



# COLCHESTER ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON:** Thursday 28 September 2023 @7pm at Marks Tey Village Hall

**PRESENT:** Brian Butcher (Chairman), Alan Frost Abberton & Langenhoe, Simon Dougherty Abberton & Langenhoe, Mick Mead Gt.Horkesley, Denise Stocker Wakes Colne, Sue Allen-Shepherd Tiptree, Robert Johnstone Myland, Gerald Wells Marks Tey, John Jardine Eight Ash Green, Tim Frances Gt. Tey, Maggie Holmes Layer de la Haye, Petra Palfreyman (Clerk), Pam Donnelly CEO Colchester City Council

Brian Butcher welcomed everyone to his first meeting as CALC chairman.

1. **TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES** – John Gili-Ross West Bergholt, Stanway & Langham Parish Councils
2. **TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON:** 22 June 2023. Three amendments were proposed to the minutes and the changes are reflected in the copy shown on the website.
3. **MEETING TOPICS & GUEST SPEAKER – Pam Donnelly, CEO of Colchester City Council**

INTRODUCTION – all local authorities are facing significant challenges and must strive to be financially resilient and secure. There are 26 local authorities on the government's watch list facing financial difficulties, not including Thurrock and Birmingham. Going into the pandemic there were a number of challenges, and the Council were significantly weakened by the previous 10 years of austerity which led to the Council receiving between £10/£12M reduction in government grants which left the Council in not the best financial position. After the pandemic the cost-of-living crisis hit, giving the Council another £10M cost pressures. The net budget of £25M is the discretionary spend. When building the recovery plan, the Council have looked to the medium-term financial position and this brought about the decisions for some savings, with 2023/24 needing a saving of £5M and 2024/25 needing a saving of another £3M. At mid-year, the budget is not doing well, and some difficult decisions have been made around the size of the senior management team, a recruitment freeze, pay rise issues and other measures, including reducing the pay budget by £0.5M this year. The three-year transformation will deliver less and reduce the size of the Council to leave it within means and with fewer employees.

Questions from Eight Ash Green Parish Council Chair

Q - We have received many concerns and complaints about the garden waste decision. Unpopular in the extreme. In our village we contribute to the cost of street lighting and take care of many of the footpaths. Substantial sums are paid in Council Tax and people are very upset that one of the few services we receive is being withdrawn. We have many elderly residents who cannot load a vehicle and take to the refuse centre. Also, we have many who are feeling the cost of living and we do wonder if this is an appropriate time to create new charges. From what we hear the saving to the council is not significant. Hard to understand the determination to bring this in by the Council. Can you explain please?

A - this was a difficult decision but the savings will be approx. £1M and will have the least impact to the greatest number of people. A number of amendments have been made to help struggling households. The Auditors and Inspectors feel the Council is well run and respond effectively to residents, following a recent peer review.

The Council has £212M of assets including land, buildings, shops, and offices. Every single line of the asset account is being looked at.

Three hundred and eighteen families are in temporary B & B accommodation, accommodating 79 vulnerable children, the Council have spent £1M more than budgeted on housing for evicted residents on a S21 (no fault) notice and a whole new community of people we are being welcomed to Colchester.

If asylum seekers receive the fast-track response, the Council will have a duty to house 12 asylum seekers every day, as well as citizens from the Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Sudan.

The financial pressures are unprecedented, and we have never seen challenges like this.

Q - We are playing our part in Eight Ash Green regarding the provision of new houses. Our community will grow but it seems to cost us - for example, we must pay for the provision of new bins, dog or litter, then we have to take on additional cost through very expensive contracts to empty the bins. As we see population growth, should there not be a re-evaluation of bin provision and collection by the Council?

A – This question is being raised all over the city. There is an argument for asking the public to take responsibility for taking their own rubbish home. Residents must take some responsibility. There is also a strong argument for using private contractors. Developers would not sign up to an arrangement whereby they have to pay to empty the bins once the development is complete and it would be difficult to enforce this.

The Council has 3 planning enforcement officers, and the enforcement figures will be provided for circulation.

Over the next 3 years there will be a lot of capital investment from the Government from the Levelling Up fund, the Town Deal and match funding from private investors. This will cause disruption before the improvements can be seen, whereby the city is more welcoming, navigation around the city is easier, congestion is reduced, and it is safer for pedestrians and cyclists. This money cannot be used for front line services as it's a grant

fund, has conditions attached and is reported monthly to Whitehall to demonstrate the money is being spent in the right way.

The good news is that Kevin Bentley has agreed to negotiate with Michael Gove for the Devolution Deal. The Level Two deal will bring in further investment for Essex, Southend and Thurrock for adult education and transport.

Q - We have suffered badly this year with traffic avoiding the A12 roadworks and increasing HGV traffic as the rural economy grows. We do not have the resources to repair pavements which are now dangerous or sides of country roads which have no pavements and were not designed to withstand HGV traffic. The sides of these roads are crumbling. Would the Council consider assistance in this regard?

