

Public Document Pack

Resources and Services Overview and
Scrutiny Committee

19 September 2023

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE RESOURCES AND SERVICES OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE,
HELD ON TUESDAY, 19TH SEPTEMBER, 2023 AT 7.30 PM
IN THE SUNSPOT - SUNSPOTS**

Present:	Councillors P Honeywood (Chairman), Doyle, Griffiths, S Honeywood, Newton, Scott, Smith and Steady
Also Present:	Councillor I Henderson, Portfolio Holder Economic Growth, Regeneration and Tourism
In Attendance:	Lee Heley (Corporate Director (Place & Economy)), Keith Simmons (Head of Democratic Services and Elections), Barbara Pole (Economic Growth & Enterprise Manager), William Lodge (Communications Manager) and Keith Durran (Committee Services Officer)

23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bensilum (with Councillor Scott substituting) and Councillor Cossens.

24. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee, held on Tuesday 27 June 2023, be approved as a correct record.

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest by Councillors in relation to any item on the agenda for this meeting.

26. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 38

On this occasion no Councillor submitted notice of a question.

27. DEPUTY LEADER'S INTRODUCTION TO THE ECONOMIC GROWTH, REGENERATION AND TOURISM PORTFOLIO AND ITS FOCUS

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Regeneration, and Tourism outlined the Councils administration's commitment to delivering tangible benefits to local residents. The Committee heard of the ongoing consultation on the emerging corporate plan, emphasizing themes such as pride in the area, raising aspirations, championing the local environment, working with partners, and ensuring financial sustainability and openness. The Portfolio Holder highlighted priority projects within his Portfolio, including the Sunspot development, Orwell Place in Harwich, and the significant "Levelling Up" initiatives, aimed to turn words into reality for community benefits.

The Committee also heard details of various projects under his Portfolio, such as a Content Hub, improvements to town centres, and the Freeport East initiative, which

aimed to bring skills training and job opportunities to the region. He highlighted the success of the Freeport-related developments and the positive impact on the local economy.

It was reported to Members that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, with 54 applications/bids received to the value of £1.2 billion against a £500,000 budget, officers were now working through those bids. The Portfolio Holder expressed optimism about the potential benefits for skills, town centres, and the visitor economy. He concluded by mentioning the 30th-anniversary celebration of an air show in Clacton on Sea and the Council's commitment to reviewing and improving the event for the following year. Despite acknowledging financial challenges, the Portfolio Holder commended the Council's community leadership role and recognized the hardworking team contributing to the projects.

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for his update.

28. REVIEW OF THE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee heard from the Chairman of Committee, who was also Chairman of the Enforcement Arrangements Task and Finish Group, that the Task and Finish Group had met for its first meeting on 14 September 2023 and was now in the process of setting a date for its second meeting.

The Committee considered and noted the progress set out in its Work Programme 2023/24 as submitted to the meeting.

29. POST DELIVERY SCRUTINY OF THE SUNSPOT COMMERCIAL WORKSPACE

In accordance with the decision of Council on 11 July 2023 (minute 37 refers) the Committee undertook a post decision scrutiny of the Sunspot commercial workspace in Brooklands, Jaywick Sands. As part of its enquiry, immediately prior to the Committee's meeting, its Members had been provided with a tour of the new premises and the adjacent community garden. During the tour the Committee's Members had met with the intended operator of the café on site.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth, Regeneration and Tourism spoke to the Committee and expressed gratitude for the support received and provided an update on the Sunspot project, highlighting its positive progress. He mentioned the availability of 24 affordable commercial units, with 14 businesses already signed up, surpassing the initial expectation set out in its business plan. The operations and facilities manager, though absent for this meeting due to illness, was now employed to support tenants, and the Deputy Leader outlined the diverse spaces within the building, including a covered market, committee room, and a café with an experienced operator.

The Portfolio Holder also emphasized the potential for skills development and job opportunities within the project, citing the café's intention to take on apprentices. They acknowledged past challenges, including cost overruns and delays, attributing them to capital cost inflation and external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges, he likened the project's journey to overcoming a "perfect storm" and

acknowledged the collective effort to reach the current stage. He also acknowledged Essex County Council's funding support.

