

**MINUTES**  
of the  
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

held on 12 February 2024 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor J. Jeapes (Chair)  
Councillor A. Thompson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors, H. Clark, A. Davidson, C. Davidson, J. Deakin, S. Davis, S. Dobson, J. Sosin,  
M. Steel and P. Wilson

Also in attendance:

Councillors J. Armstrong, D. Eley, L. Foster, R. Moore, and S. Scott

**1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies were received from Councillors V. Canning, K. Franks, and S. Young. Councillor C. Davidson and Councillor J. Sosin substituted for Councillor S. Young and Councillor K. Franks respectively.

**2. Chairs Announcements**

No announcements were made for this meeting.

**3. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

**4. Decision and Action Sheet**

The Committee considered and noted the decision and action sheet since the last meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

**5. Declaration of Interests**

All Members were reminded to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary interests or other registerable interests where appropriate in any items of business on the meeting's agenda. None were made.

## 6. Public Question Time

Seven questions from members of the public were received. Six questions were for the Cabinet Member for a Greener and Safer Chelmsford related to the green space at Hoynors and the land by Maldon Road. Concerns included the importance of the area as a recreational space for residents; the maintenance policy in place; that the rewilding had a detrimental effect on properties; and that the area had become a public safety and health hazard.

The local ward member also reiterated the concerns of residents. It was asked if there was a balance to be struck between their constituents' enjoyment and the rewilding of Hoynors, for the wellbeing and safety of residents. There were concerns regarding the litter and fire safety with a warning from the Chelmsford Fire Brigade. It was stated there should be an agreement on the way forward and that residents would be able to resume the enjoyment.

In response to the questions the Cabinet Member for a Greener and Safer Chelmsford advised that this relates to the policy for creating and managing species-rich grassland and had been reassured by the officers that the maintenance of the green space at Hoynors was in accordance with the policy. It was noted that the margins along the entrances on Maldon Road were regularly mown to ensure adequate sight lines. To ensure that the policy was implemented, it was reassured that the area was regularly inspected. It was advised that there had been no evidence of dog fouling, debris and litter during site visits by officers in May and June 2023. It was also advised that grounds maintenance staff would visit sites every three weeks and even though there might be some littering on land maintained by Chelmsford City Council, it was advised that this was not related to the implementation of the policy and areas were visited regularly to clear the litter. It was also advised that the banks at Hoynors were steep and not suitable for formal recreational activities. It was stated that the naturalistic maintenance approach was prioritised and that if officers were to close mow then this would destroy the work that had been done to date in restoring habitats. It was also advised that compromise had already been made to strike a balance between amore naturalistic maintenance regime and the residents' enjoyment of the area.

A separate question was for Essex Police, the member of the public stated that since their family moved to Chelmsford around two years ago, they had experienced both thefts of their scooter and push bikes as well as an attempted theft of their car. They also reported an incident of burglary and had witnessed suspicious activity in the park. They also reported incidents of burglaries and robberies in the town centre and even when the police were called, they had not turned up. They asked if they, their families, and their neighbours should feel safe in Chelmsford considering the numerous incidents. The member of the public was advised that their question would be answered when Essex Police presented their item later in the meeting.

*(7.02pm to 7.22pm)*

## 7. Decisions Called-In

To report on any Cabinet decisions called in and to decide how they should be progressed. No decisions had been called in.

## 8. Cabinet Portfolio Update – Cabinet Member for a Greener and Safer Chelmsford

The Committee received a portfolio update from Councillor Rose Moore on their role as the Cabinet Member for a Greener and Safer Chelmsford. They provided an overview of their key roles and responsibilities. [Their report could be accessed via the City Council website.](#)

Regarding parks and green spaces, the Committee was reminded of the implementation of the policy to maintain species-rich grasslands and they heard that there had been positive results. Councillor Moore highlighted that one of the best developments was the play area in Melbourne Park which was in an area of deprivation in Chelmsford. It was reported that it had been providing a great play experience and that most materials used were recycled. The Committee also heard success of the new vendors had started trading in both Compass Gardens and the kiosk at Hylands in 2023. The official PSPO signage and maps relating to dog restrictions at Hylands had been successfully installed. Officers had also been carrying out advisory patrols and there were also advisory leaflets available. The Committee were also informed that Hylands Park continued to be popular due to events such as Open Estate Days, and on the progress for the John Shennan Field to be a local nature reserve.

