

CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL

CLERK'S REPORT TO ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING

Meeting Date: 21 May 2026

1. Introduction

This report provides an overview of the administrative, governance, and operational activities of Chigwell Parish Council for the period May 2025 to May 2026.

I was appointed as Clerk and Proper Officer in mid-January 2026. Accordingly, this report reflects both:

- The position of the Council across the full year; and
- Direct updates, observations, and improvements implemented since my appointment.

As Clerk and Proper Officer, I am responsible for ensuring that the Council operates lawfully, effectively, and in accordance with its statutory duties and governance framework.

2. Governance and Compliance

The Council has continued to operate within its established governance framework, including adherence to Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, and statutory obligations.

During the year:

- Full Council and Committee meetings have been administered in accordance with legislative requirements
- Agendas, minutes, and decisions have been properly recorded and published
- Key policies and procedures have been reviewed and maintained, including:
 - Health & Safety Policy
 - Financial Regulations
- The Council has remained compliant with audit requirements

Since January 2026, focus has been placed on:

- Strengthening governance processes and internal controls
- Improving the clarity and consistency of reporting and record-keeping
- Supporting Members in effective decision-making through structured administrative processes

3. Staffing and Organisational Capacity

The year has seen significant progress in strengthening staffing capacity and operational resilience, reducing reliance on single points of failure.

Key appointments include:

- Clerk (January 2026)
- Caretaker (August 2025)
- Open Spaces Operative (July 2025)
- Volunteer (April 2026)

These roles have enhanced:

- Maintenance of Council facilities and assets
- Responsiveness to operational issues
- Day-to-day service delivery

Further work since January has included:

- Clarifying staff roles and responsibilities
- Strengthening communication between officers and Members
- Embedding a more structured and consistent operational approach

As part of strengthening organisational resilience and ensuring the effective use of resources, a review of staff roles, job descriptions, and working arrangements will be undertaken. This will support the alignment of responsibilities with current operational demands and help ensure that workloads are appropriately distributed across the team.

The intention of this work is to promote fairness, clarity, and efficiency, ensuring that all roles are clearly defined, properly supported, and contribute effectively to service delivery. It will also assist in identifying any capacity gaps, development opportunities, and areas where responsibilities may need to be rebalanced to support both staff wellbeing and organisational effectiveness.

4. Financial Overview

The Council has maintained sound financial management throughout the year, operating within approved budgets and maintaining appropriate financial controls. Like many organisations, rising energy costs have placed pressure on budgets where initial provisions have not fully met actual expenditure.

This includes:

- Delivery of services within the agreed precept
- Ongoing financial oversight by the Responsible Financial Officer
- Maintenance of financial transparency and audit readiness

The Council has also secured funding to support the development of the Community Hub and plans to utilise reserves to improve Victory Hall, representing a significant investment in local infrastructure for community benefit.

Since January 2026:

- Greater alignment between financial planning and strategic priorities has been introduced
- Enhanced monitoring of project-related costs and commitments has been implemented

5. Service Delivery and Operations

The Council has continued to deliver core services, including:

- Management and maintenance of:
 - Victory Hall
 - Community Hub
 - Parish Offices
 - Cemetery
 - Open spaces and community areas
- Administration of bookings and use of Council facilities
- Support for operational services across the parish

Operational improvements include:

- Strengthened maintenance arrangements
- Increased staff visibility and responsiveness
- Improved coordination of events and facility usage

Since January 2026:

- A more structured and consistent operational framework has been implemented
- Improved communication tools (including radios) have enhanced safety and coordination
- A more professional image has been established through corporate branding
- A modern telephony system has been introduced
- Investment in equipment and staff support has strengthened service delivery

6. Health & Safety and Risk Management

A proactive and structured approach to Health & Safety has been maintained.

