

# Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Minutes

Date: Thursday 11 January 2024

Time: 2:00 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Present: Councillors Tom Sanderson (Chair), Alex Bulat (Vice-Chair), David Ambrose Smith, Henry Batchelor, Steve Criswell, Claire Daunton, Jan French, Ian Gardener, Bryony Goodliffe, Ros Hathorn, Lucy Nethsingha, Keith Prentice, Geoff Seeff and Philippa Slatter

## 144. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Adela Costello (substituted by Councillor Gardener).

There were no declarations of interest.

## 145. Minutes – 19 October 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Committee noted the Minutes Action Log.

## 146. Petitions and Public Questions

One public question was received in relation to Agenda Item 8 (Library Service Annual Report), and no petitions were received.

## 147. Cambridgeshire Skills 2024 Procurement

The Committee received a report on the procurement of providers to deliver adult skills on behalf of the Council from August 2024. Cambridgeshire Skills was restricted to a 25% limit on the amount of funding from the Combined Authority that could be sub-contracted, and it was proposed to engage providers on a Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Clarified that there was a good coverage of providers across the county, with some areas having different proportions of direct or sub-contracted delivery.

- Queried whether sub-contracting part of the service helped mitigate the current national shortage of post-16 teachers. Members were informed that organisations that were contracted to provide services for Cambridgeshire Skills already had capacity in place, which removed the requirement for the Council to recruit additional teachers from a restricted market.
- Queried how many courses were carried out remotely. It was confirmed that approximately one quarter of the courses were online, mainly in subjects such as English and maths, with the service having developed additional ways of offering courses during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was also noted that the service used a large number of community spaces across the county, such as libraries and community centres, to try and minimise issues for students related to travel.
- Drew attention to the new Cambridgeshire Academy for Reaching Excellence as an opportunity for Cambridgeshire Skills to help strengthen people's care skills.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Agree to Cambridgeshire Skills running a procurement to engage providers on a Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System;
- b) Delegate authority to award and execute contracts for the provision of Adult Education starting on 1 August 2024 to the Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee.
- c) Delegate authority to agree extension periods to the Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee, when deciding which providers meet the criteria to join the Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System.

## 148. Business and Financial Plan 2024-2029

The Committee received a report summarising the business and financial planning proposals for 2024-29 which fell within its areas of responsibility. This included proposals relating to the Council's anti-poverty work, particularly given an anticipated end to the Household Support Fund (HSF), and investment in the county's libraries. The Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships informed the committee that she was amending recommendation (b) as follows (removals in strikethrough and additions in bold), in order to align the recommendation with those being presented to all other policy and service committees:

- b) ~~Provide feedback to~~ **Recommend changes and/or actions for consideration** by the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee ~~on the proposals for that Committee's consideration~~ at its meeting on 30 January 2024 to enable a budget to be proposed to Full Council on 13 February 2024; and

While discussing the report, Members:

- Established that the Council was working with partners, particularly through the Community Reference Group, throughout the first stage of the development of its anti-poverty strategy. Once a coherent, cross-council approach to supporting people out of poverty had been established, the second stage of the strategy's development would expand this engagement to the wider network of partners and organisations to develop a system-wide plan.
- Considered the Council's ongoing development of an anti-poverty strategy, with one Member arguing that previous achievements and progress had been undermined by the current administration taking so long to develop a strategy. However, another Member drew attention to action that had been taken over recent years to tackle poverty, including delivering the real living wage, providing resources for free school meals and holiday vouchers, and work on income maximisation. Members also acknowledged the challenging economic climate and uncertainty over funding from the government.
- Established that the proposed allocation of £2.2m for the anti-poverty work was for operational purposes once a strategy for working together with partners had been finalised. The Council wanted to ensure it could continue to provide support to people following the anticipated end of the HSF on March 31 2024. It was clarified that £7,162,849 had been allocated to the Council through the HSF for 2023/24. Members were assured that the action plan for spending the funding would be presented to the committee when it was ready to do so.
- Clarified that projects seeking the allocation of remaining resources from the Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund were currently being assessed and would be presented for consideration at the committee meeting in March 2024.
- Sought assurance that the budget proposal was not transferring the problem of allocating any necessary funding identified as part of the ongoing review of the Library service to future years. Members were informed that the service had already obtained some additional external funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to develop some library spaces, and further funding could be retained and transferred into a future year if necessary. It was clarified that the outcome of the review into the future of libraries could not be anticipated, although the proposed allocation of £1.3m was considered a reasonable start to the investment that would be required, and further external funding could be sought if it were considered necessary.
- Queried whether the libraries that would receive funding through the proposed Libraries Plus investment had already been identified and represented a good coverage of the whole county. Members were informed that some were selected because of their suitability for places for staff to work from, but the whole library estate was being considered to ensure coverage across the county, including the mobile service, although it was not noted that the size of each library would affect the extent of its possible development.

