

Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Minutes

Date: Thursday 6 July 2023

Time: 2:00pm – 3:30 pm

Venue: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

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

124. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Henry Batchelor (substituted by Councillor Coutts), Councillor Ken Billington (substituted by Councillor Gardener) and Councillor Keith Prentice.

There were no declarations of interest.

125. Minutes – 18 May 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 May 2023 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

The Committee noted the Minutes Action Log.

126. Petitions and Public Questions

No public questions or petitions were received.

127. Wisbech Adventure Playground – Pilot Youth Investment Fund Grant Procurement

The Committee received a report on a £914,650 grant that the Council had received from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) for the construction of a new purpose modular youth facility to replace two barges currently being used at Wisbech Adventure Playground for youth provision. The procurement for the project would be carried out by Faithful+Gould on behalf of Hawkins Brown, a firm that had been appointed and contracted by DCMS to oversee the procurement for four pilot Youth

Investment Fund projects across the country to identify economies of scale and obtain best value by advertising all the projects as one opportunity.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Welcomed the receipt of funding from DCMS and paid tribute to officers for the successful application. Members highlighted the importance of youth services and noted the support for the project from local members.
- Clarified that the project did not include the play equipment at the adventure playground, although it was noted that separate work with partners was ongoing to explore opportunities to subsequently upgrade the play equipment to be in keeping with the new building. Members were informed that the materials for the construction of the new facility would be prefabricated and put together on site.
- Requested further information on the projected maintenance and operation costs for the new facility and how they would be funded. It was emphasised that the current facilities were poorly insulated and had an out-dated heating system, with the new construction creating significant savings on utility costs from the use of modern technology, such as solar panels and a heat pump. While a possible revenue grant to initially support that project was being investigated, the longer-term objective was to offset maintenance and operation costs through revenue from letting the space. Various voluntary sector partners that could use the space had external funding streams that would support their hire of the space to expand youth services provision.
- Established that the current provision at the playground had secured three years of funding through the Holiday Activity and Food programme, although it was acknowledged that it was unknown whether the programme would continue after its completion in 2025. The Council had drawn attention to DCMS that maintaining and expanding this provision was a priority.
- Expressed concern that the report stated that DCMS would increase the level of the award if capital costs increased after the procurement process had been completed, arguing that it could incentivise prospective bidders to underestimate costs knowing that they subsequently might receive additional funding. Members were informed that the grant would include additional costs to the construction of the facility, such as the removal of the barges currently on site and temporary on-site facilities during the construction phase. The specific amount for the capital costs of constructing the new facility had not been included in the report.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Agree the procurement process for the provision of a modular Youth facility; and
- b) Delegate the decision to award and execute the contract to the Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee.

128. Closer to Communities

The Committee received a report on a series of projects that would pilot a range of decentralised approaches to bring the Council's services closer to communities. These were divided between smaller-scale tactical pilots that could be delivered quickly, and larger strategic pilots that would take longer to establish. A third aspect of the work was improving usage of the Council's property and buildings, to improve access for communities and services.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Welcomed the pilot projects as progress for the Council's decentralisation approach, but requested further information on how the projects would be funded by the Council and its partners, suggesting that they would benefit from cost-benefit analysis and business plans.
- Expressed concern about the low level of involvement of parish councils and other partners, such as the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Councils (CAPALC) in developing the projects. It was argued that local communities' objectives should be taken into consideration as much as those of the Council as part of a codesigning process, which previous work had sought to establish. It was acknowledged that the level of engagement could be increased, although it was highlighted that the projects had been selected as mostly achievable for the Council to take forward on its own, through engagement with partners. It was also noted that some of the projects had originated through engagement with parish councils, and members were informed that engagement work with CAPALC was planned for the Autumn 2023.
- Highlighted the importance of maintaining face-to-face provision of services across the county, including in areas that did not have easy access to a library. It was observed that while the Council could allow partners to operate from the libraries, it was also possible for Council services to operate out of third-party premises, such as faith places and commercial spaces. Members were informed that an underlying aspect of the projects was to improve usage and access to Council buildings, and this would continue to be discussed with affected communities and partners.
- Drew attention to the fact that many of the projects cut across the work of different committees and therefore needed coordination between the different workflows to ensure consistency and effectiveness. It was clarified that while the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee would oversee the wider series of projects, some of them would be led by other committees and funded through their respective budgets.
- Welcomed the projects as place-based, integrating initiatives and emphasised the importance of local engagement in the decision-making process, taking account of local knowledge and concerns. Members were informed that strategies and processes for increasing local participation and engagement would be developed as the pilots progressed, while events were being planned in September 2023 for members to learn more about the projects and the local connectors.

