

Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held online, on Tuesday 2 March 2021

In attendance from the committee:

Councillor M Mackrory (Chairman)
Councillor A Turrell
Councillor M Buckley
Councillor G Butland
Councillor M Garnett
Councillor J Young

Councillor V Metcalfe
Councillor M Maddocks
Councillor M Platt
Councillor S Lissimore
Councillor J Abbot

Also in attendance:

Councillor J Reeves
Councillor A Brown

Councillor J Chandler
Councillor P Reid

AGENDA

1. Membership, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

There were no changes to the membership of the committee since the last meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr John Moran

In a change to the agenda, Cllr Barker was substituted at this meeting by Deputy Cabinet Member for Customer, Communities Culture and Corporate, Cllr Mike Steptoe.

2. Minutes

Members approved as a correct record Minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2021.

3. Questions from the Public

There were no requests to speak from members of the public.

4. Remote Working and Staff Wellbeing

The panel for this item was:

- Cllr Mike Steptoe, Deputy Cabinet Member for Customer, Communities, Culture and Corporate.
- Pam Parkes, Director of Organisation Development and People (ODP).

Members received report CPSC/04/21 alongside a presentation from the panel. The full papers and presentation can be found [here](#).

Following the presentation members were invited to ask questions and provide feedback to the panel. Key points raised included:

- Low response rate – members were advised that this was likely due to ‘survey fatigue’, but were warned not to assume that all those who didn’t respond were satisfied with current working arrangements.
- Professional development – 44% of respondents answered that remote working arrangements did not adequately allow for continuous professional development. Members were assured that steps were being taken to address this, with learning and development central to any future workforce strategy. ECC is also looking at what leadership looks like in a remote working, digital office environment. ECC operates in a competitive jobs market and needs to have an attractive development offer to attract retain talent.
- Commute savings – this is hard to properly estimate. While most employees are saving money on a daily commute, often costs associated with home-working have increased (electricity, food, heating etc.). ODP is currently exploring the impact of this and will ensure that it feeds into any future workforce strategy. Remote working as a concept has defaulted to ‘home-working’ as a result of the pandemic, but it should encapsulate working wherever is comfortable. This could include satellite offices or community spaces such as libraries wherever appropriate.
- Key takeaways from home-working – ECC carried out significant research prior to, and during the pandemic, so there were few surprises. What’s clear however, is that many people experience remote working differently. Larger families, for example, might have struggled more than individuals or smaller family units who might have been able to adapt more easily. After all, people lived in homes, not offices.
- Return to business as usual – members noted from the presentation that the groundwork was being laid for further changes to ECCs workforce strategy in the future. It was noted that it is unlikely that ECC will return to ‘business as usual’. Members were advised that ODP was currently leading on a ‘ways of working’ programme with exec directors of all functions and workstreams in property, business support, wellbeing etc. creating a new hybrid working methodology tool. This is helping the organisation understand across the what is need to imbed hybrid and remote working into any new workforce strategy. Members were further advised that this is a new normal – if ECC doesn’t do this piece of work, the organisation will simply will not compete in the current jobs market.
- The role of a county councillor – members were advised that an active workstream was in place investigating how the councillor role might change to adapt to new ways of working. A further update would be provided once more is known.
- Working patterns – members were advised that working patterns would not be a ‘one size fits all’ approach across the organisation. Some teams would need to be in at the same time, others could quite happily hot desk amongst other teams. It would be down to individual business need.

- Zoom fatigue – Officers noted concerns around availability and fatigue associated with online meetings. Guidance was in preparation regarding effective meeting etiquette, including procedures around regular breaks and timings. This would be shared with councillors once available. Members also noted feeling compelled to commit to meetings and fill out their diaries more than when meetings were physical. Officers agreed to take this away. It was noted that staff needed to ‘work at home, not sleep at the office’.
- Printing – members raised concerns around the use of printing equipment. It was noted by officers that even before remote working took effect, printing was only really allowed when there was a clear business need. Where there is a clear business need, there would have to be a discussion around how this could be facilitated remotely and this would be incorporated into any new workforce strategy.

ACTION – Members requested a full member briefing to outline current and future plans around remote and satellite working.

The Chairman thanked officers for their attendance and work in preparation for the meeting.

5. Essex Records Office - Update

The panel for this item was:

- o Cllr Mike Steptoe, Deputy Cabinet Member for Customer, Communities, Culture and Corporate
- o Sam Kennedy, Director of Environment and Climate Action and
- o Martin Astell, Essex Records Office Manager.

Members received report CPSC/05/21, alongside a presentation from the panel.

Following the presentation members were invited to ask questions and provide feedback to the panel. Key points raised included:

- Preservation of digital content – this presents a real challenge, but there are ways the ERO go about ensuring that digital records of note are preserved. More difficult with regards to social media, but ERO are learning from other organisations.
- Key challenges – financial challenges are the most pressing. 59.4% of running costs on average are covered per year. This will have taken a considerable hit throughout the pandemic. There are signs that ERO’s digital subscription service have increased over the last year though. This could mean that once things return to some semblance or normality that the EROs income might increase with additional subscription income. The largest source of income is venue hire and registration services which are currently on pause throughout lockdown. Some lost income has also been recovered through government grants, and the ERO was also able to move forward with a few private contracts digitizing records for a fee.
- Digital offer – the ERO launched a new digital offer in 2019/20 which has been really successful. This provided residents with access to a library of

new images and records online. Staff are always working to add further records to this service, but private contracts where there is a potential to generate income will always take priority.

- Marketing – further marketing is in the pipeline for income generating items such as registrations, certifications and the digital subscription service. This does however, draw staff away from work to digitize existing records.
- Budget for purchase of records – there is no dedicated budget, but the ERO receives significant charitable support from the 'Friends of Historic Essex' group to expand its collection of records.
- Fire precautions – ERO operates a gas based fire prevention system to prevent damage to records. Argonite gas is used to reduce the oxygen level within a space to smother a fire before it gets out of control. The gas is not fatal to visitors, but can damage hearing if in close proximity to the pipe system when it ventilates.
- Maintenance of war records – civil defence records are kept at the ERO, but war service records are more likely to be at the imperial war museum or the national archives. The ERO's role is not to duplicate what is available elsewhere, but enhance the current public offer.
- Music collection – members noted that the ERO maintains over 35,000 audio and visual recordings, many of which are specifically historically significant to Essex. The collection is particularly strong in folk and classical music. Essex Sounds is a new service launched to provide digital access to these recordings. The ERO also operates a YouTube and SoundCloud account to allow recordings to be accessed remotely. There are always issues around copyright and permission to broadcast music, but the ERO benefits from being a public body providing an audience to music that is pertinent to Essex and its history. There is also a lot of information and recordings held regarding Essex's oral history, specifically looking at the early Essex accents.
- Duplication and sharing with other records offices/museums – ERO maintains an ethical approach to duplication by not collecting competitively with other public institutions. If the ERO received records that more closely aligned with another authority then they would be provided as a gift.

6. Date of Next Meeting

The next committee activity day is scheduled for the 30 March 2021. Due to the start of the pre-election period it is unlikely that this will go ahead.

7. Urgent Business

There was none received

8. Urgent exempt Business

There was none received

The meetings was formally closed at 12.35