- Established that an officer board would support and scrutinise the Libraries Plus work, while the Cross Party Working Group for Library Services and the committee Spokes would also be involved. Members also highlighted the importance of involving librarians in planning and developing the service.
- Paid tribute to the Emergency Planning team for the support it provided to communities suffering from significant flooding issues over recent weeks and expressed concern that the Emergency Planning Team may be under-resourced. Members were informed that the team consisted of only four officers that supported the wider work undertaken by other departments and agencies, and it was observed that the team was shared with Peterborough, which increased its workload.
- Noted the removal of the vacant Service Director of Policy and Communities post, and queried how it would affect the ongoing decentralisation work. Members were assured that the removal of the post would not affect the work, and that an internal governance board had been established across all the Council's directorates to track the decentralisation pilots that were in place. A project officer had also been assigned to oversee the pilots and a report would be presented to the committee at its meeting in March 2024.
- Queried whether the migration policy and partnerships work would be completed within the timeframe of its temporary funding. Members were informed that an officer had been appointed to a migration policy role and was working to complete the Council of Sanctuary work with the national organisation within the timeframe.
- Queried whether the proposed removal of temporary funding for Coroner staff to address the backlog meant that the backlog had been resolved or whether it could start to build up again. It was confirmed that the Coroner service was able to remove the temporary funding because of improvements it had made to bookings, processes, staff and overall efficiency, although it was acknowledged that it was not possible to predict whether a backlog could return in the future.
- Highlighted the important work carried out by Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence service and expressed concern about its grant ending in March 2025. It was clarified that it was still unknown what would happen after then, but Members were informed that it equated to about quarter of the service's staffing and could lead to a service restructure.

The Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships summarised the debate to be reported to the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee at its meeting on 30 January 2024 as follows:

- To be assured that the Libraries Plus work will look at the library service county-wide, including the mobile libraries, and not just focus on the core group of libraries that may be identified as drop-down spaces for staff to work from as part of the office rationalisation work being considered through the Assets and Procurement Committee.
- To recognise the community impact of the recent floods and in the light of this to acknowledge the pressure on the small Emergency Planning team, which is shared

with Peterborough City Council. Whilst the work of emergency planning is relevant to a number of committees, the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee requests that the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee considers increasing the investment to this team through this budget process.

The Chair sought confirmation from Committee members that this was an accurate summary of the debate, and there was no dissent.

It was resolved by a majority to:

- a) Consider and scrutinise the proposals relevant to this Committee within the Business and Financial plan put forward by the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee on 19 December 2023;
- b) Recommend changes and/or actions for consideration by the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee at its meeting on 30 January 2024 to enable a budget to be proposed to Full Council on 13 February 2024; and
- c) Receive the fees and charges schedule for this Committee, included at Appendix 2 of the report.

#### 149. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Trading Standards Annual Report

The Committee received an annual report on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Trading Standards service, which summarised the work carried out during 2023 and set out the priorities for 2024.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Established that the service consisted of twenty-two equivalent full-time members of staff, of which approximately 70% worked in Cambridgeshire. Members were informed that was a typical size for larger authorities, although it was noted that the service had a wide scope and that it was sometimes a challenge to manage service demand. It was confirmed that the service was a prosecuting authority, with many of the delegations being business related compared to unitary authorities which had a range of other services and functions.
- Queried whether pop-up businesses were a problem for the service. The committee was informed that it was largely a seasonal problem, with more issues around Christmas, for example. However, the Council only dealt with various areas, such as counterfeit goods, whereas other matters, such as licenses, planning consent, parking, etc., were dealt with by the respective local authority. The various authorities and agencies worked together to maximise their effectiveness.
- Established that there was not a significant overlap between the service's responsibilities and those of other local authorities, with separate legislation for most of the different areas. Notwithstanding, there were some areas where the different authorities worked on separate issues together, such as for large events, and in such situations, they would work together when appropriate.

