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Community Leadership Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

8 February 2021

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, HELD ON MONDAY, 8TH FEBRUARY, 2021 AT 7.30 PM

Present:	Councillors Chittock (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Amos, Clifton, Davidson, Davis, King, Miles and Steady
Also Present:	Councillor C Guglielmi (Deputy Leader) and McWilliams (Portfolio Holder for Partnerships)
In Attendance:	Anastasia Simpson (Assistant Director (Partnerships)), Tim Clarke (Assistant Director (Housing and Environment)), Keith Simmons (Head of Democratic Services and Elections), John Fox (Public Health, Wellbeing & Environmental Protection Manager), Keith Durran (Democratic Services Officer) and Matt Cattermole (Communications Assistant)
Also in Attendance:	Kirsty O'Callaghan (Head of Strengthening Communities at Essex County Council)

11. CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING.

In the absence of the Chairman of the Committee (Councillor Skeels), the Chair was occupied by the Vice-Chairman (Councillor Chittock).

12. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillor Skeels sent his apologies (no substitute).

13. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on Monday 30 November 2020 were approved as a correct record and were then signed by the Chairman.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none on this occasion.

15. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 38

On this occasion no Councillor had submitted notice of a question.

16. REPORT OF HEAD OF STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES AT ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL. - A.1 - SOCIAL ISOLATION AND MENTAL HEALTH.

Summary of Issue

The Committee heard how the impact of social isolation and loneliness on an individual's physical and mental wellbeing were well known. Social isolation had been recognised as a risk factor for suicide with an increased risk of depression, low self-esteem, reported sleep problems and increased stress response. Loneliness was considered to have an adverse impact on the condition of the heart and was a strong

predictor of premature death, with people who were lonely more likely to be readmitted to hospital, had longer stays and more visits to GPs or A&E.

The Impact of COVID on social isolation and loneliness

The Committee also heard that the COVID pandemic had posed significant health risks to the District's population; however, the risk to health outcomes extended beyond the clinical risk of COVID. The socio-economic and lifestyle factors that influenced health outcomes had also been adversely disrupted during the pandemic.

Members were informed that COVID had also amplified and increased the pace at which cohorts of people who would traditionally be at risk of social isolation were impacted, but also it had created a new group of people who had become increasingly anxious about the disease itself and the impact on their life. These included parents who had become increasingly isolated either due to financial impacts or the absence of informal connections through schools; people whose employment had changed through furlough, working at home or unemployment; and the recently bereaved who had been unable to have the normal in-person connections that would have supported them during that difficult time.

There would also be a generation of children and young people who had been adversely affected by the pandemic and that would likely have long term impacts for their emotional wellbeing, educational outcomes and longer-term economic wellbeing.

It was reported to the Committee that the [Essex Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018 – 2022](#) identified social isolation and loneliness a key priority. A whole system approach had been mobilised in 2019 designed to connect resources across the system.

The key aims were:

- *Communities had a better understanding of the impact of loneliness and how to help each other.*
- *There was a range of community led support to prevent and reduce loneliness and build capacity to support people to live well.*
- *People who were lonely, or at risk of loneliness were recognised and could access local information and support to live well.*
- *People with complex needs could access support to reduce loneliness and feel part of their local community.*

This approach included:

- Commissioned services addressing social isolation and loneliness as part of their wider response to improve independence. There were a range of ECC commissioned services that delivered specialist services to support people, promoted wellbeing and helped them to gain/regain independence, those included the Essex Children and Family Wellbeing Service, Alzheimer's Society - Dementia, Carers First - carers, ECL - sensory, Summit – Learning Disabilities and Autism, Futures in Mind – mental health to name but a few. Beyond that, there were a range services commissioned by CCG/health partners as well as

other local programmes that addressed the issues of social isolation and loneliness.

