

CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL
CLERK'S REPORT TO FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Meeting Date: 9 July 2026

Victory Hall – Compliance and Site Improvements

The fire escape pathway at Victory Hall has now been completed. This work ensures that the facility meets current access and fire safety requirements and provides a safe and unobstructed means of escape for building users.

Following a review of occupancy arrangements, updated capacity levels have been shared with regular user groups. These revised capacities have also been incorporated into the Terms and Conditions of Hire to ensure all hirers are aware of the maximum permitted occupancy levels and their responsibilities when using the facility.

As part of wider site improvements, two of the three picnic benches previously located within the Cemetery have been relocated to the side of Victory Hall. This provides additional outdoor seating and community space for hall users and visitors.

A lighting contractor is scheduled to install external lighting in the coming weeks. In addition, an area to the rear of the building has been identified which would benefit from segregation through the installation of a small fence and gate. The Open Spaces Team will undertake this work over the next few weeks. The enclosed area will provide secure external storage for items such as traffic cones and barriers, helping to free up valuable space within the basement storage area and improve overall organisation of the building.

Income Generation Opportunities – Locker Quest

Investigations into parcel locker opportunities continue.

Site surveys have now been completed for two potential locker locations:

- Victory Hall, adjacent to the existing bin storage area (with bins requiring relocation to accommodate the installation).
- The side of the Parish Office building.

Proposals have been received from both YEPP and EVRi. The Council is currently awaiting final commercial offers before considering the next steps.

Lime Avenue Brick Wall Repairs

Damage to the brick wall located at Lime Avenue has been assessed and an estimate for repair works has been requested. A further update will be provided once the final costings have been received and reviewed.

Victory Hall Rear Wall Repairs

Officers are currently awaiting quotations from plastering contractors for the remedial works required to the rear wall of Victory Hall. Once quotations have been received and evaluated, a preferred contractor will be identified and a programme of works agreed. A further update, including proposed costs and timescales, will be presented to Members in due course.

Parish Minibus Disposal

The Parish minibus has now been collected and is scheduled to be entered into auction on Thursday 9 July. The outcome of the auction and any financial return achieved will be reported to Members once available.

Infrastructure Improvement Programme and Asset Maintenance & Replacement Reserve

Officers have identified several maintenance and infrastructure requirements across the Council's asset portfolio which will require consideration over the coming years. Whilst many of these matters are not currently urgent, they highlight the need for a more structured and sustainable approach to asset maintenance, lifecycle replacement and future infrastructure investment.

Current requirements include the inspection and potential repair of the external fire escape staircase at the Parish Offices, where preliminary observations suggest there may be movement between the staircase structure and the main building. A professional structural inspection is recommended to establish the extent of any issues and identify any remedial works required to ensure the continued safety and integrity of this emergency escape route. Other identified requirements include repairs to guttering at the Parish Offices, repairs to the external side wall of the Community Hub, and the development of a planned replacement programme for windows and doors at both the Community Hub and Victory Hall. In addition, the Council will need to consider ongoing maintenance of its assets, the lifecycle replacement of key infrastructure and equipment, future information technology replacement requirements, and maintenance and improvement works associated with the Cemetery building and other operational facilities.

To support future planning and reduce reliance on reactive expenditure, Officers recommend that the Council considers establishing a dedicated Asset Maintenance and Replacement Reserve. The purpose of the reserve would be to provide a sustainable funding mechanism for planned maintenance works, statutory compliance requirements, health and safety obligations, lifecycle replacement programmes, information technology renewals, and, where appropriate, improvement projects that deliver clear operational or community benefit. Establishing such a reserve would assist the Council in managing future liabilities, reducing pressure on annual revenue budgets and supporting long-term financial planning across the Council's asset portfolio.

Potential funding for the reserve could be derived from annual budget allocations approved through the precept process, additional income generated through commercial initiatives

such as parcel locker agreements and other income-generating opportunities, unallocated year-end budget surpluses where considered appropriate by Members, and transfers from General Reserves. Officers further recommend that interest earned on the Council's bank accounts, savings accounts and investments be transferred to General Reserves and earmarked to support future maintenance liabilities, asset replacement programmes and infrastructure investment requirements.

