

## Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Minutes

Date: Thursday 23 March 2023

Time: 10:00am – 12:05pm

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, Doug Dew, Ian Gardener, Bryony Goodliffe, Ros Hathorn, Keith Prentice, and Philippa Slatter

### 105. 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 Jan French.

Councillor Bulat declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 8 (The Council's Approach to Supporting Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Migrants), due to her employment in the migrant and refugee sector.

Councillor Hathorn declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 9 (Cultivate Cambs – Endorsement of Recommendations (March 2023)), as the local member for Histon and Impington.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Bulat as the new Vice-Chair of the committee, noting her appointment by Full Council on 21 March 2023, and paid tribute, along with other committee spokes, to the work carried out by former Councillor Hilary Cox Condron as the previous Vice-Chair of the committee.

### 106. Minutes – 8 December 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2022 were agreed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

The Committee noted the Minutes Action Log.

### 107. Petitions and Public Questions

No public questions or petitions were received.

## 108. Coroner Service Toxicology Provision

The Committee received a report on the procurement of toxicology services for the Coroner service, alongside a proposal to extend an existing waiver that would allow the current provider to continue to provide the services until 30 June 2023.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Confirmed that the police were not involved in the procurement process, as despite their role in responding to sudden deaths, requests for toxicology samples were only made and agreed by the coroner.
- Sought clarification on whether samples stored by the current provider would be transferred to the new provider in the event of the procurement process identifying a different provider. Members were informed that there were rigorous processes in place to ensure samples were labelled and stored properly. As soon as testing had been carried out, all samples were destroyed appropriately and were therefore not stored for long periods of time.
- Established that although hair samples were often used for DNA purposes, this was not done by the Coroner service, which only took hair samples to assist in the identification of a cause of death.
- Suggested that sharing the services with another area could provide benefits, although it was acknowledged that a key objective of the toxicology process was obtaining results in as timely a manner as possible.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve the commencement of the procurement process for toxicology provision, as set out in Section 2 of the report;
- b) Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place and Sustainability, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee, to award and execute a contract once the procurement process has been completed; and
- c) Agree an extension to the existing waiver until 30 June 2023.

## 109. Household Support Fund 2023/24

The Committee received a report on the proposed delivery of the Household Support Fund 2023/24, following the Government's confirmation of a £7,162,849 allocation for the Council. The year-long fund would replace previous six-month iterations, and the Children and Young People Committee had already approved a continuation of the Direct Voucher Scheme, which would cost around £4m. This left an estimated working balance of £3,162,849 for the wider scheme and administrative costs, and it was

proposed to continue with the previous process for allocating the resources, as set out in Section 2 of the report.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Welcomed the new funding allocation that had been announced, highlighting its importance for many residents during the widespread ongoing economic difficulties. It was also acknowledged that the fund provided the Council with an initial contact with many residents, for whom a more targeted support offer could then be developed to help overcome the various kinds of poverty.
- Sought clarification on how the funds would be spread out across the year, to ensure that they were not all used up before the colder winter months, when they were of particular necessity for many residents. Members were informed that officers were analysing the varying levels of applications from previous rounds to identify when more resources would be required, and also to identify when communication publicising the fund would be most effective. The extended length of the scheme also aligned with the Council's preference for a more holistic approach to providing support to residents, rather than simply distributing funds as quickly as possible. It was also emphasised that there would be no kind of clawback from the government if funds were allocated progressively throughout the year.
- Welcomed the continuation of the Direct Voucher Scheme, noting how important it was for families that received the support, although it was acknowledged that the limited resources meant that the necessary criteria would restrict some people who needed support from being able to obtain it through the voucher scheme. Members also expressed concern that inflationary costs and wider economic pressures meant there would still be significant shortfalls despite the resources available through the Household Support Fund.
- Sought clarification on whether the Council had been able to retain data on pensioners who had previously been supported in arrears on their water bills, and emphasised the importance of ensuring that older people did not misinterpret the removal of the ringfenced pensioner element to mean that the new iteration of the fund was focussed on young people. **Action required**
- Clarified that although people could initially apply for one award from the Household Support Fund, they were now able to make two applications. Members were also informed that the Council had proactively contacted previous applicants to make them aware of this.
- Observed that there were still people eligible for support who were unaware of the Household Support Fund, and queried how the Council was working to identify and inform such people, particularly those who did not habitually follow communications from the Council and those who did not speak English as their first language. Members were informed that the Council was continuing to expand its network of trusted partners, some of whom were better equipped to identify people that were unaware of their eligibility. The Council was also in discussions with foodbanks around the county, as well as other organisations in the community and voluntary sector, to ensure as widespread coverage as possible. It had also promoted and

raised awareness of the fund internally, with a wide range of services that provided other support now reviewing their records and identifying additional people who had not previously applied.