Key measures include:

- Appointment of a professional Health & Safety consultant
- Implementation of action plans through external consultancy support (WorkNest)

- Regular review of risk assessments

Compliance areas addressed:

- Fire Risk Assessments completed and actions implemented
- Electrical safety maintained through EICR inspections and remedial works
- Asbestos managed through survey controls and strict procedural adherence
- Annual PAT testing and equipment safety monitoring

Enhancements include:

- Staff training in:
 - Conflict management
 - Communication
 - Traffic control and event safety
- Continued use and professionalisation of safety and security systems:
 - CCTV and alarms
 - Lone working devices
 - Staff ID badges
 - Two-way radios
- Improved operational uniforms to enhance visibility and professionalism

Since January:

- Reporting and monitoring arrangements have been strengthened
- Procedures for events and high-risk activities have been formalised
- Documentation has been improved to support audit and compliance

7. Key Projects and Achievements

Significant progress has been made across several key areas:

Community Infrastructure

- EFDC funding secured for Victory Hall and the Community Hub, with progression towards tender stage pending completion of drawings
- Continued work towards delivering enhanced community facilities
- Ongoing engagement with partners to support delivery

Environmental Initiatives

- Installation of beehives to support biodiversity and environmental awareness

Community Safety

- Continued investment in maintaining defibrillator provision

- Progression of a Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS) scheme, currently awaiting permissions for wider deployment

Since January 2026, there has been increased focus on:

- Project delivery and implementation
- Strengthening coordination and oversight
- Improvements to cemetery administration

8. Partnership Working

The Council has continued to work collaboratively with:

- Epping Forest District Council
- External consultants and contractors
- Local community groups

This collaborative approach supports effective service delivery, project development, and representation of residents' interests.

9. Challenges

The Council has faced several challenges, including:

- Planning-related work and associated legal costs
- Legacy issues and administration relating to the cemetery
- Operational pressures linked to community transport and asset management
- Increasing governance and compliance expectations

Since January 2026:

- These challenges have been addressed through improved structures, strengthened governance, and clearer operational processes

10. Governance and Meeting Practice

As the Council continues to strengthen its governance arrangements, maintaining a consistent and professional approach to meetings remains essential.

The role of the Chair is fundamental in ensuring that meetings are well-managed, structured, and inclusive. Established practices—such as speaking through the Chair and allowing one speaker at a time—support:

- Orderly and respectful debate
- Equal opportunity for Member contribution
- Accurate and complete minute-taking as the formal statutory record

These principles are designed to support effective and transparent decision-making and are not intended to limit open discussion.

Members are also encouraged to support administrative processes by:

- Reviewing and acknowledging meeting summons in a timely manner
- Preparing in advance by considering agenda papers

These practices contribute to efficient meetings, informed debate, and the overall professionalism of the Council.

11. Priorities for 2026/27

Looking ahead, the Council's priorities include:

- Delivery of the Victory Hall and Community Hub project
- Progressing the future of Parish Offices
- Improving cemetery administration
- Implementing a cemetery action plan, including memorial safety inspections
- Progressing cemetery refurbishment
- Enhancing open spaces and environmental initiatives
- Improving community safety and traffic management measures
- Strengthening governance, compliance, and reporting processes
- Ensuring effective, transparent, and responsive service delivery

In addition, it is recommended that the Council develops a strategic plan covering the remainder of its elected term. Establishing a clear strategic framework will help ensure that projects, initiatives, and resources are aligned with the Council's long-term direction, enabling more coordinated decision-making and effective delivery of priorities.

12. Conclusion

The past year has seen both challenge and progress, with the Council continuing to deliver core services, advance significant projects, and strengthen its operational capacity.

Since January 2026, priority has been given to reinforcing governance, improving organisational structure, and positioning the Council to deliver its strategic objectives effectively.

The continued commitment of Members, staff, and the wider community remain central to the Council's success. The organisation is well placed to build on this progress in the coming year.

Prepared by:

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Chigwell Parish Council

