CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL
CLERK'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

Meeting Date: 27 August 2026

Matters for Member Decision

The following items require formal determination by Members. In reaching a decision, Members are asked to consider the financial implications of each proposal, compliance with the Council's Financial Regulations and statutory duties, any health and safety requirements, environmental and biodiversity impacts, operational benefits, asset management considerations, and whether the proposed expenditure represents an appropriate and proportionate use of public funds in furtherance of the Council's objectives and responsibilities.

Courtland Drive (Decision Required)

A local resident recently attended the Parish Office to raise concerns regarding the maintenance and appearance of Courtland Drive Meadow. Members should note that Chigwell Parish Council commissioned Essex Ecology Services in 2022 following significant vegetation clearance undertaken between 2020 and 2021. The resulting Biodiversity Management Plan recommended management of the site as rough grassland, including rotational cutting, retention of longer grass areas and habitat enhancement measures.

Following a site inspection with Open Spaces staff, officers observed that the current management generally reflects the principles of the 2022 report, with mown pathways and regularly cut areas, whilst longer grass and vegetation are retained around the boundaries and rear of the site. However, it was noted that the longer grass areas adjacent to the highway can appear untidy and may contribute to incidents of fly-tipping, with discarded tyres and other waste recently identified.

Should Members wish, Essex Ecology Services has provided a quotation of £3,396.60 to undertake an ecological site inspection and management review. This would include a review of the 2022 report, ecological records search, site survey and updated management recommendations.

Members may wish to consider one of the following options:

1. Commission an updated ecological review to assess the current condition of the site and provide refreshed management recommendations.
2. Adopt a compromise approach, involving more extensive grass cutting whilst retaining trees, scrub and other biodiversity features, to improve appearance and reduce fly-tipping whilst maintaining ecological value.
3. Continue with the current management regime in accordance with the existing Biodiversity Management Plan.
4. Take no further action.

Given the balance required between biodiversity objectives, site appearance, fly-tipping concerns and community expectations, Members may wish to consider whether a cost-effective compromise can be achieved in line with the Council's Biodiversity Policy. No specific officer recommendation is made.

Garden of Remembrance Complaint (Decision Required)

Members are asked to consider a long-standing complaint relating to a Memorial Rose within the Garden of Remembrance. To preserve privacy, no personal details or plot references are included in this report.

The complainant remains dissatisfied with the condition of a Memorial Rose and has requested a complimentary five-year extension to the agreement, representing a value of £445. The matter predates the current Clerk's appointment and was previously considered by Full Council, which approved a programme of replacement planting following concerns regarding the quality and establishment of several roses.

Whilst replacement planting was undertaken, the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome and the communication surrounding the remedial action. Officers have established that the complainant does not appear to have been directly informed that replacement planting had taken place, which has contributed to the ongoing dissatisfaction. Concerns have also been raised regarding maintenance standards within parts of the Cemetery.

A recent inspection undertaken by officers and the Open Spaces Team identified several areas requiring improvement, including the Garden of Remembrance. These works will be incorporated into ongoing maintenance programmes.

Members should note that Memorial Rose fees contribute towards administration, grounds maintenance, staffing and the wider operation of the Cemetery. The service does not operate at a profit and has historically been subsidised by the Council. Whilst officers acknowledge that aspects of the service provided in this case may not have met expectations, granting a complimentary extension could create a precedent for similar requests from other plot holders.

Members are invited to consider whether:

- Any further action should be taken in respect of this complaint.
- A goodwill gesture is appropriate.
- The risk of setting a precedent outweighs the circumstances of this case.
- Improvements to the Garden of Remembrance and wider Cemetery would represent a more appropriate response.

Officer Comment

Officers acknowledge the complainant's concerns and recognise that the matter has remained unresolved for a considerable period. However, Members should carefully consider the implications of departing from the established scheme, particularly as Full

Council previously approved replacement planting as the agreed remedy. Officers consider that priority should be given to improving standards within the Garden of Remembrance and wider Cemetery for the benefit of all users, rather than establishing a precedent which may be difficult to apply consistently in future. Members' direction is sought.

Maternity and Family Friendly Policy (Decision Required)

The Maternity and Family Friendly Policy have been reviewed and updated by the Council's external HR Consultant to ensure compliance with current employment legislation and best practice, including recent changes relating to neonatal care leave and other family-friendly rights. This is detailed within appendix 11a, and Full Council is requested to consider and adopt the revised policy to enable its formal publication and implementation.

Lime Avenue Brick Wall Repairs (Update)

Members will recall that at the Full Council meeting held on 23 July 2026, it was agreed that repairs were required to a section of brick wall at Lime Avenue which had suffered structural failure. Council approved expenditure of £6,150 for the repair works (Minute Reference FC043/26). Prior to proceeding, Members requested that a claim be submitted to the Council's insurers to determine whether the damage was covered under the policy.

A claim was subsequently submitted on 18 August 2026 (Claim Reference 20-50-890737). The insurer has since rejected the claim. The decision is based on an exclusion contained within the policy documentation, specifically Page 28, Point D. Within the subsidence section, the policy states that boundary walls, fences and similar structures are excluded from cover for subsidence-related damage unless the insured building itself has been damaged simultaneously and by the same cause**.**

Considering the insurer's decision and given the public safety implications associated with the damaged wall, I have proceeded with arrangements for the repair works in accordance with the resolution previously approved by Council.