- Noted that Paragraph 1.7 of the report mentioned a project already in place with Citizens Advice, and queried whether the Council also worked with alternative providers in East Cambridgeshire, where Citizens Advice did not operate. Members were informed that the varying support options that were in place across the county would be reviewed following the confirmation of additional funding.
- Expressed concern about the impacts of new rules announced by government regarding free childcare, although it was acknowledged that they would not directly affect the Household Support Fund 2023/24.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve the approach to delivery of the Household Support Fund 2023/24, as set out in Section 2 of the report; and
- b) Delegate further decisions relating to the delivery of the Household Support Fund to the Assistant Director for Communities, Employment and Skills, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee.

## 110. Library Stock Procurement

The Committee received a report setting out a proposal for the library core stock procurement to be carried out through the East Midlands and Mid Anglia consortium, as it would reduce procurement, legal and evaluation costs, while strengthening purchase power to gain best value. The anticipated value of the four-year contract that would be secured through the procurement was £1.5m.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Supported the proposal to procure through a consortium, noting that it would take advantage of the expertise of specialists in various areas. Members highlighted that the stock of individual libraries should reflect the communities in which they are located. It was noted that the Library service had its own development team based in the district areas, which worked closely with the Think Communities team to ensure that it was reactive to the evolving demographics of the different communities.
- Noted that in other parts of the country Ukrainian citizens were working with local councils to donate books in Ukrainian to libraries, and queried whether the Council was involved with such initiatives in Cambridgeshire and whether it could proactively work with communities of people from other countries as well to expand the foreign language stock. Members were informed that the Council was working on a national level through Libraries Connected and had also received books from the Ukrainian embassy, which were available in some of the county's hub libraries. It had also

purchased some dual-language books and was open to receiving to donated books. On a wider level, data from the 2021 census had been analysed to update purchasing patterns to reflect the evolving demographics across the county.

- Established that while the procurement of widely published local books would be carried out through the consortium if it offered the best value, smaller or self-published local titles would continue to be procured directly. It was also confirmed that Library service staff would continue to maintain autonomy on selecting titles.
- Acknowledged that preparing books for public use was a time-consuming and skilled task, noting that for new books, it took approximately 30-45 minutes per book to build a catalogue record and service the book accordingly. It was clarified that such work was carried out by suppliers, to ensure that staff were able to dedicate themselves to frontline services, rather than in back office functions.
- Welcomed that children's use of libraries accounted for around 55% of lending, and established that while the percentage of stock purchases was probably higher than this, on budgetary terms it was less, due to the higher cost of non-fiction and adult books.
- Paid tribute to the work of former Councillor Hilary Cox Condon in promoting the role of libraries in local communities.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Agree to the procurement of library stock through the East Midlands and Mid Anglia consortium;
- b) Delegate the authority to the Service Director of Policy and Communities, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee, to award and execute the contract once procurement has been completed; and
- c) Delegate the authority to the Service Director of Policy and Communities to approve all necessary legal documentation relating to the contract award, along with any transactions, associated arrangements and their formal executions.

## 111. Cambridgeshire Skills Six Month Review

The Committee received a report that provided a six-month review of progress made by Cambridgeshire Skills in relation to its delivery plan, having been brought back into the Council's corporate centre after three years as an arms-length organisation.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Queried how much work was carried out by Cambridgeshire Skills with adults with learning disabilities or difficulties. Members were informed that the organisation was developing various programmes in this area, including through some groups specifically working with adults with learning disabilities in Cambridge and Fenland,

although it was acknowledged that more could be done, including linking to a supported employment model.

