

**CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL  
CLERK'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL**

**Meeting Date:** 30 April 2026

**Overview**

In recognition that this meeting takes place during the pre-election period, this report provides Members with a series of factual updates relating to ongoing officer activity and matters for note. Only one decision is requested at this meeting, relating to a business case included as a separate appendix (Appendix 15). All other matters are presented for information and awareness at this stage.

**Electrical Installation Condition Reports (EICRs)**

Members will be aware that the Council has a statutory duty to ensure that all electrical installations within Council-owned buildings are safe, compliant, and subject to regular inspection.

Following identification that a previous Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) had not been completed to the required professional standard, officers commissioned a new, competent local electrical contractor to undertake EICRs across all Council premises.

A formal complaint has been raised against the previous contractor, and a recorded Letter Before Action has been issued seeking recovery of costs totalling £1,439.96.

Progress to date:

- Cemetery: EICR and all associated remedial works completed- Completed.
- Community Hub: EICR inspection completed with significant immediate safety issues identified and rectified- awaiting report.
- Victory Hall: EICR inspection complete awaiting report.
- Parish Council Offices: EICR completed remedial works included installation of a new external light and authorisation of repairs to the disabled toilet emergency alarm (approved as operational expenditure)- awaiting report.

Certain repairs were authorised immediately by the Clerk on health and safety grounds, including where damage was discovered during inspection (for example, removal of a deteriorated ceiling light). These actions were necessary to protect staff, users, and visitors and to ensure compliance with electrical safety legislation.

**Playground Equipment – Station Green**

The routine playground inspection took place this week. Defects were identified, resulting in the swing and infant seesaw being taken out of use pending repair.

Officers are currently liaising with the equipment manufacturer to establish warranty status or remedial costs. Members will be updated once outcomes are confirmed.

### **Victory Hall and Community Hub – Fire Escape Route**

An outstanding health and safety issue remains regarding the fire escape route from Victory Hall, specifically the pathway leading from the designated fire exit to a safe point of dispersal at the front of the building.

Following assessment of available options, officers recommend that the works be delivered in-house by the Open Spaces Team, representing the most efficient, cost-effective, and environmentally responsible solution. A business case supporting this approach is included as a separate appendix for Members' consideration.

### **Martyn's Law (Protect Duty)**

Members are advised that Martyn's Law will become enforceable from 2027 for venues with a capacity of 200 persons or more, introducing implications for training, compliance, inspection, and ongoing costs.

Following the forthcoming fire risk assessment on 18 May, officers propose reviewing:

- Standing, seated, tabled, and mixed capacities;
- Fire exit provision and circulation flow;
- Whether capacity remains below or exceeds the 200-person threshold.

Indicative safe capacities are currently estimated as:

- Standing: approximately 150
- Seated: approximately 120–130
- Tabled: approximately 80–90
- Mixed use: approximately 70–90

Capacity will need to be declared at the point of booking. A formal recommendation will be brought back to Full Council for ratification once the assessment is complete.

### **Team Restructure – Separation of Administrative and Operational Functions**

An operational restructure has been implemented to formally separate administrative and operational service delivery.

Revised arrangements:

- Administrative Officers: Based at Parish Council Offices.
- Operational Officers: Based at the Cemetery.

Benchmarking across Epping Forest District identified that Chigwell Cemetery was the only site with a Registrar permanently based on site. In line with sector practice, the Registrar function has now been relocated to the Parish Council Offices.

Benefits realised include:

- Improved dignity and privacy for bereaved families;
- Support for the transition to card-only payments via a single terminal;
- Greater resilience and integration with financial processes;
- Extended administrative coverage beyond the previous 9:00am–2:00pm arrangements;
- Capacity created to support placement of an Apprentice within the operational team.

All local Funeral Directors have been formally notified in writing.

### **Cemetery Action Plan – ICCM Audit Response**

The Cemetery Action Plan, developed in response to the ICCM audit. This represents a significant and complex programme of work requiring sustained officer focus and coordination.

Officers first met on 10 April 2026 and continue to meet on a weekly basis to oversee delivery and track progress.

Key updates include:

- A trial memorial safety programme commenced on 24 April 2026 and was communicated via the Council's website and social media channels. The trial sample involved 25 memorials, of which 10 passed and 8 failed, representing a 32% failure rate. Failed memorials required immediate temporary safety measures (wooden supports and strapping), which took approximately three hours to complete, followed by further action to arrange permanent repairs by qualified stonemasons. All findings and remedial actions are being logged and monitored via a tracking spreadsheet.
- Following the trial, officers will assess team capability, capacity, and cost implications, including the potential requirement for additional equipment to support safe lifting and storage.
- A Task and Finish Group will provide weekly oversight to ensure delivery against programme milestones.
- Financial implications are anticipated, particularly in relation to memorial safety works and enhanced out-of-hours security arrangements.
- Security improvements already implemented include live CCTV feeds linked to the Parish Council Offices and the installation of a larger monitor within the Cemetery Office to improve real-time monitoring.

Full delivery of the Action Plan is expected to take 9–12 months, phased alongside statutory burial responsibilities and ongoing grounds maintenance. Members are advised that this work will reduce officer capacity for non-essential projects during the implementation period.

In addition, officers are required to undertake retrospective digitisation of burial records for 2025–2026 to ensure accuracy and compliance within the Scribe system.

### **Telephony System**

The new telephony system is now live and aligns the Council with modern public-sector standards.