As agreed by Members, the cost of the repairs will be funded through a transfer from General Reserves to Earmarked Reserve 210**.**

Council Chamber and Meeting Facilities (Update)

Members will observe that the Council Chamber has now been painted, reconfigured and modernised as part of the Council's wider improvement programme. Improvements completed include new tables and chairs, a revised seating layout to improve public engagement, councillor nameplates, enhanced meeting presentation facilities, provision of refreshments, and an overall more professional appearance.

The Chamber modernisation works have been completed within budget, with only a small number of finishing touches remaining, including the installation of blinds and the delivery of branded tablecloths which have already been ordered.

Further improvements have also been implemented, including the installation of new display screens for Members and public viewing, replacement of the previous projector arrangement, relocation of the existing projector for use at Victory Hall, and the transfer of the CCTV viewing monitor to the Administration Office to improve site security and visibility.

These upgrades support more efficient and environmentally sustainable meetings, improve accessibility to information, and enhance public engagement. Overall, the project has been successfully delivered within the allocated budget, with only minor finishing works outstanding.

Cemetery Building (Update)

Members are advised that the cemetery building remains closed following the identification of structural concerns during a recent inspection. The building will remain closed until a full safety inspection and structural assessment have been carried out.

To ensure continued provision of facilities for visitors, an accessible temporary toilet has been installed on site. Cemetery staff have been relocated to the main Parish Offices whilst the building remains unavailable.

Officers are currently awaiting an update from the Council's insurers regarding the status of the claim and the arrangements for a structural assessment. A further update will be provided to Members once the insurance position has been clarified and the findings of the safety inspection are available.

Victory Hall Rear Wall Repairs (Update)

Members are advised that plastering repair works to the rear wall of Victory Hall are now substantially complete. The works have addressed the identified deterioration and cracking, improving both the appearance and safety of the area. Final finishing works are currently underway and are expected to be completed next week.

Community Hub Snooker Tables (Update)

Members previously resolved to sell the two snooker tables in advance of the proposed Community Hub and Victory Hall improvement works.

I can confirm that both tables have now been sold for £385.59. The tables have been collected, and payment has been received by the Council. As previously agreed by Members, these funds will be retained until such time as the Limes Farm Community Group formally registers as a charity, at which point the funds will be transferred on the understanding that they are used towards the purchase of a smaller, collapsible pool table or similar facility for community use.

Members should also note that all remaining snooker-related fixtures, equipment and associated electrical connections have been safely removed by a qualified electrician and the Open Spaces Team. Items of historical or sentimental interest have been retained

temporarily, and officers will contact individuals who have expressed an interest in preserving memorabilia from the former snooker club. Any remaining items will be disposed of appropriately.

These actions have enabled the area to be cleared and prepared for future works, subject to the removal.

Parish Council Electric Vehicle (Update)

Members are advised that the lease provider has confirmed that the Council's electric vehicle lease expired on 12 June 2026. Whilst a three-month extension was agreed, the provider has advised that no further lease payments will be collected.

The vehicle remains with a third party for repair, and officers are awaiting confirmation of any outstanding costs together with the requirements for preparing the vehicle for return. As the lease has now expired and no further payments are being made, the financial implications associated with the vehicle are largely concluded, subject to the hand back process.

As previously reported, the Council initially hired a larger replacement van for one month and has subsequently downsized to a smaller vehicle whilst longer-term options are considered. Based on initial assessments, it is likely that a new lease arrangement will provide the most cost-effective solution. A business case will be presented to Members once the final implications of returning the existing vehicle have been established.

Cremated Remains Plot Renewals (Update)

Members are advised that significant work is underway to digitise historic cemetery records and transfer legacy information onto the Council's cemetery management system, in line with recommendations arising from the Cemetery Audit.

This process involves reviewing handwritten records, historic documentation and ownership information, and where possible contacting rights holders to discuss renewal options. Whilst the Council's recently adopted Cemetery Regulations place responsibility on owners to maintain up-to-date contact details, officers are managing several historic cases that pre-date these arrangements.

The review has generated a small number of complaints from individuals who believe the Council should have contacted them before rights expired. In some cases, rights have effectively continued beyond their expiry date without charge. These matters are sensitive and require a fair, proportionate and consistent approach as officers work through historic records.

The review has also highlighted that the current fee structure for cremated remains renewals may warrant further consideration, particularly when compared with the cost and duration of other burial rights within the Cemetery. Officers are therefore developing

revised pricing proposals for consideration by the Finance and Governance Committee later this year.

Several renewal notices have now been issued, and where owners no longer wish to renew, plots will revert to Council ownership in accordance with the applicable regulations.

At present, the priority remains the verification and digitisation of cemetery records, ensuring that ownership information is accurate, complete and capable of being managed effectively going forward.

Victory Hall Income Awareness (Update)

Members will be aware that officers have worked to re-establish theatrical productions at Victory Hall, providing a valued cultural and community benefit.

Whilst these events are welcomed, Members should note that the installation of staging, scenery and lighting equipment requires the hall to remain set up for a period before and during performances. This can limit the availability of the hall for other larger bookings requiring stage access, even when performances are not taking place.

A recent example resulted in the Council being unable to accommodate two bookings, representing potential lost income of approximately £1,280.

At present, this is an unavoidable consequence of hosting larger theatrical productions. However, Members should be aware that whilst the performances themselves may only run for a short period, the associated set-up and dismantling requirements can affect hall availability for a significantly longer duration.

Looking ahead, the proposed redevelopment of the former snooker room may provide opportunities for alternative storage and operational arrangements which could help reduce this impact and improve flexibility in the future.

This update is provided for Members' awareness when considering hall utilisation, community benefit and potential income opportunities.

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