- Services directly commissioned to tackle social isolation and loneliness. Provide, had been the strategic partner to tackle loneliness, delivered a single point of access for the Livewell/Linkwell network support that included the Care Navigator Plus network (a partnership between a number of voluntary sector and community sector providers using a social prescription approach). The Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) as a Livewell Linkwell partner delivered the social prescribing and the social isolation model, including the United in Kind coaches – as did the West Essex Community Action Network (WECAN). Social engagement partners delivering Essex Befriends, or befriending service, included Action for Family Carers, MIND, Mencap and independent Age.
- Place based community care and support. Primary Care Networks were key to integrating primary care with secondary and community services, pivotal to improving population health and taking a proactive approach to hidden needs to support. Social Prescribing Link Workers helped to reduce health inequalities by supporting people to unpick complex issues affecting their wellbeing, and enabled people to have more control over their lives. There was also a multitude of smaller and larger infrastructure organisations such as the Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) organisations and volunteer centres who worked to build community resilience and in doing so tackle loneliness.
- Community Networks. Faith communities played a positive role in neighbourhoods and supported those most in need, strengthening resilience, reinforcing local identity and helped to connect communities. The Essex Faith Covenant continued to drive the partnership between faith communities and public services. Parish and Town Councils, as the first level of local government provided communities with a democratic voice. Networks like those played a key role in the identification of local needs and utilising community assets that provided a structure to take local community action. The importance of Neighbourhood level schemes had emerged as an effective means to reduce loneliness and isolation during the pandemic.

The future model for tackling social isolation and loneliness

Members heard how there was a need in any future model to amplify what already existed in terms of the offer to increase the connectedness and ensure that the scope of the offer addressed the needs of emerging cohorts who were becoming increasingly isolated because of COVID. An offer was needed that sought to provide formal support alongside resilience building and encouraged conversations around isolation and loneliness that built on existing pathways and expertise within the system.

People's identities were being impacted and generated a negative sense of being; such as:-

- Sense of loss, shame, confusion, failure, frustration and range of other emotions leading to feelings of helplessness, a lack of confidence and self-esteem and sense of belonging thereby:-

- Leading to isolation and/or loneliness and whilst this might have been felt previously in those families and areas that were more deprived, this was now transcending populations regardless of personal socio-economic status.
- Those groups included:
 - COVID recovery; long COVID sufferers,
 - minority groups; faith groups;
 - new parents; lone parents
 - young men and women
 - Those who were now unemployed or had seen changes in their employment
 - The bereaved

There was therefore a pressing need to innovate responses that resonated and engaged those, who unaware about the support available, or that they could benefit from some support and where to get it.

Next Steps:

The Committee heard that the Health and Wellbeing Board members would discuss the issues, provide their different perspectives, and consider what and where the gaps might be in the current approach.

The Committee thanked Kirsty O'Callaghan (Head of Strengthening Communities at Essex County Council) for her report and **RESOLVED** to note its contents.

17. REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING. - A.2 - MITIGATION MEASURES FOR IMPACT OF PUBLIC FIREWORK DISPLAYS

Further to both Minute 12 of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 September 2020 and Minute 24 of the meeting of the Full Council held on 24 November 2020 the Committee heard that in terms of the previous request to Council in Councillor Sue Honeywood's motion on this matter the Council had no legal enforcement powers to undertake that work and so any request to organisers would be for them to comply with on a voluntary basis only.

- **Advertising Events** - the Council had no powers to require organisers of public events to advertise their event prior to it occurring. However, by their very nature public events were routinely advertised in order to ensure that they had a sufficient attendance and on that basis nearby residents were also likely to be aware. In addition, where the organisers of an event attended the Safety Advisory Group and where potential disturbance to neighbours was likely to occur, for example through fireworks or the provision of music, then advice was given to the organisers to contact neighbours to make them aware. However, that advice could not be enforced.
- **Animal disturbance** – It was reported that in the last year there had been a number of complaints in terms of fireworks potentially distressing animals (such as horses) and on that basis that an event should not take place. Reference was made to the Animal Welfare Act 2006 which, under section 4, made it an offence to cause an animal to suffer. On the basis that any individual could set off fireworks at their property as a private individual and it was not regarded as an offence in terms of neighbours' pets, the relative infrequency of major public

events which tended to operate in early November or on significant dates, and the lack of specific legislation which banned public firework events it was not considered an offence by an event organiser to hold a firework event.