- Expressed concern about the increasing popularity of vaping, and welcomed the work undertaken by the service in that area, suggesting that the Council could publish informational material on the website which could be further disseminated by Members. It was agreed to raise the suggestion with a regional group of trading standards teams to maximise the potential effectiveness of the information available, given that it was a constantly evolving market. **Action required**
- Queried whether the sanctions available to the service were adequate for their purpose. It was suggested that in some cases, the level of fixed penalties in place were not sufficient to act a deterrent, whereas cases that went to court had more flexibility in the level of sanction that could be applied. When organised crime was behind the actions, the Trading Services service did not have the capacity or remit to tackle the root behaviour, but it worked to make it as difficult as possible. It was also observed that in many cases they were not businesses with a reckless approach to compliance, and there were more effective ways to support them do things properly than by prosecuting or fining them.
- Requested further information on the issue of electric scooter batteries catching fire. Members were informed that this was often a case of different batteries being used than those provided by the scooter’s manufacturer, or a battery being modified, both of which bypassed the safety measures on the device. However, it was also a case of batteries being left to charge overnight, and the fire services were working to educate people on that. It was noted there were ongoing inquests related to the area, and more information would become available once they had been completed.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report.

## 150. Cambridgeshire Registration Service Annual Report

The Committee received an annual report on the Registration service, which provided an update on ceremonies, marketing, appointments, accommodation, technology, finance and performance, alongside other areas.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Expressed concern about the significant increase in the number of registered still births and requested a briefing note from the Senior Coroner on the suspected causes of the situation. **Action required**
- Queried why the service offered private citizenship ceremonies, and it was observed that while some people enjoyed larger ceremonies, others preferred more intimate events. The service aimed to tailor its service whenever it was possible to do so and would extend the offer beyond the city of Cambridge if there was sufficient demand to do so.

- Clarified that paragraph 2.6.5 of the report should have read “significant population growth”, instead of “significant pollution growth”, and queried whether the current level of resources would be sufficient to cope with continuous population growth in the future. While future population growth would naturally lead to higher demand, it was observed that there could also be future changes that reduced demand, such as death registrations being carried out online. Notwithstanding, the service had consulted the Council’s property team in order to analyse what future requirements there may be and what facilities the Council would have available for use.
- Queried the effectiveness of the Cambridgeshire Archives building in Ely being used by the Registration service for ceremonies. It was acknowledged that there were some aesthetical concerns about the venue and Members were informed that other venues may be sought in Ely.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report.

## 151. Library Service Annual Report

The Committee received an annual report on the Library service, which provided information on its performance during 2023 and the various projects it was involved in.

Antony Carpen was invited to present his question to the committee. Noting the high number of teenagers using the available space at Cambridge Central Library for studying purposes, despite a significant drop in borrowing from the same age group, Mr Carpen argued it could be due to a lack of independent study facilities at schools and colleges. He suggested the Library service could work with local schools and colleges to ensure some of the material for their courses was stocked in the library. Mr Carpen also highlighted the importance of increasing the interest of young people in local history and suggested that the fact teenagers used the library in such high numbers provided an opportunity for the Council to encourage this. The committee was informed that the ongoing EverySpace project sought to improve facilities within libraries for studying and to improve access to technology. Although the Library service did not have specific partnerships with any schools in the county, various pilots, including Every Child a Member, were being undertaken to promote the use of libraries among younger people, and the service also supported librarians undertaking apprenticeships.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Welcomed the suggestion from Mr Carpen for the Council to support interest in local history. It was observed that such interests were increasingly expressed through audiovisual technology, rather than traditional written formats, and argued that the libraries therefore needed to continuously evolve to accommodate the changing trends. Members were informed that the EverySpace project included providing access to technology and facilities for this kind of project, including podcasts. Attention was also drawn to the Library service’s LendIT project, which allowed library users to borrow laptops and other devices free of charge, helping to reduce digital exclusion and prevent students from suffering as a result of it. Members were

informed that an ongoing review of IT equipment across the library estate involved consideration of what people needed for educational purposes, with a move away from desktop computers to laptops. It was confirmed that the level and type of provision would continue to evolve as appropriate.

