
Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.45am on Thursday, 28 July 2022 in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford.

Present:

County Councillors:

C Pond (Chairman)
T Cunningham
J Fleming
M Garnett
I Henderson
S Kane
D Land
A McQuiggan
W Stamp
M Steptoe (Vice Chairman)
M Vance

The following members from other scrutiny committees were also present:

Councillor R Gooding (Chairman of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee)
Councillor C Souter (Vice Chairman of the Health Overview Policy and Scrutiny Committee)

The following joined the meeting virtually via Zoom:

Councillor A Goggin (Chairman of the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee),
Councillor D Harris (Vice Chairman of the Health Overview and Policy Scrutiny Committee),
D King (substitute),
W Stamp.

Gemma Bint, Democratic Services Officer, Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, and Emma Hunter, 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 noted.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor M Mackrory (for whom Councillor King substituted via Zoom) and Councillor C Siddall.

2. Minutes

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2022 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. Ways of Working Programme update

The Committee considered report CPSC/16/2022 comprising the

The following joined the meeting to introduce the item:

Councillor Christopher Whitbread, Cabinet Member for Finance,
Resources and Corporate Affairs;
Pam Parkes –Executive Director, People and Transformation

During the opening presentation and subsequent questioning and discussion, the following was acknowledged, highlighted and/or noted:

- (i) Four workstyles had been defined namely Anywhere Workers, Fixed Base workers, Community Based workers, Operational Field Based workers.
- (ii) Support was being given to staff, managers and leaders in each function to help embed the work styles and hybrid working.
- (iii) Staff surveys had been conducted throughout the pandemic. Members recalled that a staff survey reported to the Committee in September 2021 had indicated that some staff were unhappy about working from home. It was countered that recent staff surveys clearly demonstrated Anywhere Workers were generally happy with their arrangements and the flexibility it provided. Anywhere Workers seemed to be the most satisfied compared to the other three workstyles and this suggested that more work needed to be done particularly with Fixed Base workers and Operational Field Based workers to understand if there were specific issues that needed further consideration and/or support. Community Based workers, such as social workers, were broadly still working in the same way as they had before the pandemic although some efficiencies had been achieved through greater use of technology for virtual meetings between the statutory agencies when appropriate. It was also stressed that a number of other front-facing services had not actually changed in the way they were being delivered – for example libraries and registrars.
- (iv) Some comparative work with other local authorities in the region had revealed that at least four had adopted something similar. As with ECC, none had amended employee contracts but three had changed some internal policies to accommodate new ways of working. It was suggested that there was some degree of

assurance that ECC were not out of line compared to other neighbouring authorities.

- (v) A broader review of the whole Estate and building usage was underway. Work was also underway to understand how people were now using the Category 1 buildings as, on average, the returning numbers post pandemic were less than had been anticipated. However, the use of buildings had been dropping before the pandemic.
- (vi) There had been a continued focus on staff health and safety with local management trained to monitor and help staff conduct risk assessments of their working locations.
- (vii) The County Council believed staff should not be working at home all the time and had encouraged the holding of regular in-person team meetings.
- (viii) Members questioned if productivity and performance had been significantly impacted by greater numbers of staff working at home and whilst these continued to be monitored the Cabinet Member and senior officer had not seen any evidence of this.
- (ix) It was reported that Trade Unions had also encouraged the adoption of the new flexible workstyles although they had expressed some early concerns about health and safety risk particularly for those working at home. Greater care and attention to staff welfare may need to be given when they were remote working which was why ECC had been insistent that no employees could work remote full time. ECC would seek to accommodate those who wished to work more substantively in an ECC office.
- (x) There were very active staff/employee networks who ensured a high profile for staff concerns and priorities such as supporting those with caring responsibilities.
- (xi) Flexibility of working patterns could aid recruitment as it may be viewed as attractive by prospective applicants.
- (xii) Staff working from home had been facilitated by the provision of equipment for use at home and allowances towards some furniture. By working at home some staff may be saving on commuting costs. Some members queried if ECC would be saving on energy costs by the low occupancy rates in buildings and mothballing of parts of County Hall.
- (xiii) Prior to the pandemic approximately 95% of staff lived within the county. It was acknowledged that since the pandemic some staff

may have been making different choices about where they live now and had moved out of the county.