Other Actions

The Committee also heard that as per the motion as previously approved by Full Council, the Council could determine whether it wished to run a publicity campaign in relation to fireworks. Both the timing of the campaign and content would need to be considered to ensure an effective message was provided at the correct time.

An event proposed within Tendring in November 2020 had been subsequently cancelled due to a social media campaign, originally in terms of distress to animals, which had then developed and resulted in personal threats to the event organiser and potential threats to anyone who attended the event. Therefore any message provided needed to be balanced, highlighted what was permitted but also encouraged achievement of high standards. Within that campaign the benefits of quieter fireworks could also be identified. However, that would only be on a voluntary basis by event organisers.

The Council had a presence on social media sites for disseminating advice and information which had been found to be effective in reaching significant numbers of people in the area and could be used to promote messages in respect of firework displays.

Tim Clarke (Head of Housing and Environment) reported to the Committee that Central Government had received a report from the Parliamentary Petitions Committee inquiry into Fireworks in March 2020. From that report the Government had subsequently recommended that:

“While people who want to ban the public from buying and using fireworks have valid concerns that must be addressed, we cannot support a ban before other, less drastic but potentially more effective, options have been fully explored”.

The Committee heard how Government had commissioned a piece of work from the Office of Product Safety and Standards in relation to the decibel level of fireworks to collate data for an evidence base, however this was still to be produced.

Mr Clarke also reported that Government had recommended that:

“... the Government work with Local Authorities to identify a best practice approach to a revenue-neutral, mandatory permit system for fireworks displays, where local evidence suggests this is necessary to protect the community. The Government should work with a Local Authority to pilot the approach before the end of 2020, with a view to legislating to empower all Local Authorities to establish mandatory permit schemes where they deem it necessary”.

That had been supposed to start in autumn of 2020 but Mr Clarke was not aware that any such pilot had commenced to date.

The Members also heard about another recommendation in the report that read:

“... the Government fund and coordinate a major, national awareness campaign on the responsible use of fireworks to get this message across to the public.”

That Campaign had started and the advertising material was available for the Council to use.

After a full in-depth discussion it was moved by Councillor Steady, seconded by Councillor Amos and **RESOLVED** that the Committee **RECOMMENDS** to Council that:

- The Council is made aware of the Government’s response to the Petitions Committee.
- The material already available to the Council from Central Government be used as part of the public relations campaign for firework mitigation.
- The Chief Executive write a letter to Central Government in support of any measures coming forth to tighten the restrictions on licensable sales of fireworks.
- A channel is developed for information in relation to the illegal and underage sale of fireworks to be passed along through the Council to Trading Standards.

18. REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL. - A.3 - PRIORITY FOR ACTIONS 2021/22 AND MONITORING DELIVERY OF THOSE ACTIONS.

The Committee heard how the Council had previously approved a Corporate Plan for 2020/24 and that it had established Council’s strategic direction for those four years. That strategic direction itself sought to reflect the issues that mattered most to local people, the national requirements from Government and the challenges that faced the District over that time period. The Corporate Plan had been adopted unanimously at the Council meeting held on 21 January 2020 (Minute 78 referred).

The themes of the 2020/24 Corporate Plan were:

- Delivering High Quality Services
- Building Sustainable Communities for the Future
- Strong Finance and Governance
- Community Leadership through Partnerships
- A Growing and Inclusive Economy

Members were informed that Cabinet established each year its priority actions to deliver against the Corporate Plan and thereby ensured that the ambition of that Plan remained central to its work. The priority actions did not cover every separate element of the ambition of the four year Corporate Plan; nor were they intended to indicate that other projects, schemes or activities were not being pursued. They were though intended to reflect imperatives across the Council and for the District and actions that it was right to focus on in that year.

