

**CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL
COMMUNITY SERVICES AND ASSETS COMMITTEE
OFFICER REPORT- BUILDINGS**

Date: 30 July 2026

Purpose of Report

This report provides Members with a brief update regarding the Council's property portfolio, including ongoing improvement works, project development, asset management matters and future building priorities.

Council Chamber Improvements

Members will be aware that Full Council recently approved a programme of improvements to the Council Chamber.

The objective of these works is to modernise the space, create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for residents and visitors, and improve the overall functionality of the chamber as a community and democratic space.

The proposed improvements will also support enhanced technology provision, enabling greater flexibility in how meetings are conducted and facilitating future remote and hybrid meeting capabilities should legislation permit.

In addition to improving accessibility and the user experience, officers anticipate that the move towards greater digital working will reduce reliance on printed agendas and reports, generating savings through reduced printing, toner usage and confidential waste disposal costs.

Further updates will be provided as the project develops.

Community Hub

Full Council has approved interim Terms and Conditions governing the use of the Community Hub by the Lime Farm Community Group pending completion of the wider Community Hub improvement project.

A longer-term occupancy agreement will be prepared once the building works have been completed and future operational requirements are fully understood.

Officers have commenced discussions regarding the clearance of the former snooker room. Over the coming weeks, remaining equipment and associated items will be catalogued and stored temporarily whilst opportunities are provided for any legitimate ownership claims to be made. Any unclaimed items will subsequently be disposed of in accordance with the Council's procedures.

The clearance of this area will assist in creating a clearly defined and potentially lettable space, separate from the existing multi-purpose areas currently in use.

Community Hub Improvement Project

Significant progress has been made in developing the Community Hub project.

To date, seven contractors have attended site visits and engaged with officers regarding the proposed tender opportunity.

In addition, Full Council has approved the Terms of Reference for the Community Hub Working Group. This now allows the group to be formally established and mobilised to assist in identifying project priorities, engaging with stakeholders and supporting future decision-making.

The intention is that the project will now move forward at pace, supported by regular task and finish meetings involving Members, staff and stakeholders. Updates will continue to be provided as the project progresses.

Officers are also pleased to note that the Communities Directorate at Epping Forest District Council has expressed support for the revised approach being adopted by Chigwell Parish Council.

Victory Hall

Victory Hall continues to perform well and remains in a positive financial position. Usage levels remain strong and officers anticipate that future improvements, including the planned kitchen installation, will further enhance the building's attractiveness as a venue and support future income generation opportunities.

Officers would recommend that individual capital projects associated with Victory Hall and the Community Hub continue to be financially monitored as separate projects, even where works are being delivered concurrently. This will provide greater transparency regarding project costs and outcomes.

A significant health and safety improvement has recently been completed through the construction of the new fire escape pathway. In addition to enhancing emergency egress arrangements, the area has created an attractive outdoor space for users of the facility.

The area has been enhanced through the relocation of two picnic benches from the cemetery and the creation of external storage facilities for weather-resistant equipment, reducing pressure on storage space within the Parish Office basement.

Emergency lighting is currently being installed and will incorporate battery backup functionality, ensuring continued illumination in the event of a power failure during an emergency evacuation. Completion of these works will close out a longstanding health and safety action.

Members should also note that delivery of the fire escape pathway project required a substantial commitment of officer time and operational resources. The Open Spaces Team dedicated the majority of a working week, together with weekend working where necessary, to complete the project whilst continuing to maintain essential services elsewhere. This coincided with one of the busiest operational periods of the year.

In addition to the pathway project, officers have undertaken repairs to sections of the car park surface outside Victory Hall and the Community Hub, whilst also removing substantial weed growth to improve the appearance of the site. These improvements are particularly timely given the forthcoming installation of the parcel locker facility adjacent to Victory Hall.

Victory Hall Hire Snapshot (July 2026)

Bookings at Victory Hall continue to demonstrate strong demand and provide a stable income stream for the Council. During the reporting period, a paid booking scheduled for 11 July 2026 was cancelled by the hirer at short notice, with the Council retaining the £327.50 hire fee in accordance with the terms and conditions. Long-term bookings remain particularly encouraging, with a regular hirers Friday afternoon sessions secured and paid for through to 25 December 2026, together with confirmed and paid bookings from 6 February to 8 March 2027. Additional programme activity includes performance hires across September and October 2026, although the occupation of the hall for these events resulted in the loss of a potential alternative booking valued at £720. Private hire bookings presently include one hire in August, three hires in October and one hire in November. Whilst bookings remain uneven across some months, the current position reflects continued confidence in the venue and supports the positive financial outlook reported for Victory Hall.

Parish Office

The primary focus at the Parish Office has been the Council Chamber improvement project.

Alongside this work, officers are exploring the installation of an intercom and controlled access system. The objectives of the proposal are to:

- Improve the professionalism of public interactions.
- Enhance lone-worker safety for staff.
- Manage visitor access more effectively.
- Improve security during public meetings and day-to-day operations.
- Support an appointment-based approach to office visits where appropriate.

Officers are currently exploring costs and practical options. Any formal proposal will be brought back to Members for consideration through the appropriate committee process.

Cemetery Building

The cemetery building remains a significant area of concern from an asset management perspective.

The toilet facilities have been in poor condition for some time and require future investment. Similarly, the current staff welfare provision does not reflect modern expectations, with limited rest facilities available and no shower provision for operational staff following physically demanding outdoor work.

As Members will appreciate, operational staff regularly undertake grounds maintenance, grave preparation and other physically demanding activities, often in challenging weather conditions. Suitable welfare facilities are therefore an important consideration both from a wellbeing and workforce perspective.

These matters are currently being incorporated into the wider strategic review and business case relating to cemetery operations and future service delivery, which will be presented later this year.

Planned Maintenance and Asset Improvement Programme

Full Council has approved a building improvement budget to support a rolling programme of maintenance, refurbishment and asset enhancement across the Council's estate.

The intention is to ensure that Council-owned facilities remain safe, welcoming and fit for purpose whilst supporting continued community use and income generation opportunities.

Several priorities have already been identified, including:

- Replacement of side windows at the Community Hub.
- Improvements to entrance doors at Victory Hall and the Community Hub.
- Future replacement of ageing windows where required.
- Repairs and maintenance to guttering at the Parish Office.
- General property condition improvements across the estate.

Attention should be drawn to the Community Hub side windows, which remain an outstanding health and safety concern. The existing glazing is below waist height, consists of older single-pane non-safety glass and is situated in a location where accidental impact remains possible.

Officers will explore whether replacement can be incorporated into the wider Community Hub refurbishment project. Should this not be possible, separate proposals will be brought forward.

Whilst it is not possible to address all building improvements simultaneously, officers are developing a longer-term programme of investment designed to improve the condition, accessibility and functionality of the Council's buildings over time.

Conclusion

Good progress continues to be made across the Council's property portfolio. Significant work has been undertaken to improve health and safety compliance, modernise facilities and develop plans for key community assets.

Current priorities remain focused on delivery of the Community Hub project, continued improvements to Victory Hall, modernisation of the Council Chamber and the development of a longer-term maintenance and investment programme for the wider estate.

Members will continue to receive regular updates as projects progress.

Recommendation

That the Community Services and Assets Committee:

1. Notes the contents of this report.
2. Notes the progress being made on the Community Hub and Victory Hall projects.
3. Notes the ongoing review of improvements to the Parish Office and Cemetery facilities.
4. Supports the continued development of a rolling programme of maintenance and improvement works across the Council's property portfolio

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