

Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Minutes

Date: 16 January 2025

Time: 2:00 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

Venue: Red Kite Room, New Shire Hall

Present: Councillors Tom Sanderson (Chair), Alex Bulat (Vice-Chair), Henry Batchelor, Steve Criswell, Claire Daunton, Ian Gardener, Mark Goldsack, Bryony Goodliffe, John Gowing, Ros Hathorn, Lucy Nethsingha, Geoff Seeff and Philippa Slatter

192. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Ambrose Smith (substituted by Councillor Gowing), Adela Costello (substituted by Councillor Goldsack) and Jan French.

There were no declarations of interest.

193. Minutes – 5 December 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2024 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

While discussing the Minutes Action Log, individual Members:

- Established that the toolkit referenced in Minute 179 (Road Closures for Remembrance Events) had been sent to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association of Local Council (CAPALC) for distribution to parish councils in the week following the committee meeting, and Members were assured that they would also be provided with a copy of the toolkit.
- Noted that since the action log had been published, the action related to Minute 188 (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Coroner Service Annual Report) and one of the actions relating to Minute 191 (Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Agenda Plan) had been completed.

The Committee noted the Minutes Action Log.

194. Public Questions and Petitions

One request to speak at the meeting had been received, but as the member of public had not joined the meeting, the Committee was informed that a written response would be sent. **Action required**

No petitions were received.

195. Business Plan and Budget 2025/26 – 2029/30

The Committee received a report on the Council's draft 2025-30 Business Plan and Budget, with a focus on the services and responsibilities within the committee's remit, before it was scheduled to be presented to the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee on 28 January 2025 and Full Council on 11 February 2025. The report also set out the fees and charges schedule for the committee.

While discussing the report, individual Members:

- Thanked officers for compiling and proposing a business plan and budget under tight and demanding financial constraints.
- Expressed concern about the impact of the loss of grant funding for the Domestic Violence service and sought assurance that the service would be monitored carefully to identify any issues that arose as a result of the loss of funding. It was clarified there were two elements of grant funding that would be lost in the next financial year. One was funding from the Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Commissioner to support medium risk referrals from the police, and Members were assured that alternative support would be provided by the Victim and Witness Hub. The second was funding for specific pathways into the Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA) service, and Members were informed that the service would focus on high risk victims as its core function, while working with outreach providers to ensure other victims were able to self-refer or be referred by professionals to the service instead.
- Noted that it was not known whether the Household Support Fund (HSF) would continue beyond its current iteration, and expressed concern about the potential impact on people currently receiving support from the fund if it did not continue. Members noted the difficulties caused by short-term funding on long-term planning, as well as retaining staff and knowledge, and suggested that this should be highlighted to the government, along with the findings of the Cambridgeshire Poverty Strategy Commission. Members were informed that the commission's findings would influence how the Council utilised the £2.2m resource that had been allocated to anti-poverty work. It was also noted that the Council had reviewed its service model for the HSF, including the impact of losing staff, with a more outward-facing approach to supporting external work through its partners and ensuring resources were in place to support such work. Members requested clarification on how resources from the Household Support Fund were identified in the budget and business plan. **Action required**
- Established that the figures in Table 5.1 of the report were thousands, rather than millions, and it was confirmed that the figures would be corrected in the report presented to the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee on 28 January 2025. It was also observed that a £41k budget change due to inflation had been listed twice on Table 3.1 in the report, although it was confirmed that this

discrepancy was restricted to the table in the report and was not reflected in the wider budget calculations.

- Expressed concern about the formula used nationally for allocating grants and queried whether it was based on data from the 2021 census and therefore did not take into account the significant level of planned growth in some parts of the county, as well as the growth that had already taken place since 2021. Members were informed that a consultation on local authority funding reform was being undertaken by the government, with the intention to subsequently review the area cost adjustment and to simplify the funding process. It was suggested that the formula could focus more on levels of deprivation, rather than simple population data. It was also highlighted that the Council received funding from a range of sources, such as the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, which were allocated on varying criteria other than just population.
- Queried how confident the Council was in the revenue and income generation projections that formed part of the business planning process. Members were informed that fees and charges were continuously monitored and reviewed before each financial year, with increases or decreases proposed according to trends and take up. If it became clear that a target was not being reached in-year, alternative options were considered to overcome a potential income deficit.
- Clarified that the schedule for fees and charges did not include information on room hire charges for Cherry Hinton library because it would be a responsibility for the community group to set the charge for that particular library.
- Supported the proposed increase to room hire charges for libraries, which was broadly in line with inflation, as well as the approach to implementing higher charges for commercial hirers than community group hirers, but requested further information on the level of usage and hiring of such rooms. Members were informed that commercial hirers represented approximately 15% of the overall number, while community groups were approximately 30%, although it was emphasised that approximately 49% of the total income from room hire came from commercial hirers. It was also noted that the level of room hire varied significantly between each library, and although the service was broadly satisfied with current levels, it acknowledged that it could be higher in some parts of the county.
- Argued that it was difficult to assess whether the current fees for some services, such as photocopying in libraries, were appropriate when compared to historic charges. It was acknowledged that the photocopying charge had not increased for a while, but Members were assured that fees were compared to local competition to ensure that charges neither undercut competitors nor overcharged users, while users were also encouraged to reduce their costs, for example by printing double-sided documents.