The Committee heard that there had been a general rise in litter, especially litter that was thrown from cars and that clearing litter on major roads had proven to be difficult due to the risk to crews. Regarding recycling and waste services, it was advised that there were twenty-one recycling rounds, eight food waste rounds, seven residual waste rounds, and one isolated properties round. It was also advised that 88.33% of flats have a full range of recycling and 76% receive food waste collections. 97% of the flats have either full range or partial recycling and it was advised that the cost of a collection service per household was less than £1.35 per week. In terms of recycling performance, it was reported that the recycling and compost waste was at 51.8% and 230,000 kerbside household collections were undertaken per week.

Regarding Chelmsford Market, it was reported that the indoor market consisted of 21 kiosks and 106 stalls, and that occupancy was at 68%. It was reported that high-speed Wi-Fi was available to assist traders to diversify however it was also advised that the trading environment was challenging. It was advised that the High Street Market continued to trade as normal but there had been a drop in footfall. It was also reported that Shopmobility continued to be well-used with a total of 3,129 uses between April 2023 and January 2024. There were also improvements for the toilet facilities and a policy was currently in development to accommodate people identifying as trans.

Regarding public health and protection services, it was reported that the service had been through some challenges, that they had risen to in the past year. The Committee heard that the city council was now in the Phase 2 of the Home Upgrade Grant and an initiative was underway to assist those in homes off the gas grid and improve resilience through insulation other measures to reduce heating costs. It was advised that the City Council received around 1000 noise complaints and 400 anti-social behaviour (ASB) complaints during 2023. With regards to food standards,

there had been one successful food safety prosecution of a takeaway which resulted in a £13,000 fine. It was also advised that the Food Plan had been approved at Cabinet in September 2023.

The Committee also heard of the recent statistics regarding bereavement services. It was advised that current facilities were close to capacity however a lower morality rate was observed. Members were also informed of the improvement works for the chapels and memorials.

In response to the questions and statements from Committee Members, it was advised that;

- Regarding a query whether Chelmsford City Council would be able to share resources to other boroughs due to a revocation of a Operators Licence, it was advised that it would not be practical to share this particular resource (Transport Manager).
- The City Council would not be able to enforce the restriction of the sale of vaping products in High Chelmer shopping centre due to the leasehold arrangement. However, subsequent to the motion at Council, it was advised that the government had introduced restrictions on the sales of disposable vapes.
- Regarding a query regarding enforcement of bylaws, particularly parking on grass verges, it was advised that existing ones were unfortunately unenforceable and were effectively redundant.
- Regarding a query about the Home Upgrade Grant, it was clarified that this was government funding, the City Council's role is to promote uptake of these grants.

**RESOLVED** that;

- the Cabinet Portfolio Update to be noted.

*(7.22pm to 7.49pm)*

## 9. Annual Presentation by Safer Chelmsford Partnership and Essex Police

The Committee received an annual presentation from the Safer Chelmsford Partnership and Essex Police.

Spencer Clarke, the Public Protection Manager for Chelmsford, gave an overview of the strategic duties and priorities and reiterated that they were speaking on behalf of the Safer Chelmsford Partnership. The Committee were informed of the statutory duties of the Community Safety Partnership which were detailed under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Members were also noted of a crime risk matrix that was produced and the top risks identified include burglary, trafficking of drugs, medium risk domestic abuse, robbery, hate crime, and vehicle crime. The Committee were informed of the forthcoming Face the Public event with the Police, Fire, and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) on 27<sup>th</sup> February as well as statistics on public opinion.

The Committee was also advised of the Community Safety Structure and the Community Safety Partnership Hub which was coming to its five-year anniversary.

They were also informed of fortnightly tasking and monthly tasking with other partners. It was highlighted that one of the results had been improved data and identified hotspots for ASB. The Partnership also continued to meet with schools and social landlords regarding rough sleeping and mental health. They were also informed of the relations and engagements in wider Essex in strategic level with numerous partnership boards.

The Committee were advised of the key projects, including the Chelmsford Against Slavery Partnership, and Women's Safety in Our City project. The Committee were also briefed regarding violence and vulnerability. The Committee was also informed of various engagement events such the 999 day in South Woodham Ferrers. It was also reported that Chelmsford had maintained the Purple Flag for 11<sup>th</sup> year running and that Transport safety officers would also be patrolling six areas in Essex including the bus station in Chelmsford along with other improvements including a CCTV camera under a bypass in First Avenue, a bystander awareness project, and new benches at the Cathedral.