The Corporate Director for Place and Economy (Lee Heley) addressed concerns related to costs and provided a detailed timeline of the Sunspot project. The feasibility study commenced in January 2020, and the application for further funding to the local Enterprise Partnership was submitted in September 2020. The initial estimate was 13 units for £1.97 million. Changes, including an increase to 24 units and an additional £300,000, were made after advisors reviewed the scope in February 2021.

Members heard that tenders were sought in December 2021 for a £2.1 million project. Cost consultants estimated a potential increase to £2.7 million, but the lowest tender came in at £3.9 million. Despite challenges, including cost overruns and delays, the decision was made to continue, securing investment from partners, including Essex County Council. The construction contract was awarded in April 2022.

The Corporate Director for Place and Economy highlighted the unique challenges faced, including unexpected ground conditions and the need for additional funding, leading to a total cost increase of £760,000. Refinancing was necessary, involving discussions with partners around the refinance process. The speaker emphasized the importance of closely monitoring costs, refining project scopes, and considering potential challenges for future projects.

It was reported to the Committee that the cost increases in the project were due to capital costs going up globally due to COVID and the Ukraine war.

It was **RESOLVED** to **RECOMMEND** to Cabinet:

- a) That the positive news about occupancy rates for the Sunspot Centre, Jaywick Sands and the intentions around the on-site market be noted; and
- b) that the capacity and expertise of the Council in costing and programme managing major capital schemes of the Council be strengthened to avoid or minimise unforeseen "mission creep" in schemes and unrealistic cost assessments being presented as part of approval mechanisms (that then needing to be repeated when true market costings are subsequently identified).

It was further **RESOLVED**:

- c) That delivery against the business plan compared with the experience in the first six months operation of the Sunspot Centre, Jaywick Sands be confirmed in the Committee's Work Programme for April 2024.

30. CORPORATE PLAN (OUR VISION) CONSULTATION

The Members had before them a report that outlined how Tendring had amazing opportunities and some deep-seated challenges. The Council's emerging Corporate Plan for 2024 -2028, would reflect this as the Council's focus. It needed to recognise the challenging financial position, with financial sustainability being key for delivery. The Council also recognised that it was a deliverer, influencer and facilitator, which would be the only way it could achieve ambitious Corporate Plan aspirations.

The report explained that the Council had an established set of arrangements to set out its long and medium term aims and to monitor progress in delivering them. This included a long-term Corporate Plan (agreed by Full Council), Annual Priorities and Projects in line with the Corporate Plan (agreed each year by Cabinet), and quarterly performance reporting. In addition, Departmental Plans were prepared annually at an operational management level to deliver against the long-term corporate plan.

The Committee was made aware that Cabinet on 27 July 2023 had approved the following (minute 23 refers).

- a) Notes and endorses the initial emerging themes for a Corporate Plan (Our Vision) for 2024-28 as set out at Appendix A to the report it was considering;
- b) requests officers to undertake consultation with the public, stakeholder organisations, Councillors and staff on the initial emerging themes referred to in (1) above;
- c) receives the outcome of that consultation to the meeting of Cabinet on 10 November 2023 with a view to development of finalised Corporate Plan (Our Vision) themes for 2024-28 being then recommended to Council on 28 November 2023; and
- d) endorses engaging a social research company to support the consultation referred to in (2) above and, in view of the limited capacity within the Council, authorises that the costs of that support (up to £25,000) be met from corporately accrued vacancy savings to date in 2023/24, where this will not impact on service delivery.

The consultation was still underway on the emerging themes and all Councillors could respond in that capacity as well as in their capacity as residents.

Picking up on the themes already referred to, the Cabinet would be developing its highlight priorities for 2024/25 and these could be considered by the Committee too.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the report to cabinet on 27 July 2023 in respect of the emerging Corporate Plan.

The meeting was declared closed at 8.17 pm

Chairman