- Sought clarification on how the projects would be monitored and evaluated to assess whether they could be replicated or expanded more broadly across the county. Members were informed that an evaluation report would be presented to the committee at its meeting in March 2024, while a hub to track progress of the projects was being developed for the Council's intranet. It was suggested that affected parish councils should be invited to provide feedback on the projects as part of their evaluation.
- Suggested that it could be useful for the County Advisory Group for Archives and Local Studies to be involved in the Care Leavers Community Support project.
- Requested further information on the role of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in the Commissioning of Detached Youth Work project, and on how it would be funded. Members were informed that it had been included as one of the projects to change the previous approach of the Council carrying out the work, and instead commissioning a contract to a voluntary sector provider. While the Council would receive a management fee for overseeing the commissioning and reporting, the funding from the PCC would be devolved to voluntary sector and their own youth workers. The hotspots where such work would take place were decided by work carried out by the Cambridgeshire Countywide High Harms Board.
- Queried whether there were any plans for active travel projects in rural areas, with members suggesting that cycleways would help reduce rural isolation and encourage behavioural change, such as routes between Tilbrook and Kimbolton, or Littleport and Ely. Members were assured that further projects would continue to be developed.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve Endorse the Council defining and delivering a series of pilot decentralisation projects, starting in July 2023; and
- b) Endorse the development of proposals for library-led front door services.

129. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

The Committee received a report on the development of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy, prior to its consideration by the Strategy and Resources Committee and Full Council. Replacing the Single Equality Strategy 2018-2022, the new strategy would set equality objectives and measures, while sitting within the Council's wider Strategic Framework and alongside the People Strategy. An action plan would be developed once the EDI Strategy was in place, and it was noted that the final version would include additional references to the socio-economic duty adopted by the Council in 2022, as well as the Council's recent recognition of care experience as a protected characteristic.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Suggested that use of the word ‘communities’ could be replaced by ‘people’ in the strategy to reflect that the document referred to individuals, arguing that it should not be necessary to wait for a characteristic to be shared by multiple people before responding to it.
- Noted the Council’s ambition to make travel across the county safer and more environmentally sustainable, and queried how it was working to improve transport options and increase opportunities for people travelling to or working in the Council’s offices in Alconbury Weald. Members were informed that work was being undertaken to try and increase public transport to the site, and it was agreed to provide members with a briefing note. **Action required**
- Queried whether mitigating actions undertaken by other local authorities had been assessed for their effectiveness in improving ‘cultural competency’, as included in the workforce challenges listed in the strategy on page 81 of the agenda. Members were informed that mandatory EDI learning had been implemented for the Council’s whole workforce, while monthly EDI conversations regularly involved over 300 members of staff and provided an opportunity to better understand similarities and differences between people and how to navigate them constructively and successfully.
- Observed that accessibility could be interpreted in two ways, including ease of access for people with disabilities and reachability via public or active transport, and suggested that the strategy could have more clarity when referencing accessibility.
- Drew attention to the workforce challenge of improving the Council’s retention of staff from under-represented and marginalised group listed in the strategy on page 81 of the agenda, and queried which groups were most under-represented and what actions could be taken to improve the situation. Members were informed that the Council’s new e-recruitment system was beginning to provide data on candidate pools and their varying success rates. It was acknowledged identifying and successfully recruiting from under-represented groups remained a challenge, although it was also emphasised that this would be a focus during the development of the action plan.
- Welcomed the network of self-organised peer support groups that had been set up for the Council’s officers and members, acknowledging that some of them were targeted for specific people and should not be considered as discriminatory or excluding.
- Sought clarification on how the strategy would be monitored to assess its level of success. Members were informed that measures would include data, such as the number of complaints received, and feedback would be sought through focus groups and surveys. A pilot was being undertaken with new recruits within children social care, and further measurable targets would be established during the development of the action plan.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Comment on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