Members also heard that 2020 had been an exceptional year not only nationally but globally. The Council’s Community Leadership role had never been more important. The Council had taken on additional responsibilities and supported its residents and businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst Tendring District Council had not formally reported on its performance against its priorities during 2020, much had been achieved including but not limited to:

- The roll out of numerous grants in excess of £38million to businesses
- The adoption of a local Back to Business Agenda which not only supported businesses to survive but prepared to help them flourish.
- An Economic Growth Strategy focused on recovery for the future.
- Allocation of monies from the Tendring Community Fund to Ward Councillors that provided grants to local organisations that enabled them to respond to the pandemic locally.
- Business continuity arrangements had immediately been invoked to ensure Council services remained in place where they were able to do so and for those services impacted by the various lockdowns, staff were redeployed to work with different teams in response to the pandemic, such as the Community Hub.
- Adoption of a Climate Change Action Plan to meet the Council's aspirations towards the Climate Emergency.
- Section 1 of the Local Plan had been found sound by the Planning Inspectorate thereby establishing the 5 year housing supply of 550 dwellings per annum, a North Essex vision and the Garden Community at Tendring Colchester Borders
- A balanced budget and revised governance arrangements had ensured democratic decision making continued throughout.
- Council had adopted a Corporate Housing Strategy in order to deliver homes to meet the needs of local people, making the best use of, and improving, existing housing and supporting people in their homes and communities. Separate strategies and policies had been introduced to assist in reducing homelessness and rough sleeping in the District, providing financial assistance policies for private sector housing and acquiring land and buildings to increase council housing stock.

All of those had provided a strong foundation on which the Council would continue to deliver its priorities during the remaining years of the Corporate Plan. The 2021/22 actions would, of themselves, underpin further actions in 2022/23. As such, it was appropriate to invest time and energy to delivering them.

A provisional list had been prepared following consultation with individual Portfolio Holders and the Leader of the Council and that was set out at Appendix A to the report before the Committee.

After discussion it was moved by Councillor Steady, seconded by Councillor Davis and unanimously **RESOLVED** that this Committee **RECOMMENDS** to **CABINET** that:

- Any specific schemes that Members wish to be considered be submitted to the appropriate Portfolio Holder for an initial evaluation and then submitted to Cabinet for its formal decision.

It was then moved by Councillor Miles, seconded by Councillor Davis and unanimously **RESOLVED** that this Committee further **RECOMMENDS** to **CABINET** that:

- Cabinet re-examines its position with the view to establishing a wider focus in relation to the expenditure of monies.

19. **REPORT OF THE CORPORATE FINANCE & GOVERNANCE PORTFOLIO HOLDER.**
- A.4 - PROTOCOL FOR CABINET AND OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY ROLES

It was reported to the Committee that, in May 2019, Statutory Guidance had been published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities. This Council, in operating a Leader and Executive Governance Model must have regard to it when exercising its functions and it should be followed unless there was a good reason not to in a particular case.

Section 2 of the Government's Statutory Guidance referred to Culture and expressly stated that:-

"The prevailing organisational culture, behaviours and attitudes of an authority will largely determine whether its scrutiny function succeeds or fails.

While everyone in an authority can play a role in creating an environment conducive to effective scrutiny, it is important that this is led and owned by members, given their role in setting and maintaining the culture of an authority.

Creating a strong organisational culture supports scrutiny work that can add real value by, for example, improving policy-making and the efficient delivery of public services. In contrast, low levels of support for and engagement with the scrutiny function often lead to poor quality and ill-focused work that serves to reinforce the perception that it is of little worth or relevance.

Members and senior officers should note that the performance of the scrutiny function is not just of interest to the authority itself. Its effectiveness, or lack thereof, is often considered by external bodies such as regulators and inspectors, and highlighted in public reports. Failures in scrutiny can therefore help to create a negative public image of the work of an authority as a whole."

The Committee heard that the Guidance recommended an 'executive-scrutiny protocol' which helped define the relationship between the two arms of the organisation, dealt with the practical expectations of scrutiny committee members and the Executive, as well as the cultural dynamics. Councils should have considered adopting a protocol, e.g. through formal agreement at both scrutiny committees and Cabinet, then a formal integration into the Council's constitution.