Key features include a professional greeting with menu options and voicemail, hunt group functionality to reduce missed calls, core operating hours of 9:00am–4:00pm (Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays), call transfer capability, integration with mobiles and headsets, and removal of redundant landlines.

Feedback to date has been positive, with notable improvements in accessibility and resilience.

### **Protected Wildlife – Open Spaces**

During planned works, protected wildlife was identified at Station Green. Specialist ecological advice was obtained immediately and works adjusted accordingly.

Certain areas will remain uncut for approximately three weeks. While the badger sett is currently void, this precaution reduces the likelihood of re-occupation prior to resumption of works.

### **Cemetery Administration – Single Point of Failure**

A significant single point of failure risk currently exists within the Council's cemetery administration arrangements.

Members are therefore asked to consider delegating authority to the Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), alongside the Cemetery Registrar, to act as authorised signatories for official cemetery documentation, including Grants of Exclusive Rights of Burial.

In addition, Members are asked to support the requirement for all official cemetery documentation to be completed within five working days. This will improve service continuity, strengthen governance arrangements, and reduce organisational and operational risk.

Approval of this delegation is requested at this stage to establish a robust framework to inform the ongoing review and rewrite of the Cemetery Regulations, which will be

completed and presented to the Finance and Governance Committee for consideration in due course.

### **Cemetery Gates Contract**

The contract for opening and closing cemetery gates outside normal working hours has lapsed.

Officers will process an interim quarterly payment to maintain continuity and request Member approval to continue this arrangement, which represents good value, supports public access, and enables families to visit outside staffed hours.

### **Vehicle Lease and Operational Capability**

The current electric vehicle lease expires in early June. While environmentally beneficial, the vehicle has limited operational capability, including no towing capacity and insufficient suitability for memorial safety works.

Officers will explore replacement options, including vehicles with towing capability, to improve operational flexibility.

### **Volunteer Support – Financial Reconciliation**

Members are advised that Galina Chirvas, who holds a Master's degree in Accounting and Auditing, will join as a volunteer from next week for one day (five hours) per week.

Support will include scanning, data input, assistance with historical administrative backlogs, and support to the RFO with financial reconciliation. This is a short-term capacity measure under supervision.

### **Uniform and PPE – Cemetery Staff**

Additional uniform and PPE provision is required as a health and safety matter.

Proposed issue includes five wicking work shirts per operative, two pairs of work trousers, and additional PPE for the Caretaker. This will improve safety, resilience, and professional presentation.

### **Lone Worker Safety**

Officers are currently trialling the *Lone Alert* lone-working application on Parish Council-issued mobile phones. This service extends the functionality of the Council's existing lone-worker safety provision for open spaces team and is available at no additional cost. It forms part of the package associated with previously purchased lone-worker devices.

The application enhances staff safety by enabling real-time monitoring, automated welfare check-ins, and rapid escalation in the event of an incident or failure to respond, including

GPS location sharing and emergency alerts. The trial will support the Council's ongoing health and safety obligations and inform any longer-term approach to strengthening lone-worker protection across both sites and could extend to members.

### **External HR Consultant**

The Council's external HR consultant has provided invaluable support during the Clerk's transition period and assisted with outstanding HR matters. It is recommended that the current provision be retained pending resolution of these matters, with a review brought forward thereafter.

### **Public Burial (For Information)**

The Coroner has approached the Council regarding the provision of a public burial. This item is noted for Members' awareness only. Officers are liaising with the London Borough of Waltham Forest regarding costs and responsibilities.

### **Marketing Materials**

The Clerk is exploring modest branded materials (such as pop-up banners, tablecloths, and a gazebo) for use at Council surgeries, community events, and cemetery services (for weather protection). Branding will remain consistent with existing identification and lanyards.

### **Cemetery Regulations**

The Clerk will commence work on developing a comprehensive and up-to-date set of Cemetery Regulations. Subject to review by the Finance & Governance Committee, the final document will be presented to Full Council for approval prior to publication.

This work will establish a single, authoritative source for cemetery processes, procedures, fees, and regulations. Current documentation is fragmented, lacks version control, and is not easily accessible to officers or the public, leading to inconsistency and reduced transparency.

The existing regulations are over 11 years old and no longer fully reflect operational practice. Matters requiring formalisation include qualifying criteria for reduced fees, public burials, respectful burial of babies and bodies outside gestation periods, and alignment with current legislation and professional standards.

Members are also advised of an operational consideration relating to grave excavation. Current equipment safely supports excavation to six feet. While eight-foot graves can be accommodated, the risk profile increases for operatives. Officers will therefore consider whether investment in more capable equipment is required in the medium term.

This item is presented for awareness only at this stage.

## **Bench at Bus Stop – Fencepiece Road**

Following a detailed, evidence-led assessment, officers have concluded that progression of a request for the installation of a bench at the Essex County Council bus stop on Fencepiece Road is not justified at this time.

While Transport for London data indicates modest use by elderly and disabled passengers, this is outweighed by significantly higher school-age use, strong local resident opposition, recent antisocial behaviour, constrained site conditions, limited surveillance, and lack of mitigation measures.

A detailed written update has been shared with the requesting Parish Councillor, and with District and County Councillors. As the Parish Council has no statutory control over bus stop infrastructure and the evidence does not support progression, Members are advised that no further action be taken and that this matter is now concluded.

**Prepared by:**

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