Conclusion:

It was agreed that the following further information would be provided:

- (i) A map or other representation illustrating the distribution of staff home addresses.
- (ii) Line by line breakdown of budget provision for home working including for new starters.

The Cabinet Member and supporting officers were thanked for their attendance and they then left the meeting.

5. Everyone's Essex Performance Update - Quarter 4 2021-22

The Committee received report CPSC/17/22 which provided the latest performance update on the aims, aspirations and targets within the Everyone's Essex Strategy.

The following joined the meeting to introduce the item:

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader of the Council
Richard Puleston – Director, Policy
Clare Perkins – Business Intelligence Partner

During questioning and discussion, the following was acknowledged, highlighted and/or noted:

- (i) The Strategy was intended to be the building blocks for generational change, facilitate equal opportunity, and some outcomes would not be immediate.
- (ii) Both local and national government, together with strategic partners, were facing unprecedented times emerging from the global pandemic and now also faced further significant economic challenges and climate change. The latter was one of the biggest threats and would require longer term measures to change behaviours.
- (iii) Several members questioned the Leader on bus service provision. The Chairman noted the increasing importance of good public transport, including information about services.

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- (iv) There was concern about bus services in rural areas and members encouraged the further roll-out of the Digibus scheme. The Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee would be looking at future strategy for bus services.
 - (v) Members encouraged further lobbying on the A127 corridor to ensure adequate road infrastructure for the anticipated housing growth in the area.
 - (vi) Members sought information on whether there had been any further progress on devolution and the possibility of the County Council also becoming a Transport Authority.
 - (vii) More information may be needed for members to further understand some of the targets and what was changing and where and cited, for example:
 - The skills that were being targeted when measuring the numbers of people benefiting from skills and employment programmes and where they were being targeted.
 - The type of jobs being created by ECC programmes and where they were located.
 - Distinguishing those using e-scooters instead of car journeys from those just using scooters as recreational activity.
 - The location of homes benefitting from funding for energy efficiency improvements and clarification on the target being sought. Members stressed that it was important to continue dialogue with Government and lobby hard for further funding.

Conclusion

In view of the detailed questioning from some members on quite specific matters and subjects, it was suggested that a more granular conversation to go through some of the detail required by members could be arranged as part of pre-meets ahead of future formal performance updates on Everyone's Essex. The Chairman agreed to consider this further. In the meantime, it was agreed to provide further information on issues raised under (vi) above.

The Chairman highlighted that the discussion had demonstrated that future quarterly performance updates would benefit from including more information on the geographical distribution of funding and spending as part of the broader Levelling Up agenda. It was stressed by the Leader that change was not always seen by everyone as it may just impact on services accessed by a few people. It was also important to note that change was not always solely about funding and may also be about facilitating equal

access and opportunity and that any decisions to prioritise or target certain areas would be supported by the evidence. The Deputy Leader would be invited to attend the next update so that she would be able to provide more information on Levelling Up initiatives.

It was stressed that there were not sufficient resources available to always advise local members of everything being done, particularly in relation to highways matters. However, this would be referred to Councillor Scott to consider if there could be more communications around what was being done and the best way to display it.

Members sought more information on funding for infrastructure projects, including section 106 developer contributions, and delivery of those projects. There were suggestions from members that there could be more joined-up thinking specifically in relation to section 106 developer contributions and better linkages with the work of the Local Highways Panels. Further consideration would be given by the Scrutiny Board to structuring a further discussion on these issues perhaps jointly with other scrutiny committees if appropriate.

The Leader and supporting officers were thanked for their attendance and they then left the meeting.

6. Work Programme

The Committee received report CPSC/18/21 comprising the current work programme of the Committee which was noted.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 22 September 2022.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1.07pm

Chairman