The Committee also heard that the Council already had strong measures in place to demonstrate the openness of Cabinet being held to account and had introduced some time ago that Group Leaders of all political groups would have the right to attend Cabinet meetings and speak on agenda items although they were not able to vote. The Terms of Reference of the Resources and Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee stated that the position of its Chairman and Vice-Chairman would normally be a Member of a political group not represented on the Cabinet. Informal Group Leaders meeting were also held at which the Leader or Deputy Leader could share information on matters in advance of their going to Cabinet or other topics, which had proved particularly useful during the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chief Executive also held regular All Member Briefings, at which Portfolio Holders had presented ideas on early strategies and policies for discussion. Furthermore the Deputy

Leader chaired a Constitution Review Working Group, whose membership was made up by representatives of nearly all political Groups of the Council.

Members were informed that, as previously requested by Cabinet, Senior Officers had produced a draft Protocol for Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny roles for consultation with Chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny and Audit Committees, the Deputy Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Partnerships. The Statutory Guidance had been considered in the production of the draft Protocol together with taking into account comments received through the consultation.

The draft Protocol introduced a number of principles and how it applied between the roles of Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny building upon a relationship of trust whilst both bodies were performing their statutory functions, whilst acknowledging the inter-relationship with Audit. It was designed to sit alongside the range of other commitments to openness and inclusiveness as set out above.

The draft Protocol also set out how Policy Development Overview and Pre-Decision Scrutiny could work in addition to the traditional views of solely holding the Cabinet to account. The importance of timely overview and scrutiny in budget setting and monitoring throughout the year showed how the process could add value, by reviewing whether the financial plans and strategies of the Council were sound and had taken into consideration all relevant factors.

The Committee heard how the Performance Measurement and reporting provided insight into whether value for taxpayers' money had been achieved and whether improvements were necessary, feasible and affordable. Reporting general performance data to an Overview & Scrutiny Committee enabled scrutiny to capture the right level of data so they could support delivery of services or priorities – and could make recommendations, if necessary. In some instances further enquiry of an activity could be warranted and the Committee would factor how that work could be accommodated in that Committee's work programme.

The Committee also heard that through its individual work programme the Overview and Scrutiny Committees would consider the Cabinet's adopted priorities in support of the Council's Corporate Plan, areas of planned policy development over the relevant Municipal Year (and the next) would be provided and they would be asked to highlight any areas where overview & scrutiny could be specifically invited to assist in work (including Community Leadership areas). The enquiries included within the work programme could be identified to add value to the Council as a whole and the District. The allocation of enquires to specific Overview and Scrutiny Committees would be in accordance with their respective terms of reference.

It was reported to Members that the draft Protocol also referred to how Overview & Scrutiny recommendations to the Cabinet would be dealt with and included how to further clarity could be sought if needed.

Some additional operational matters had been included for completeness that determined the relationship that covered the response to urgent items of Cabinet Business, Scrutiny Consideration of Confidential Decisions, Call-in and Councillor Call to Action which built upon the requirements within the Constitution.

With due regard to the Council's Statement on Councillor development, training would be made available for Overview & Scrutiny Committee members, Cabinet Members and support Officers on the Protocol and elements referenced in it that included work planning, budget scrutiny, performance data and key lines of enquiry. In the Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report submitted to Full Council each year there would be a section demonstrating the impact of Overview & Scrutiny and the effectiveness of the Protocol.

All Members were expected to adhere to the Protocol in their respective roles, and once formally adopted by Council, the Protocol would be incorporated within Part 6 of the Council's Constitution.

After discussion it was moved by Councillor Clifton, seconded by Councillor Amos and **RESOLVED** that the Committee **RECOMMENDS** that:

- Full Council approves the draft Protocol for Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny roles, as set out in Appendix B to the Portfolio Holder's report;
- the adopted Protocol be incorporated within Part 6 of the Council's Constitution; and
- The Constitution Review Working Party revisits the Committee structure in due course.

20. SCRUTINY OF PROPOSED DECISIONS

The Committee **NOTED** the comments of the report.

21. RECOMMENDATIONS MONITORING REPORT

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

22. REVIEW OF THE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee **NOTED** the contents of the report.

The meeting was declared closed at 10.15 pm

Chairman