The Women's Safety Project had been running for 18 months and there had been a lot of collaboration with the Business Improvement District as well as various campaigns. The second video for the Women's Safety Project would be focused on bystander awareness and there were currently 40 businesses signed up to the project. It was also noted that the project had become a blueprint for Essex as there were five other councils looking to deliver something similar. The Committee also heard about the future work of the Safer Chelmsford Partnership.

In response to the comments and questions from Committee members, it was advised that;

- Regarding the new CCTV, it was clarified that the PFCC gave officers an opportunity to fund the placement of CCTV in that area and advised that crimes were less likely to be committed if CCTV was in operation.
- It was advised that before CCTV could be installed, officers would have to follow a robust privacy assessment.
- Regarding a query about the community protection warnings, it was advised that each particular case was judged and that officers would tend to give out a warning before putting in a notice. It was advised that there would be changes in the legislation in the coming months.

*(7.49pm to 8.13pm)*

Chief Inspector Paul Ballard then presented the work of Essex Police. The Committee learned of the Force Plan for 2022/25 and the policing priorities from the PFCC. They also talked the specific work in Chelmsford. They advised that the force was the largest that it had ever been and that recruitment would continue to ensure retaining their numbers. It was advised that they continued to risk assess, grade, and respond to all forms of ASB reported. The Chelmsford Town Centre team was also highlighted in tackling in offences such as theft and retail crime. They continued to work closely with the Community Safety Partnership and other partners.

The Committee heard that crime was up by 3.1% but ASB was down by 36.8%. There had also been a 10.2% drop in cycle theft and violent offences had decreased as well. However, areas of concern included vehicle theft, shoplifting, and dwelling burglaries..

They also presented the recent statistics and the results of the public survey which were conducted by a private company. It was found that there had been an increase of public confidence. Essex Police remained as one of the most highly surveyed and Chelmsford were representative of the force figures with a 77% approval score.

The Committee was informed of the local community policing structure in Chelmsford. Concerns raised by Chelmsford residents had been reported regarding the rise of ASB around Chelmsford City Bus Station and train station, and informed measures had been taken such as issuing multiple search warrants, and dispersal orders. There had also been significant work to tackle vehicle crime including identifying trends and patterns. It was also stated the solve rate for motor vehicle crimes had been improving in Essex and in Chelmsford. There had been a reduction of 10% on pedal cycle thefts over the last 12 months but there was a knock-on effect as it was observed that offenders moved on to other methods. Chelmsford Police had also worked with partners in tackling violence against women and girls with initiative such as “On Your Team” and other events and continued to work with the night-time economy surrounding that. Members also heard of examples of Nights of Action which included working with other partners as well as engagement with communities to strengthen existing relationships.

In response to the questions and comments made by members, it was advised that;

- Essex Police seek to retain their staff numbers thus they recruit on a rolling basis. Residents should expect to see more police on the streets but the challenge would always be if they were in the right place, in the right time based on information.
- The response team in Chelmsford consisted of 5 Inspectors, 15 Sergeants, and 82 police constables. Regarding how many would be on duty, there would be 1 inspector, 2 sergeants, and 17 police constables.
- Regarding the increase in shoplifting, it was admitted that there was an increase in shoplifting, but that offenders were being prosecuted. It was also advised that whilst there had been an increase and a significant concern for businesses, some of the increase could indicate that there had been increased reporting.

*(8.37pm to 9.01pm)*

**RESOLVED** that;

- the annual presentation by Safer Chelmsford Partnership and Essex Police be noted.

## 10. Presentation on Essex Violence and Vulnerability Partnership

The Deputy Chief Constable Andy Prophet gave a presentation to the Committee regarding work of the Essex Violence and Vulnerability Partnership (Essex VVU). The Committee heard that they were the Chair of the Operations Board within Essex VVU.

The Committee heard that the purpose of Essex VVU was to tackle serious violence in the county. It was reported that Essex received multiple funding incomes from central Government, PFCC, and Essex County Council to tackle serious violence. This had been a long-term preventative strategy with key measures including reducing

hospital admissions, non-domestic homicide, and other knife violence. The Committee learned Essex VVU's approach which was to engage with communities, young people, those vulnerable to serious violence, to understand what the communities tell them, targeting interventions, developing the workforce, raising awareness, and improving understanding.