Before developing a comprehensive strategy or detailed business case for future projects, Officers consider it important to establish a clear understanding of the Council's current and future asset liabilities, maintenance obligations and funding requirements. It is therefore proposed that the Council develops an Infrastructure Improvement Programme to identify and prioritise investment needs across its asset portfolio.

The programme would provide a structured assessment of Council assets and infrastructure, including condition surveys, identification of short, medium and long-term maintenance requirements, the development of a rolling programme of anticipated works, and an assessment of assets and infrastructure elements approaching the end of their useful life. It would also consider opportunities to improve functionality, accessibility and energy efficiency, together with future projects relating to the Cemetery building, Community Hub, Victory Hall, Parish Offices and other Council assets. The programme would also identify future funding requirements and reserve provisions needed to support delivery.

This approach would provide Members with greater visibility of future investment requirements and enable the development of evidence-based business cases for larger projects as they emerge. It would also ensure that the Council's responsibility to maintain and replace its assets is aligned with its wider ambitions for service improvement, community benefit and long-term asset sustainability.

Community Hub Project

The tender documentation for the Community Hub Project has now been published, and interest has been received from prospective contractors.

The original project brief included the relocation of Parish Council staff accommodation into the proposed Community Hub, accessibility improvements, provision of kitchen facilities within the Community Hub, and improvements to the existing Victory Hall kitchen.

Initial professional assessments have now been undertaken to support project development. Whilst this work has been valuable in establishing potential delivery options, it has also highlighted the need to review the original scope against the funding currently available to the Council.

Officers are therefore recommending that the Council consider a revised and phased approach to delivery. The objective would be to prioritise those elements that provide the greatest immediate community benefit whilst allowing other improvements to be progressed as separate projects as funding opportunities become available.

Subject to Member consideration, Officers are proposing that the following workstreams be explored:

Project 1 – Community Hub, Pantry and Community Kitchen Facilities

This project would focus on delivering the core objectives associated with the Community Hub and existing grant funding requirements, including:

- Secure pantry provision;
- Community kitchen facilities;
- Warm space and community support initiatives; and
- Infrastructure required to support community-based activities.

Given existing funding requirements and project deadlines, Officers consider this workstream should be prioritised.

Project 2 – Accessibility Improvements

This project would focus on accessibility and inclusion improvements across the facility, ensuring that the building is accessible and welcoming to all residents and user groups.

Project 3 – Victory Hall Kitchen Improvements

This project would focus specifically on the refurbishment and improvement of the existing Victory Hall kitchen facilities and would be developed independently of the Community Hub proposals.

In addition, Officers are reviewing whether the relocation of Parish Council staff accommodation should continue to form part of the Community Hub project, or whether staff accommodation should remain within the Parish Office building. This review is intended to ensure that available resources are directed towards the delivery of community-facing facilities and services.

A meeting has been scheduled with senior officers at Epping Forest District Council to discuss grant requirements, project objectives and delivery timescales associated with the Community Hub proposals.

Draft Terms of Reference are currently being prepared for Member Working Groups to assist with the development of each proposed workstream and to provide recommendations to Council as the projects progress.

Members should note that detailed financial, procurement and commercially sensitive matters relating to the project are contained within a confidential appendix elsewhere on the agenda. These matters relate to contractor engagement, project affordability, funding considerations and procurement activity and are exempt from public disclosure in order to protect the Council's commercial position whilst discussions remain ongoing.

Further updates will be provided as funding discussions, project development and feasibility work progress.

Council Chamber and Meeting Facilities

Officers are continuing to explore opportunities to modernise Council meetings and reduce reliance on printed paperwork.

Initial proposals include:

- Introduction of tablet devices for Councillors to facilitate paperless meetings.
- Installation of a dedicated display screen for Councillors and attendees to improve presentation of documents and reports during meetings.
- New tables estimated at approximately £32.99 each (three required).
- Replacement chairs at an estimated cost of £240 for 12 chairs, following feedback that existing seating is uncomfortable during longer meetings.
- Provision of Councillor name plaques for seating positions.
- Purchase of a branded tablecloth to provide a more professional and consistent appearance during Council meetings and public events.

Further proposals and costings will be brought forward for Member consideration as the project develops.

Prepared by:

Jason Selvarajah MSc
Clerk & Proper Officer
Chigwell Parish Council