- Queried whether Cambridgeshire Skills retained information on the location of people that made enquiries to the organisation but who did not proceed to enrol, suggesting that it could demonstrate areas where there was demand for the service that was unable to be fulfilled for various reasons, including inadequate public transport provision. Members were informed that prospective learners were offered the opportunity to be placed on a mailing list or waiting list if a course was not available in the right place, and while data relating to some enquiries was retained, it was not universal, as people would have to grant permission for their data to be stored.
- Welcomed the ongoing work by Cambridgeshire Skills and the Combined Authority to support people who had an English as a second language (ESOL) need, noting the importance of a single point of contact to help people find the available ESOL courses in their area and beyond. Observing the additional six ESOL tutors that had been recruited to meet the increasing demand, Members queried whether this was sufficient. It was confirmed that there was an open recruitment drive for additional ESOL tutors on the Council's website, and Members were informed that someone who had recently arrived from Ukraine had been employed by the organisation as an ESOL tutor.
- Sought clarification on the reasons for lower enrolment numbers in Huntingdonshire and East Cambridgeshire, as indicated in Appendix 1 of the report. It was noted that East Cambridgeshire had a smaller population and there was also an overlap in provision from the College of West Suffolk, particularly in English (including ESOL) and maths courses. It was acknowledged that numbers were lower in parts of Huntingdonshire, particularly in St Neots, but Members were assured that work was ongoing to increase interest and enrolments in the area.
- Established that Cambridgeshire Skills supported learners who were struggling to continue with their courses in a number of ways, including financial support, guidance, counselling, and also identifying alternative courses or providers if appropriate. While 23% of the overall funding was spent on skills, the majority was used for community learning, which did not necessarily result in a formal qualification, but which helped to build learners' confidence in their ability to go on to learn and develop additional new skills.
- Welcomed the achievements from working alongside the Council's Traveller Health team, and requested that additional information on this area be included in the next iteration of the six-month review. **Action required**
- Expressed concern about the difficulties faced by residents of rural communities in accessing the courses provided by Cambridgeshire Skills due to inadequate public transport, and queried whether hubs would also be opened in smaller towns in the future. It was emphasised that courses were available online, with support available for those who were digitally excluded, while financial support for transport was available for some learners if required. Members were informed that while the organisation would like to expand its hubs to smaller towns, the fact that funding

was claimed each month, rather than being provided as an initial upfront payment, made this challenging to operate.

- Highlighted the importance of establishing a set of key performance indicators that would allow the committee to analyse and critique performance, especially given the increased relevance of scrutiny following the organisation being brought back within the Council. Members were informed that Cambridgeshire Skills was required to produce an annual accountability statement, which would be presented to the Committee at its meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023, and which would shape future monitoring of the service.
- Suggested that it would be beneficial to develop a single platform on which potential learners could explore the complete range of available course options from all providers in the region, including schools and colleges, rather than having to search through each individual provider.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the 6-month progress of the service operating as Cambridgeshire Skills.

## 112. The Council's Approach to Supporting Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Migrants

The Committee received a report providing an update on the Council's response to a motion agreed by Full Council on 8 December 2022, relating to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. The report detailed proposals for the Council to sign the City of Sanctuary pledge and commit to upskilling officers who worked directly with refugees and asylum seekers, and it also sought the appointment of a Migrant Champion.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Welcomed the support provided by the Council to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. It was suggested that the Committee could receive further reports in the future to provide updates on actions that had been taken by the Council, in order to continue raising awareness.
- Observed that it was being proposed for the Council to sign a City of Sanctuary pledge, and expressed concern that refugees and asylum seekers in rural parts of the county may feel that it did not apply beyond Cambridge City. Members were informed that signing the City of Sanctuary pledge would enable it to then move towards obtaining Council of Sanctuary status, but it was agreed to investigate whether City of Sanctuary UK would consider developing a County of Sanctuary pledge. **Action required**
- Clarified that the recommendations did not include a commitment to progress the Place of Safety pledge, with some Members expressing concern about explicitly pledging to not fully cooperate with the Home Office in the reporting of issues relating to immigration enforcement. Other Members argued that it was important for

people to be able to approach elected officials for advice or signposting, without the fear of being reported for immigration enforcement. It was confirmed that while members and partners were encouraged to sign up to the pledge, the Committee was not being asked to make any such commitment, and it was also emphasised that the Council would continue to provide information to the Home Office where it was required to do so by law, as set out in Paragraph 2.13 of the report.

