
Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.15am on Thursday, 28 April 2022 in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford.

Present:

County Councillors:
C Pond (Chairman)
T Cunningham
J Fleming
P Gadd
S Kane
M Mackrory (Vice Chairman)
A McQuiggan
C Siddall
M Steptoe (Vice Chairman)
M Vance

Chairmen and Vice Chairmen from other scrutiny committees:

A Goggin
R Gooding
C Guglielmi
D Harris (by Zoom link)
P May
C Souter

Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer, and Gemma Bint, Democratic Services Officer, were also present.

The Chairman welcomed Chairmen and Vice Chairmen from the other scrutiny committees who were in attendance. This was in recognition of the cross-cutting nature of the Everyone's Essex agenda item and would be a standing invite for future updates on Everyone's Essex.

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 Wiles.

2. Minutes

The notes of the meeting held on 24 February 2022 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman of the meeting.

Matters Arising: It was noted that further information had been received on the actions listed as arising from the briefing session on developer contributions. There was further discussion on this under Agenda Item 7.

4. Questions from the public

There were no questions from the public.

5. Everyone's Essex

The Committee considered report CPSC/08/2022 comprising.

The Chairman welcomed the following to the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

- Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader of the Council
- Councillor Louise McKinlay, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community, Equality, Partnerships and Performance
- Richard Puleston, Director – Policy
- Suzanne Barcz - Head of Performance and Business Intelligence

The Leader and Deputy Leader provided the first quarterly performance update on the aspirations and targets set in the Everyone's Essex Strategy:

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) Some measures would require work with local partners with working to reduce carbon emissions cited as an example.
- (iii) The Leader had met District Leaders to raise the profile of Everyone's Essex. However, the County Council would need to make sure that it is not viewed as just "a public sector thing" and that there was private sector and community and voluntary sector involvement. The important role of the private sector, in particular, in developing apprenticeship opportunities was highlighted.
- (iv) The Leader stressed that no one should be left behind but that some areas would need more attention. It would not always be about financial support but checking and ensuring that people had equal opportunities and this was reflected in the County Council's own Levelling Up paper which complemented the

national White Paper. There would need to be both a geographical and cohort approach. Some members stressed there could also be practical issues to consider around accessing support.

- (v) Scrutiny had an ongoing role to challenge the consistency of change and improvement across the county and disaggregating analysis down to local community levels where necessary.
- (vi) In rural areas the challenge was not always about household income but broader issues around isolation and connectivity.
- (vii) There was challenge on wider disparities of health and wellbeing (life expectancy, suicides and education for example) and some further information on these (possibly in different formats) would be available at other times in the year (not everything was measured/available quarterly).
- (viii) Mental health was highlighted as a particular challenge with societal rather than just individual factors also impacting on symptoms and outcomes. It was important to look at root causes and measuring the outcomes of some improvement actions would not be tangible straightaway.
- (ix) The issue of poverty was complex. An example of this was that 75% of families in poverty actually had family members in some kind of work. If families were currently being supported on a part-time income for example, then perhaps some of the support to be offered should be around identifying and resolving issues currently preventing full-time work.
- (x) Members highlighted energy poverty, looking at more green energy and to make sure that people were skilled to work in green areas of the local economy.
- (xi) The impact of the Tendring Multi-Disciplinary Team pilot providing a more-rounded approach towards families would be assessed and learning from it applied where appropriate elsewhere.
- (xii) There was challenge on the clarity and transparency of the baselines being used for some measures.
- (xiii) There was a reluctance to put absolute timelines on every target as the future for some issues was currently extremely unpredictable.

Conclusion:

It was agreed that some further clarity and information was to be provided:

- (i) on the availability of some baseline data for the County Council's energy usage.
- (ii) On total household waste to be collected and the percentage sent for recycling as the targets seemed worse than baseline?
- (iii) on the availability of some baseline data for sustainable transport

It was **further agreed** to continue with format of quarterly performance reporting presented to the Committee, recognising that the structure of ongoing scrutiny engagement with the performance reporting for Everyone's Essex may further evolve over time.

The witnesses were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.

6. Data Analytics and artificial intelligence

The Committee considered report CPSC/09/22 which.

Richard Puleston, Director – Policy, remained from the previous item. The Chairman also welcomed the following to the meeting to join Mr Puleston and introduce the item and respond to questions:

- Nicola Mallett - Head of Profession Data and Analytics
- Stephen Simpkin - Data Science Fellow

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

- (i) It was important to ensure that the County Council had a culture that valued data and viewed it as a strategic asset. Generally, data was welcomed when it reinforced hypotheses but less so when it challenged those hypotheses.
- (ii) Members challenged the combinations of data available and options for different types of presentation of data and the levels of granularity (for example educational attainment).
- (iii) Members sought clarification on the challenges of data sharing between partners. Partnership working was an ongoing part of the operating environment and the County Council wanted to work more with partners and increase the number of data sharing agreements in places for sharing information on different issues. It was important to continue to promote recognition within both the County Council and partner organisations that they had a shared interest in improving local infrastructure.

- (iv) Outcomes were not just about service delivery and for levelling up, for instance, it was more complex and pulling data together was more difficult. Residents did not always recognise local government boundaries when looking for support and the onus was on local government and other partners to make sure data flowed across those boundaries.
- (v) Data analysis can highlight the unexpected (for example rural Braintree had been identified as needing support for levelling up but was not showing up on indices of deprivation).
- (vi) An example case study showed 50,000 households at risk of fuel poverty and a further 60,000 identified as at risk with a 52% rise in the regulated price cap. This analysis had used a definition of fuel poverty as those spending more than 10% of their income on energy who continued their same rates of energy usage. This was still very new analysis and further work was needed to establish outreach to partners and residents to provide more information.
- (vii) Members challenged the availability of published data sets that the County Council held citing, for example, how much energy was used by the County Council. There was a commitment to add more data to the existing data portal where possible and subject to any relevant commercial sensitivities. Members were invited to suggest any particular data that they would like to see published on a regular basis.

Conclusion:

The witnesses were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.

7. Developer Contributions

On 31 March 2022 the Committee had hosted a private virtual briefing session on aspects of the process for developer contributions to local infrastructure (with members from the three other scrutiny committees also invited). The Committee considered report CPSC/10/22 which was an overview of the briefing presentation and resulting discussion. Further information had subsequently been provided;

- (i) On how members could get involved in developer contributions and mitigating impacts on development;
- (ii) Clarifying the County Council's role and interactions with the NHS;
- (iii) Clarifying the data held on specific s106 holdings and the status of planned projects.

It was **agreed that:**

- (i) Notwithstanding the provision of the above, further clarity would be sought on the data held for s106 holdings and whether further granularity was possible and further detail could be made available – for example at ward level.
- (ii) Further information be requested on the preparing for, and anticipated impact of the introduction of the national infrastructure levy and what was being done to facilitate such introduction.

7. Work Programme

The Committee received report CPSC/11/22 comprising the current work programme of the Committee which was noted.

It was also highlighted that the Place and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee had hosted a joint session (with Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee members also invited) to look at the draft Economic Renewal Investment Fund/Strategy and members had constructively challenged and supported the proposals. Some further thought would need to be given to scrutiny follow-up and monitoring.

8. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that whilst the next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 26 May 2022, a site visit to the Essex Records Office was being arranged which might impact on that date.

[CLERKS NOTE: the formal meeting date of 26 May 2022 was subsequently cancelled to be replaced by a site visit on the 24 May 2022 instead.]

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.25pm

Chairman