130. Performance Monitoring Report – Quarter 4 (2022/23)

The Committee received a report providing an update on the performance of services within its remit over Quarter 4 of the 2022/23 financial year. The Library service's recovery from the impacts of the pandemic continued to be a problem, although actions that had been taken to increase visitor and borrowing levels were proving effective, with improved performance in Quarter 4. Attention was drawn to two errors in the report, with the number of cases in indicator 175 being 3,488 (instead of the 34,888 reported), while indicator 220 should have referenced deaths registered within 5 days (instead of the 42 reported).

While discussing the report, Members:

- Observed the drop in digital engagement demonstrated by Indicator 38 and highlighted the importance of the Council's effective use of social media to communicate with people. It was acknowledged that the most appropriate channel had to be identified for the relevant audience in each case, and members were assured that the Communications team were continuously monitoring the wider situation and updating their practices accordingly.
- Requested an update on the project to make every child a library member in Wisbech. **Action required**
- Requested information on how the temporary closure of Cherry Hinton library was expected to affect overall visitor numbers over the next year. **Action required**
- Sought clarification on why the number of hours of advice provided to business under primary authority had reduced in Quarter 4. **Action required**
- Expressed concern about the slow recovery of the Library service following the pandemic, noting that most other areas had now recovered to previous levels, although it was acknowledged that one of the effects of the pandemic had been a behavioural shift towards online access to services, and that libraries were used for a wider range of purposes than before. Attention was drawn to the decentralisation pilot projects, which aimed to improve the usage of Council buildings, particularly libraries. Members requested an in-depth review of the service be carried out to identify what people wanted from it and in what direction it should be heading. **Action required**

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report.

131. Finance Monitoring Report - Outturn 2022-23

The Committee received the Outturn Finance Monitoring Report for services within the remit of the Committee for the 2022-23 financial year. The revenue budgets within the remit of the Committee ended the year with an underspend of £158k, with the two areas with greatest variance being the Coroner service with an overspend of £102k and the Community, Employment and Skills strategic management budget with an underspend of £158k. The capital programmes within the remit of the Committee ended the year with an underspend of £2.114m, with the two areas with greatest variance being the Community Fund with an underspend of £1.642m and the Libraries Open Access capital scheme with an underspend of £383k.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Requested further information on the £383k underspend with the Libraries Open Access capital scheme and whether it remained deliverable. **Action required**
- Clarified that the capital budget was produced on a ten-year rolling programme. Project budgets were agreed at the outset, with spend phased into how much would be spent each year, but delays, such as with construction recently, sometimes caused spend to slip into the following year, and this was referred to as an in-year underspend. The revenue budget was a five-year rolling programme, and revenue underspends were not available to be carried forward to following financial years.
- Observed that at a recent briefing on the Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund, members had been informed that the amount available was £1.542m and sought clarification on why the report identified the underspend as £1.642m. **Action required**

It was resolved unanimously to:

Review and comment on the report.

132. Finance Monitoring Report – May 2023

The Committee received the Finance Monitoring Report to the end of May 2023 for the services within its remit, with none of these services forecasting significant variances on either capital or revenue expenditure to date.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Review and comment on the report.

133. Committee Agenda Plan and Appointments to Outside Bodies, Internal Advisory Groups and Panels, and Member Champions

Clarifying that the next scheduled meeting was to be held on 19 October 2023, rather than 9 October 2023 as listed in the agenda plan, the Committee noted its agenda plan.

Chair
19 October 2023