The Committee learned that Essex VVU was a small group based in the Community Safety Partnership Hub and their role was to coordinate activity around the county to ensure that the approaches to prevent serious violence were effective. This would include projects such as outreach and targeted youth work. The Committee learned that nearly 50,000 individuals were engaged by Essex VVU and this continued to rise. It was advised that the preventative work was just as important as traditional police work. CCTV, working with schools, and working with particular communities were used to tackle serious violence. The Committee was also made aware of the funding that local community safety managers and others could apply each year. Raising awareness regarding risks of the county lines was highlighted as a key tool. Serious Violence Duty and sharing information and data around Chelmsford and county was highlighted. The Committee were then given examples of local prevention such as Knife Arch operations, pursuing organised crime groups, and approach with persistent offenders.

In response to the questions and statements from members, the Deputy Chief Constable advised that;

- It was admitted that whilst serious crime and violent crime statistics decreased, burglaries also increased. However, it was also advised that there were 30,000 violent crimes per year and two-thirds of them were domestic abuse in homes. It was advised that a tailored response for Chelmsford regarding vehicle crimes and that some offenders were outside county with organised theft of high value vehicles.
- It was also advised that whilst resources were low, it was ensured that Essex Police strived to ensure that they make the best use of their funds and ensured that this was balanced. There would be judgement of targeting where the most harm was and what the right approach would be.
- In response to a query regarding criminal behaviour orders (CBOs), it was advised that it was an outcome of an escalating approach and that the notice given was effective in controlling the offending behaviour. It was only the most persistent offenders that would get a CBO which was highlighted as effective. However, it was admitted that the delays in the court system posed a challenge.
- Essex Police reiterated that all calls should be logged and 100% should be recorded.
- Primary drivers of serious violence included domestic abuse, drugs, knife crime, and serious violence.

**RESOLVED** that;

- the presentation on Essex Violence and Vulnerability Partnership be noted.

*(8.13pm to 8.37pm)*

## 11. Presentation from Essex Countywide Traveller Unit (ECTU)

Paul Ashworth, the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Manager, and Alec Baker, Essex Countywide Traveller Unit Enforcement Lead, gave a presentation on the work of the Essex Countywide Traveller Unit and when there had been unauthorised encampments.

Councillor Jannetta Sosin declared at this point that they were the Chelmsford City Council representative for ECTU.

The Committee were advised of the background of the ECTU which meet bi-yearly. It was advised that ECTU was partner-funded with 11 local authorities signed up to manage unauthorised encampments on their behalf and that they fund the unit in terms of managing unauthorised encampments, staffing, and legal costs. The ECTU worked in partnership with Essex Police, Rural Engagement Team, and the Fire and Rescue Service. There were three main units in ECTU where one dedicated to unauthorised encampment, one for outreach, and one for the management of ECC owned sites.

The Committee heard the definition of what unauthorised encampments were, which could be either in public or private land, and the legal avenues to retain land from unauthorised encampments as well as common law avenues for private landlords. Members were advised that ECTU have two legal avenues as well as a non-legal route under the "Code for Travellers" and it was expected that encampments would be resolved within 7-10 working days. The Committee were advised that ECTU's primary avenue would be the Section 77/78 Criminal Justice & Public Order Act 1994 and that welfare checks were also conducted. Members were also made aware of the current statistics and trends and advised that numbers of unauthorised encampments had been declining in the last two years. They were also informed of the historic hotspots, such as the Dukes Park industrial estate and Galleywood Common, and ECTU had provided a case example of the unauthorised encampment on Waterhouse Lane car park. Then, the Committee was also informed of the ECC traveller sites as well as the outreach services that ECTU provide.

In response to the questions and statements from members, the officers at ECTU advised;

- Where the district or local authorities that have a parish council, ECTU still undertake the management of unauthorised encampment on their land.
- It was advised that from the ECTU interventions, there was evidence that young people do go to further education or transition from primary to secondary school. There were also support in areas such as digital inclusion as well as other kinds of training.
- It was also reported that all traveller sites that ECC own were at full capacity.
- It was observed that travellers were not travelling as much as they used to due to challenges in income streams and that they try to buy their own land. It was identified that COVID might have affected the encampments as well.

**RESOLVED** that

- the presentation from ECTU be noted.



*(9.01 pm to 9.27 pm)*

## 12. Work Programme

The Committee considered a report on its work programme which had been updated following the last meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

The Committee was informed of the cancellation of the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024 meeting and that the scheduled items would be moved to 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024.

**RESOLVED** that;

- the Work programme be noted.

*(9.27 pm to 9.30 pm)*

## 13. Urgent Business

There were no matters of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm.

Chair