
Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 1.00pm on Wednesday, 4 August 2021 in the Council Chamber, County Hall, Chelmsford.

Present:

County Councillors:

C Pond (Chairman)
S Barker
T Cunningham
J Fleming
P Gadd
M Garnett
S Kane
D King (substitute)
A McGurran (substitute)
D Land
A McQuiggan
C Siddall
M Vance

Richard Buttress, Democratic Services Manager, and Graham Hughes, Senior 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. Since publication of the agenda, Councillor Barker had replaced Cllr Steel as a member of the Committee.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Henderson (for whom Councillor McGurran substituted), Mackrory (for whom Councillor King substituted) and Steptoe.

2 Appointment of Vice-Chairmen

The Chairman nominated Councillor Mackrory to be a Vice Chairman of the Committee, which was seconded by Councillor Barker. At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Barker also proposed Councillor Steptoe for the second Vice Chairman post, and this was seconded by Councillor Garnett.

There being no further nominations and by general consent, it was agreed that Councillors Mackrory and Steptoe were each elected as a Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2021 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Questions from the public

There were no questions from the public.

5. Essex County Council Organisation Strategy

The Committee considered report CPSC/06/2021 comprising an update on the draft Organisation Strategy for 2021-25 and the approach to measuring performance.

The following people from Essex County Council joined the meeting to introduce the item and respond to questions:

Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leader.
Gavin Jones, Chief Executive,
Patrick Guthrie, Head of Policy
Alastair Gordon,

A new Organisation Strategy was being developed. The new administration had brought forward its draft Organisation Strategy (called *Everyone's Essex: The Plan for Essex 2021-25*) to Full Council in July to note pending a further period of engagement with stakeholders prior to seeking adoption of a finalised version at Full Council in October.

The strategy embodied the themes that the new administration had set out of renewal (to recover and rebuild following the pandemic), equality (that growth and renewal benefitted all) and ambition (to secure the best outcomes and the best value for money).

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

- (i) The Strategy sat within the Essex Vision which had been established three years ago after consultation with the community.
- (ii) A 100-day Plan had been set by the new Administration – some ambitions within it would transition into longer term plans and this particularly applied to levelling up actions.
- (iii) The Chief Executive highlighted the creative tension between political ambition and resources available and the need to demonstrate that the County Council's activities aligned with

strategic priorities. There may also be ongoing conversations about prioritisation in allocating future resources.

- (iv) Whilst current service delivery models had served the local community well in the past, the new strategic plan emphasised the need for closer alignment of future work with partners and flexibility in ways of working.
- (v) Discussions were underway between Cabinet Members and Executive Directors to define processes and targets so that political priorities could be translated into corporate actions. A further update on this, and the development of performance measures, could be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.
- (vi) Metric setting to assist assessing performance had to be supported by regular reliable data that could be influenced. Members were keen to emphasise the importance of challenging the flow of robust and timely information on strategic aims.
- (vii) The County Council had an ethics data committee. It also had a central analytics team and was looking to further build upon a strong relationship with the local university to help recruit young graduates.
- (viii) Some members were keen to try and indicate the links to budgets where possible and funding behind meeting Key Performance Indicators. It was also acknowledged that developing KPIs was not always about costs and savings.
- (ix) The recommendations made by the Climate Commission were being worked through and their contribution to, and impact on, the aspirations to reduce emissions.
- (x) Input from city, district and parish councils was important – the Essex Association of Local Councils had already been consulted and it was suggested that other local council forums should also be included. There was a view that some communications were still siloed and that the County Council and Districts, for example, could sometimes collaborate more on that.
- (xi) The need to work cross-border did present some challenges and the ongoing development of NHS Integrated Care System (ICS) boundaries was cited as an example. The County Council were keen to encourage further close working between the three ICS's in Essex.
- (xii) In terms of smarter ways of working, members encouraged lobbying for legislation to permit more virtual and hybrid local government meetings.

- (xiii) Specific digital versions of documents needed to be created rather than solely putting a pre-written hard copy format onto a digital platform. The Leader also acknowledged that perhaps more emphasis needed to be put on plain English in communications as well.
- (xiv) Some members encouraged the development of a definition of what levelling up meant for Essex.

Conclusion:

Members stressed that, in due course, they would be keen to see further detail on the empowerment parts of the plan and the way front line staff could influence the changes necessary.

It was **agreed** that:

- (i) A list of partners currently being consulted would be provided to the Committee so that members had the opportunity to suggest any further consultees;
- (ii) A timetable for delivery should be developed;
- (iii) A copy of the 100-day plan be provided subject to the consent of the governing political party;
- (iv) Consideration be given to arranging a further opportunity for members to comment on the development of the Strategy, and the performance measures in particular, ahead of the Full Council meeting in October;
- (v) Further briefing be scheduled on levelling-up strategy and actions;
- (vi) A further update on the implementation of Climate Commission recommendations be presented in due course with further clarity on the targets actually being set.
- (vii) Further briefing be scheduled on the collection and use of data analytics and artificial intelligence, including practical examples of how it has been used to solve problems.

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

6. Information Bulletin

The Committee considered report CPSC/07/21/07/21 comprising:

- (i) 2021/22 Financial Overview as at the First Quarter Stage; and

- (ii) 20/21 Provisional Outturn report that was considered by Cabinet in June 2021.

It was **agreed** that:

- (i) Further information be provided to breakdown Operating Costs which comprised approximately 10% of the Revenue Budget presented in the Appendix to 2021/22 Financial Overview as at the First Quarter Stage;
- (ii) Subject to (i) above that both reports be noted;
- (iii) Further financial scrutiny was currently planned for the October meeting of the committee.

6. Work Programme

The Committee received report CPSC/08/21 comprising primarily of headlines from recent discussions with Cabinet Members. Members agreed to defer further formal consideration of the work programme of the Committee pending further discussions which would be reported back on at the next meeting.

7. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 30 September 2021.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 2.55pm.

Chairman