

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

Date: 30 July 2026

Telephony and Customer Contact Improvements

Members should note that the Council's investment in the new telephony system has delivered significant improvements in customer contact, responsiveness and service delivery.

The implementation of hunt groups, Interactive Voice Response (IVR) functionality and improved call-routing arrangements has greatly reduced the risk of calls going unanswered. Calls are now directed to the most appropriate officer or service area, and where calls cannot be answered immediately, voicemail facilities and missed-call monitoring ensure that customers receive a return call wherever possible.

The system's digital functionality also provides greater flexibility for officers, allowing calls to be handled through laptops and, during office opening hours, rerouted to work mobile devices when staff are away from their desks. This has improved service continuity and reduced missed opportunities to assist residents and service users.

Feedback received from users, particularly funeral directors and those accessing cemetery services, has been overwhelmingly positive. Stakeholders have commented on the increased confidence in being able to contact the Council and receive timely responses, an area where improvements were previously required.

The system also provides out-of-hours messaging, call recording functionality and management reporting. Call recordings enable officers to undertake quality assurance checks and review customer interactions to help maintain a high standard of customer service.

Overall, the telephony solution is proving to offer excellent value for money, providing a more comprehensive service than the previous arrangement whilst operating at a lower overall cost.

Information Technology and Cyber Security

Members should be aware that a proportion of the Council's existing IT infrastructure is approaching the point where replacement and renewal planning should begin.

Given the increasing dependence on digital systems across all Council services, officers consider it prudent to develop a rolling three-year IT modernisation programme. Such an approach would allow the Council to replace equipment in a planned and financially sustainable manner whilst ensuring systems remain reliable, secure and fit for purpose.

Cyber security continues to represent one of the most significant risks facing public sector organisations. Consequently, future financial planning should include provision for IT replacement, software upgrades, cyber security measures and ongoing system improvements.

Members may therefore wish to consider that the Council's recently approved infrastructure improvement programme should encompass not only physical assets and buildings but also the technology assets required to support modern service delivery.

Officer Capacity and Project Delivery

Members are asked to recognise the significant officer commitment currently required to manage several complex and fast-moving projects simultaneously.

In particular, the Community Hub tender process and associated stakeholder engagement work is demanding substantial officer time. This includes contractor liaison, project coordination, community engagement, preparation of documentation, working group support and the management of linked projects and dependencies.

Officers are therefore keen to ensure that sufficient capacity remains available to both deliver these strategic projects and maintain day-to-day service delivery across the Council's operations.

Accordingly, Members are requested to carefully consider any additional work requests or project commitments during this period to ensure that resources remain focused on successfully delivering the Council's agreed priorities whilst maintaining business-as-usual services.

Service Demands and Management Responsibilities

Alongside project delivery, a considerable amount of officer time continues to be dedicated to operational matters, including issues relating to Council vehicles, service requests, resident enquiries and Member-generated reports concerning Council services.

These matters, whilst important, must be balanced alongside a wide range of management responsibilities including:

- Maintaining service delivery.
- Supporting and briefing staff.
- Work allocation and operational oversight.
- Staff wellbeing and welfare.
- Human Resources matters.
- Absence management.
- Health and safety compliance.
- Financial management.
- Contractor coordination.
- Asset management.

Members are asked to appreciate the considerable officer commitment required, particularly during periods of organisational change and project delivery. This is especially relevant given the ongoing Community Hub project, contractor engagement, service reviews and wider property and asset management work currently underway.

Asset Management, Inventories and Workforce Development

Officers have also commenced preparations for a more structured approach to asset management and workforce planning.

The Responsible Financial Officer and Clerk will be undertaking a programme of asset verification and inventory reviews to ensure that the Council maintains accurate records of equipment, replacement requirements, servicing schedules and future capital investment needs.

This work will support improved financial forecasting and help inform future budget planning.

In addition, the Council's recently adopted Personal Development Review process, which replaces the previous annual appraisal model, will enable officers to identify training requirements on an ongoing basis. This will provide greater visibility of future training cycles, professional development needs and workforce planning requirements, allowing these costs to be forecast more accurately and incorporated into future budget-setting exercises.

Collectively, these measures will strengthen the Council's approach to asset management, workforce development, business continuity and long-term financial planning.

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