A - There are several schemes on going with Highways. For example, there will be a major redevelopment of St Nicholas Square and the Northern Gateway. However, the Highways authority have serious issues with vacancies being at 40%, a national skill shortage in key professions and a lack of investment in training. The pay is not competitive, and the private sector is more attractive. Although this is not the answer, it does offer some explanation to why there are delays everywhere in the work by ECC.

Questions from WBPC

Q - Has the Council yet drafted as you kindly advised at CALC meeting six months ago a policy in respect the manner in which it deals with s106 agreements, specifically the dealing with applications for the release of funds by Parish Councils and its payment to them? If so, are P C's to be permitted to comment upon such before its implementation? Also, what is the implication of the change to CIL on such?

Karen Syrett is now dealing with S106. She is still in discussions about CIL but in previous reviews it put Colchester in a worse position. With CIL some non-financial obligations are being introduced and this is very important.

Q - Rory Doyle has tabled the idea of CALC and the Clerk's Forum become one. They are two totally separate organisations and have diverse agendas. Do you know of this idea as the person who started the Clerk's Forum and chaired, and something you had a genuine interest in? What are your thoughts and is this idea something CALC should be concerned about or ignore?

Pam advised that she was unaware of this suggestion and will look into this further.

OTHER QUESTIONS/STATEMENT

It is difficult to get any planning enforcement, there is a lack of response and inadequate investigations. Also, Highways and CCC Planning give contradictory advise and comments. There are only 3 planning enforcement officers. Information will be sought about response times.

Other examples given by the members were that the planning enforcement team responded well to queries and issues.

To avoid issues getting money out of the developers for S106, could it be suggested that after some houses have been built/sold, a percentage of the money could be placed in ESCROW account, which could give some security to parishes and towns. The matter will be put to the planners for consideration.

Cllr Butcher thanked Pam for her attendance.

4. **APPOINTMENT OF NEW CALC CLERK** – Cllr Butcher confirmed that two applications have been received and both candidates will be interviewed over Zoom by Cllr Butcher and Cllr Johnstone.
5. **TO CONSIDER A CONSTITUTION FOR CALC** - The constitution which had previously been circulated, was agreed.
6. **TO CONSIDER INSURANCE COVER FOR CALC** – Following discussion, the members agreed that insurance of the type offered by Zurich via EALC was not required.
7. **A) ELECTION ON LHP REPRESENTATIVES FROM CALC** – Two members required. Robert Johnstone & Sue Allen Shepherd were voted in by the members. John Gili-Ross is Standing down and thanks were given by the members for his previous work. John will advise the LHP of his decision and Sue’s appointment.  
**B) ELECTION OF STANDARDS COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVE** – Brian Butcher was voted in by Members to be CALC’s representative on CCC’s Governance and Audit’s sub-committee.
8. **TO RECEIVE REPORTS**
  - a) **TREASURES REPORT** – It was proposed to authorise the payment of £218.00 to the clerk. Additional stationery costs to be paid later were also agreed. The bank balance as of 14.09.23 is £1391.50. There is a credit against Marks Tey Village Hall of £66.00. Another signatory will be sought for the bank account in due course. A recently received letter from Barclay’s was to be given to John Gili - Ross to help respond.
  - b) **LOCAL HIGHWAYS PANEL** – CALC have an LHP representative on the panel which is managed by ECC. The last meeting gave an update about schemes awaiting assessment and/or progressing. Lewis Barber advised he will run a session about LTN 120 in March 2024.
  - c) **GOVERNANCE REPORT** – nothing to report
  - d) **EALC EXECUTIVE** – the EALC AGM was an interesting day with good presentations from the Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable. There were 14 stall holders including web designers, play equipment specialists and Men in Sheds. Approx 180 attended.
9. **INFORMATION SHARING** – A query was raised about the Civility & Respect pledge and how it sits alongside the Code of Conduct and how other Councils viewed it. Councillors confirmed it was generally accepted by Councils. Civility & Respect is a standalone national pledge which is an SLCC initiative. Future speakers were discussed and agreed

as follows: Karen Syrett, CCC Planning, NEPP chairman, Ben Plummer CCC Climate Change Officer, Essex Police ( Roger Hirst/B J Harrington ) and Jon Simmons from Local Highway Panel/ECC.

**10. NEXT SPEAKER:** Laura Atkinson, Rural & Community Led Housing Advisor, RCCE

**11. DATES OF NEXT MEETING:**

Date – Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Location – by Zoom

Time – 7pm

Chairman – Cllr Butcher gave his apologies for the next meeting. Cllr Johnstone agreed to chair the meeting.

Following her resignation, thanks were given to the clerk for her work for CALC, this being her last meeting.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the meeting at 21.09pm and thanked everyone for attending and providing valuable feedback.

Signed..... Date

**e-mail** – calc.clerk@gmail.com

**Chairman** – Brian Butcher **Telephone** - 07836348955

**e-mail** – cllr.butcher@westbergholt-pc.gov.uk