The Executive Director of Finance and Resources provided a summary of the above discussion, which was endorsed by the Committee.

It was resolved to:

- a) Consider and scrutinise the proposals relevant to this Committee within the Business plan and Budget 2025-26 – 2029-30 put forward by the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee, 17 December 2024;
- b) Recommend changes and/or actions for consideration by the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee at its meeting on 28 January 2025 to enable a business plan and budget to be proposed to Full Council on 11 February 2025; and
- c) Receive the fees and charges schedule for this Committee included at Appendix 2.

196. Closer to Communities - Final Considerations

The Committee received a report on the conclusion of the Closer to Communities programme, which provided an evaluation of the individual pilots and detailed a set of considerations on how the learning could inform the work of the Council on an on-going basis, through the pilots' exploration of different approaches to the devolution of decision-making, power and funding, as well as a variety of co-designed, co-produced, place-based and targeted approaches.

While discussing the report, individual Members:

- Welcomed the extensive report and the findings of the Closer to Communities programme, paying tribute to officers for developing and coordinating a wide-ranging set of pilots. Members highlighted the importance of effectively communicating the positive impacts on local communities of the pilots and the wider decentralisation, particularly those pilots where the benefits were more abstract, and it was agreed to provide Members with a map showing the geographical distribution of the pilots across the county. **Action required**
- Suggested there could have been greater involvement of Members from other committees in the development of pilots, although it was acknowledged that two workshops had been held for all Members during the programme and that local Members had been kept informed of pilots that were being undertaken in their division. Attention was drawn to consideration 6 within the report, which suggested that the Council should enhance officer/member engagement by reviewing and developing guidance, while exploring awareness and training opportunities for officers. Members also suggested there could be a greater level of communication between Members on different committees and different political groups.
- Noted that prior to the Closer to Communities programme, the Council had undertaken extensive work to develop a place-based approach, to support local schemes and to collaborate extensively with partners as part of a wider anti-poverty strategic approach. While some Members argued that the Closer to Communities programme had largely duplicated this work and consequently slowed down its impact, other Members argued that it had built on and expanded the earlier work,

with the response to the Covid-19 pandemic also having led to an increased partnership-based approach on many levels. Notwithstanding, it was agreed to support continuity of the ongoing development of a Council-wide approach to decentralisation following the upcoming election, a report would be presented to the committee at its meeting in June 2025. **Action required**

- Suggested that despite the completion of the Closer to Communities programme, the committee should maintain oversight of the ongoing decentralisation work moving forwards to avoid momentum being lost as it became a wider cross-Council approach. It was also suggested that clear targets should be established for the development of the approach moving forwards. It was emphasised that the pilots had been carried out to test various ways of working and that the learning was embedded in the Council's 'Our Future Council' change strategy, but it was agreed to consider how the committee could continue overseeing the wider decentralisation work. **Action required**
- Expressed concern about the sustainability of an expansion of place-based forums and the danger of over-burdening local organisations or partners with too much work or responsibility, given that they often faced their own resource pressures. Members were informed that the place-based forums had largely been internal to the Council, as its partnerships with other organisations were generally found to be stronger than those between directorates within the Council, although it was now intended to increasingly expand the approach externally. It was highlighted that although the place-based budgets were generally very small, they demonstrated that working together towards shared objectives helped such small amounts go further, and it was emphasised that sustainability was not always an issue because they often sought to kick-start work rather than sustain it.
- Highlighted the importance of improving the Council's working relationship with parish councils across all committees and directorates, and it was suggested that working groups could provide cross-cutting support to help achieve this.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Endorse the learning and considerations set out in Section 6 of the report.

197. Cambridgeshire Registration Service Annual Report

The Committee received an annual report on the Registration service, which provided information on delivery over the last twelve months, focusing on ceremonies, appointments, performance, and technology, while providing assurance around the delivery of the service's statutory duties and responsibilities.

While discussing the report, individual Members:

- Expressed concern about the safety and equipment issues at the Ely Register Office that were detailed in the report and queried whether the venue continued to be

suitable for shared use by the Registration service and Cambridgeshire Archives. While it was acknowledged that the Registration service could benefit from better and more appropriate facilities, it was emphasised that changes to technology and population distribution affected how services were accessed and where they needed to be located.