- Endorsed the role description of Migrant Champion, as set out in Paragraph 2.2 of the report, highlighting the intergenerational nature of the work necessary to bring about social cohesion, and emphasising that the role was symbolic and should not include specific questions or any form of case work. Members acknowledged the importance of the Council maintaining clear and consistent communication about migrant and asylum issues, particularly as the Council did not have a dedicated workforce in the area. It was clarified that there was no remuneration for the role.
- Observed the temporary nature of councillors' positions compared to the more secure and permanent nature of officers' positions, and queried whether the network also included officer Migrant Champions, given that they were the people who worked with migrants and asylum seekers on a daily basis. It was emphasised that work towards obtaining Council of Sanctuary status would be undertaken by officers, as exemplified by the proposed commitment to upskill officers, and it was agreed to establish whether Migrant Champions in other local authorities were officers.

#### **Action required**

- Considered whether Migrant Advocate would be a more appropriate name for the role, although it was acknowledged that the Migrant Champion title was used nationally and adopted by those councillors who formed the Migrant Champions Network.

It was proposed by the Chair, seconded by Councillor Slatter and agreed unanimously to nominate Councillor Bulat as the Migrant Champion.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Agree the role description of Migrant Champion, as set out in Paragraph 2.2 of the report, and appoint Councillor Bulat as the Migrant Champion;
- b) Approve that the Council signs the City of Sanctuary pledge and continues to work towards becoming an awarded Council of Sanctuary member; and
- c) Support the Council making a commitment to upskill its officers who work directly with refugees and asylum seekers.

## **113. Cultivate Cambs – Endorsement of Recommendations (March 2023)**

The Committee received a report recommending sixteen grant applications for funding through the Cultivate Cambs fund, following a meeting of the Recommendation Panel on 8 March 2023. It was confirmed that if funding was approved for all the applications,



a total of approximately £2.64m would have been committed from the overall available funds of £2.65m, meaning this would be the final allocation of Cultivate Cambs funding.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Sought clarification on whether the Groundwork East project would deliver home energy-efficiency advice and support to vulnerable households in just Cambridge or across the whole county. **Action required**
- Paid tribute to officers that had supported the Cultivate Cambs fund and its previous form as the Innovate and Cultivate Fund, highlighting its success in enabling and supporting a wide range of community projects across the county, and welcoming the learning and collaboration that it had brought about. Members expressed disappointment that the fund would not continue, although one member noted that Littleport Town Council would continue to fund one of the projects due to the recognised benefits for the local community.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Agree to fund the following sixteen applications:

- i) Hope Against Poverty CIC
- ii) Groundwork East
- iii) Soham Community Association
- iv) Camtrust
- v) Cambourne Men's Shed
- vi) Rowan
- vii) Social Echo North Huntingdonshire CIC
- viii) SSAFA Cambridgeshire
- ix) Home start Cambridgeshire
- x) Cambridge Curiosity and Imagination
- xi) Orchard Park Community Council
- xii) The Baca Charity
- xiii) Switch180
- xiv) Sports Connections Foundation
- xv) Next Generation CIC
- xvi) Shelford and Stapleford Youth Initiative.

## 114. Performance Monitoring Report – Quarter 3 (2022/23)

The Committee received a report providing an update on the performance of services within its remit over Quarter 3 of the 2022/23 financial year. Attention was drawn to the higher than anticipated number of visitors to libraries over the quarter, and although it was not possible to confirm the specific reasons for visits, the service concluded that the Council's work in promoting libraries as warm spaces had proven effective and beneficial to residents.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Note the contents of the report.

## 115. Finance Monitoring Report – January 2023

The Committee received the Finance Monitoring Report to the end of January 2023 for the services within its remit, with a previous overspend of around £50k having been reduced to approximately £11k.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Sought clarification on the role and functions of Cultural Services. **Action required**
- Requested further information on why Youth in Communities had only spent £48k of its £395k budget. Members were informed that the budgetary figures included grant income, which artificially skewed the actuals figures and made it appear that the team had spent less. Some of this grant income related to delivering a contract in the following financial year, so would be carried forward.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Review and comment on the report.

## 116. Community, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Agenda Plan

The Committee noted its agenda plan and agreed to:

- a) Appoint Councillor Bulat to:
  - i) County Advisory Group on Archives and Local Studies
  - ii) Cross Party Working Group for Library Services
  - iii) Cultivate Cambs Steering Group
- b) Councillor Daunton to:
  - i) The Library Presents
- c) Councillor Meschini to:
  - i) Capital Fund Steering Group
- d) Councillor Shailer to:
  - i) Cambridge & District Citizens Advice Bureau Management Committee
  - ii) Community Safety Partnerships
  - iii) White Ribbon Delivery Group
- e) Councillor Wilson to:
  - i) Hunts Forum of Voluntary Organisations