were also looking to see how to get people using on-line resources more as well.
 - (xiv) Everyone's Essex enabled discussions on the most important measures such as ageing well, continuing good education provision and supporting those that needed more help in attainment, and facilitating emerging jobs and opportunities.
 - (xv) There was ongoing consideration about how to incorporate and complement Oflog reporting disclosure requirements with the strategic measures reporting within Everyone's Essex.

Conclusion

The Leader suggested that advance notice of the most detailed questions would help him to come prepared to give detailed answers on the day.

It was agreed to provide more detail on the following:

- (i) The calculation of mileage driven with low or zero emission vehicles and the assumptions used.
- (ii) Job opportunities from emerging sectors including ongoing discussions about establishing a further college specifically looking at Green jobs.
- (iii) Carbon savings from use of LED lights and savings on electricity usage and the extent to which energy supplies came from green sources.
- (iv) A further breakdown of the number of road casualties and relevant links to other reporting platforms where appropriate. Generally, they were not reported in detail as part of the Everyone's Essex strategic performance framework as they were available via LG Inform and Oflog Data Explorer

It was also agreed that confirmation and clarification on any new deadlines and any new opportunities for funding under the housing decarbonisation fund would be included in the next report.

5. Member Enquiries Service - update

The Committee considered report CPSC/05/24 which provided an overview of the Member Enquiries Service and the results of a recent survey of councillors about the service.

Councillor McKinlay, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Levelling Up, Communities and Business Engagement, remained from the previous agenda item to introduce the update and respond to questions and was joined by:

- Richard Buttress, Democratic Services Manager
- Emma Tombs, Interim Democracy Lead

Key points raised, acknowledged and/or noted during the discussion included:

- (i) Average turnaround for responses to enquiries was 5.5 days although this could vary depending on complexity and the type of enquiry.
- (ii) 80% of enquiries were highways related.
- (iii) It was considered that the response rate for the survey was about average with 97% of the ECC members who had responded being satisfied with the service. Thanks were extended to the Team.
- (iv) Surveys were completed anonymously.
- (v) All 75 ECC members were entitled to use the service together with Essex Members of Parliament. Enquiries received from district councillors would be forwarded to the Customer Services Team. The Cabinet Member stressed that she wanted to maintain County Councillors being the core client for the service.
- (vi) 98% of enquiries submitted to the service were by email.
- (vii) A breakdown could be provided for each member listing the enquiries they had submitted over a specified time period.
- (viii) If a case was not closed until the actual issue raised within it had been resolved then it would distort the performance data for Member Enquiries.
- (ix) Certain issues might receive a higher priority if they were deemed urgent. Enquiries raised direct with Cabinet Members should still be actioned through the Member Enquiries process. Escalation of highways issues would be subject to criteria assessment as part of the overall Highways Strategy. Raising

issues with Highways Buddies should only be done as a point of escalation with the standard process through Member Enquiries.

- (x) A procurement process for a new Member Enquiries system may facilitate some system enhancements.

Conclusion

It was agreed that Cabinet Members and officers:

- (i) Provide an emergency contact list for members with a summary and reminder of key points when escalating issues and a reminder not to contact service officers directly. This could include advice and guidance to further improve the operation of the Highways Buddy system.
- (ii) At an appropriate time in the future that an update be provided on the further system development work underway looking at how members could be given further usable case and work-flow information when they logged an enquiry and to be able to access timely updates.
- (iii) Provide any available data on answering telephone call enquiries from members and an explanation of how the telephone system operates: i.e. whether on a loop basis and the circumstances in which calls may be 'dropped'.

The contributors were thanked by the Chairman for their attendance and then left the meeting.

6. Work programme

The Committee considered and noted report CPSC/06/24 which comprised the current work programme for the Committee.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was currently scheduled for 26 March 2024.

8. Urgent Business

No items were raised.

The Chairman then closed the meeting at 1.08pm

Chairman