- Established that the Registration service continuously sought to identify potential new accommodation and venues for ceremonies around the county, including through partnerships with district councils. Seven new approved venues had been identified over the previous year, and attendance at wedding fairs often led to approaches from businesses interested in becoming approved venues for the bespoke ceremonies offered by the service.
- Noted that the Registration service had previously experienced a significant backlog of registrations due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and queried how such issues had been addressed. Members were informed that the backlog had been overcome as efficiently as possible, and that resilience planning and contingencies had been developed as a result of the experience, to ensure the service was better prepared for future potential disruptions.
- Requested further information on the Registration service's performance in relation to the registration of deaths for people from religious groups requiring burial as soon as possible after a death. It was clarified that the Coroners service, rather than the Registration service, had the responsibility to manage this issue, and Members were assured that the Council worked hard to support communities and groups with such requirements, with performance exceeding that of other areas.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report.

198. Trading Standards Annual Report

The Committee received an annual report on the Trading Standards service, which provided information on delivery over the last twelve months, focusing on activity, performance, and outcomes, and providing assurance around the delivery of the service's statutory duties and responsibilities.

While discussing the report, individual Members:

- Paid tribute to the service for the national recognition it had received in various areas of its work, noting that the specialised team sometimes provided support to the government and the wider sector.
- Queried whether the service had experienced resistance from businesses or any other kind of problems from its work advising on best practice for providing allergen information. Members were informed that businesses' concerns were predominantly around assurance that the allergen information they were provided with and passed on to customers was accurate and continuously updated. The service worked to

raise awareness on regularly checking ingredients, particularly when changing providers or products, and advised on legal obligations as well as best practice.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report.

199. Library Service and Archives Service Annual Report

The Committee received an annual report on the Library service and the Archives service, which provided information on their activities and performance during 2024, their direction of travel and the ways in which they supported the Council's wider priorities.

While discussing the report, individual Members:

- Paid tribute to the Library service for reaching 100,000 active library card holders across the county, which represented approximately 15% of the population, and welcomed that there had been over 1,500,000 visits to libraries over the past year.
- Requested further information on community managed libraries. It was clarified that community managed libraries were not part of the Council's statutory service, although their valuable role in the wider offer was emphasised. Members were informed that service level agreements had been refreshed with all such libraries over the past year, to clarify reciprocal responsibilities, such as training and access to the library management system, and to ensure that isolated issues with individual libraries could be identified and addressed.
- Requested an update on the reopening of Cherry Hinton library. Members were informed that the library, which had closed for refurbishment in April 2023 as part of the wider development of the Cherry Hinton Community Hub, was provisionally scheduled to open on 3 February 2025, with a full launch scheduled for June 2025. The library had been stocked with books and the procurement of a management agent had been completed through a collaboration between the Council, Community Benefits Society and Cambridge City Council.
- Drew attention to Men's Sheds as a valuable resource for tackling mental health issues and suggested that the Library service could connect with such groups to signpost and collaborate on shared objectives. Members were informed that various library projects around the county had engaged with Men's Sheds, including in Chatteris, March and St Neots, and it was agreed to provide Members with a briefing note on such collaborations. **Action required**
- Queried whether the Council used the Public Health service and social prescribers to identify people that may benefit from some of the Library service's programmes, such as the mobile library service, Care Together and Library@Home. Members were informed that the service regularly engaged with social prescribers to maximise the impact of such programmes.

- Highlighted the importance of using leaflets as a means of communication to overcome digital exclusion, noting that respondents to a customer impact survey carried out by the Library service identified it as an important way to find out about the service and the wider services on offer in libraries. Members were informed that a micro grant application had been submitted to Arts Council England to support the distribution of leaflets as part of a campaign to increase membership of over-60 residents.
- Noted that the Archives service was a separate statutory to the Library service, and it was agreed to provide Members with a briefing note on the work of the County Advisory Group on Archives and Local Studies. **Action required**

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report

200. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Action Plan Update

The Committee received an update report on the progress of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Action Plan.

While discussing the report, individual Members requested an update on the action to develop guidance to support hiring managers in writing job descriptions and person specifications, which was due to commence in January 2025. Members were informed that the Council had been developing interview questions to support recruitment interviews, and although such guidance had not yet been put into effect, its future usage and impact would be monitored.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the status of the actions in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Action Plan.

201. Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Agenda Plan

While discussing the Committee's agenda plan, individual Members noted that the Committee's Spokes would consider the suggestion of a report on the various aspects of community safety at its forthcoming meeting.

The Committee noted its agenda plan.

Chair
27 February 2025