- Queried how the service managed to raise awareness of the numerous opportunities it provided to different people. It was acknowledged that raising awareness was one of the largest challenges for the service, although Members were informed that it had an internal development team that held class visits, engagement talks and other events to continuously inform people of opportunities. The service also had a sophisticated approach towards reaching different customers through multiple platforms and undertook targeted promotional work that was disseminated via social media. A newsletter was also circulated to 30,000 people.
- Requested further information about the range in fees for hiring rooms in libraries, and queried whether there was demand for all the different fee bands. Members were informed that following the complete closure of libraries during the Covid-19 pandemic, a lot of promotion had been undertaken to reengage with the community and segmenting the price of room hire catered for the different communities and organisations that needed space.
- Paid tribute to staff in the Library service for developing such popular spaces and welcomed the continuous investment, adaptation and willingness to attract new people, and noted the wide variety of reasons for which people used libraries beyond borrowing books.
- Observed the data on age profiles of active users in the report and expressed concern about the reduction in borrowers over 80 years old and queried whether anything could be done to help that age group use the libraries, although it was acknowledged that the data could map to the area's demographics. It was emphasised that the current offer from the service was much more diverse and modern than a traditional library, although Members were informed that the service tracked demographic changes and was starting to target the older population accordingly through various measures, including holding events, offering warm spaces, promoting volunteering, tackling social isolation and increased provision of audio books. Work was also underway to develop the digital coaching support in communities to increase digital connectivity and literacy.
- Suggested that the mobile library service could be developed further to expand the offer that was of significant value to rural communities. It was noted that many other library services across the country had removed mobile libraries for financial or environmental reasons, but Members were informed it was also becoming increasingly difficult to source suitable vehicles.
- Paid tribute to the achievements of The Library Presents, welcoming the opportunities it provided people, and expressed concern about what would happen once the funding ended. Members were assured that the service would reapply for further funding, with a successful track record that was a cause for optimism. It was also noted that the service had acquired a significant amount of equipment through



The Library Presents that it would continue to be able to use in future projects, even if it did not obtain further funding from that specific stream.

- Established that the service was reviewing its service level agreements with community managed libraries, as many of them had been set up approximately ten years ago. It was emphasised that such libraries were not part of the statutory service, although the Council wanted to continue to support them.
- Welcomed the National Databank project that was currently operating in some of the county's libraries, and queried how the locations with most need had been identified and how the scheme could be expanded to more rural areas without as much access to libraries. Members were informed that it was only piloted in a few libraries and that it had been decided to carry out the pilot in the libraries close to the three asylum hotels in the county, before then being expanded further based on various criteria, such as footfall, the social economic profile of communities, and likely demand.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report.

## 152. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Action Plan

The Committee received a report setting out the proposed action plan for the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which detailed actions underpinning each of the Council's twelve equality objectives that would enable the Council to measure progress against each objective.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Highlighted the importance of treating care experience as a protected characteristic, as agreed by the Council on 16 May 2023.
- Emphasised that accessibility of buildings included being able to reach them without a private vehicle and requested a briefing update on how public transport to the Council's office in Alconbury Weald was being improved. **Action required**
- Clarified that the committee would receive an update on the action plan every six months in order to monitor progress.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Approve the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy action plan.

### 153. Corporate Performance Report - Quarter 2 (2023-2024)

The Committee received a report providing an update on the performance of services within its remit over Quarter 2 of the 2023/24 financial year.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Noted that the key performance indicator monitoring the number of active library users had been constantly increasing for the last six quarters and queried why it was RAG rated as red. It was clarified that comparisons for the Library service were made against data prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, rather than the previous year, in order to track the service's recovery from the pandemic's impacts, although Members were informed that this method of measuring was currently under review in order to better represent the service's wider offer.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note and comment on performance information and act, as necessary.

### 154. Committee Agenda Plan and Appointments

The Committee received a report which included its agenda plan and a proposal to four internal advisory groups.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Review its agenda plan attached at Appendix 1;
- b) Agree to remove the following internal advisory groups:
  - (i) Cambridgeshire Registration Service Cross Party Working Group;
  - (ii) Registration Service Ceremonies Focus Group;
  - (iii) Registration Service Functions Focus Group; and
  - (iv) Cultivate Cambs Steering Group.

Chair  
21 March 2024