

CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL
CLERK'S REPORT- COMMUNITY SERVICES AND ASSETS COMMITTEE

Date: 30 July 2026

Clerk's Attendance

I regret that I am unable to attend this meeting due to previously scheduled First Aid Training, which is being attended by both me and the Open Spaces Supervisor. The matters below are therefore provided for Members' information and consideration where appropriate.

Asset Management and Property Matters

Limes Avenue Boundary Wall

Members will be aware that a section of brick boundary wall on Limes Avenue requires repair. Estimates have been obtained and Full Council has agreed in principle that the necessary works should proceed.

Before any commitment is made, officers are engaging with the Council's insurers to establish whether any element of the repair may be recoverable through the Council's insurance arrangements. This remains an active matter.

At this stage, Members are asked simply to note that the issue is being progressed. Given the location of the wall on Council land and the potential public safety implications, the Parish Council is accepting responsibility for investigating and resolving the matter appropriately.

Victory Hall Stage Wall

Members will recall that the condition of the rear stage wall at Victory Hall was identified as an outstanding health and safety matter. The wall has developed two significant cracks and there are areas where plaster has become loose and is detaching from the surface, creating a potential risk to users of the facility.

Following consideration by Full Council, approval was granted for the necessary remedial works to be undertaken. Officers are currently progressing the required repairs and are coordinating the programme of works around existing hall bookings and hire commitments to minimise disruption to users wherever possible.

The matter remains under active management and will continue to be monitored until the repairs have been completed and the associated health and safety risk has been fully mitigated.

Tree and Vegetation Management

Station Road Tree Encroachment

Members will be aware of the ongoing issue relating to tree growth encroaching from Station Green towards the opposite side of Station Road.

Whilst Full Council has indicated support for the required tree works in principle, officers are currently exploring the wider implications associated with any necessary traffic management arrangements, including possible road closures or lane restrictions.

Given the location of the tree, proximity to the highway network and impact upon a bus route, further information is being sought regarding the costs and practical implications of undertaking the works safely.

Officers agree that the works are necessary; however, before a final recommendation is made, Full Council will be asked to consider the total project cost, including any highway and traffic management requirements.

Dolphin Court Boundary Vegetation

Officers have continued to receive correspondence and personal visits to the office from residents regarding vegetation adjacent to Dolphin Court.

Following previous complaints, the Open Spaces Team undertook works to reduce the undergrowth and manage vegetation in the area. Subsequent requests have focused on the removal or significant reduction of mature trees.

Whilst some residents directly affected by the trees support further intervention, officers also received representations from other residents expressing concerns regarding habitat loss and the environmental impact of such works.

Having considered the matter, Full Council resolved not to proceed with further tree reduction works at this time. Officers supported this approach as the trees remain healthy, do not currently present a significant safety risk, and contribute positively towards biodiversity objectives within an increasingly urban environment.

Residents will be informed accordingly.

Officers remain satisfied that a proportionate response has been provided and that appropriate maintenance has been undertaken.

Brook Way Tree Defect

During routine officer inspections, a substantial section of a tree was identified as having failed from the main stem at Brook Way.

The defect requires remedial attention, and officers are currently obtaining quotations for the necessary works.

A further report will be presented to Full Council once costs have been established.

The Paddocks

Officers responded to and resolved an incident reported over a recent weekend concerning The Paddocks.

As part of ongoing site management, officers are now exploring opportunities to improve signage within the area.

The intention is to provide greater clarity regarding:

- Council ownership and management responsibilities.
- The site's designation as a natural habitat area.
- Appropriate recreational uses.
- Restrictions relating to amplified music, barbecues, large-scale events and similar activities.
- The Council's grass-cutting regime, which is intended to preserve biodiversity whilst maintaining accessible pathways.

Further updates will be provided once proposals have been developed.

Open Spaces Service Update

The Open Spaces Team has continued to respond to resident concerns relating to overgrown vegetation, including recent reports from Ely Way and St Mary's.

Remedial works have been completed where appropriate.

Members should note that operational activity has been significantly impacted in recent weeks by the absence of a service vehicle. Officers have now secured a temporary hire vehicle whilst the supplier continues efforts to source a courtesy vehicle.

Given the anticipated repair timescales, it is likely that the current hire arrangement will require extension for a further three months.

Vehicle requirements will also form part of the wider strategic review of cemetery and open spaces operations currently being undertaken.

Members are reminded that the service presently has only one operative authorised to drive Council vehicles. Officers are hopeful that this position will improve during September.

For clarity, this issue does not affect the operation of the Category K mower or other machinery used within parks and open spaces.

Service Pressures and Operational Priorities

Members should be aware that officers have been working exceptionally hard throughout a period of annual leave, staff absence and reduced operational capacity.

Despite these challenges, key services have continued to be delivered.

The absence of a dedicated operational vehicle has inevitably hampered productivity and required officers to prioritise statutory and safety-critical work.

The locking and unlocking arrangements for the cemetery remain under review and will form part of the wider business case being presented later this year.

Station Green

A recurring challenge remains the cleanliness of Station Green, particularly in relation to litter and overflowing bins.

Officers are currently engaging with local food outlets and businesses to explore opportunities for partnership working and community support.

This includes investigating whether dedicated waste facilities for oversized takeaway packaging, including pizza boxes, may be available and whether local businesses may wish to contribute towards such initiatives.

This work remains ongoing and no decisions have yet been made.

Road Safety Update

Vehicle Activated Sign (VAS)

Officers continue to pursue the outstanding installation requirements associated with the Vehicle Activated Sign. Progress has been slower than anticipated due to a number of ongoing highway-related matters requiring engagement with external agencies and approval processes.

Responsibility for progressing this matter has been delegated to the Open Spaces Team, who are continuing to liaise with the relevant parties. Officers will provide Members with a further update once additional information is available and a clearer implementation timetable has been established.

Community Speedwatch

Members are asked to note that the local Community Speedwatch Coordinators have formally stood down from their roles. This has been reported to the Essex Road Safety Partnership, which has overall responsibility for the coordination, recruitment and training of Community Speedwatch volunteers.

Whilst the Parish Council retains the speed detection equipment, all other associated equipment is awaiting collection by the relevant organisation. There has previously been some uncertainty regarding responsibilities for the scheme; however, for clarity, the Essex Road Safety Partnership has primary responsibility for the delivery and management of Community Speedwatch initiatives.

Officers remain in contact with the Partnership and will provide further updates should arrangements be put in place to recruit new volunteers and re-establish the scheme locally.

Overall, officers remain committed to supporting road safety initiatives within the Parish and will continue to pursue both the Vehicle Activated Sign project and any future opportunities to support Community Speedwatch activity.

Member Service Requests and Reporting Arrangements

Officers have identified a growing need to improve how service requests, concerns and complaints raised by Members are received, recorded and managed.

Most Councillor enquiries are entirely legitimate and assist officers in identifying issues affecting residents. However, as both Members and service users, some Councillors may occasionally raise matters relating to Council services in which they have a direct personal interest, such as allotments or other Council-operated facilities.

Additionally, officers have experienced increasing levels of ad hoc requests, verbal reports, repeated informal approaches and instances where complaints are relayed without supporting evidence or sufficient information to enable investigation.

This can make it difficult to distinguish between:

- Formal service requests.
- Resident concerns raised through Councillors.
- Matters affecting individual service users.
- Operational instructions, which Members are not authorised to issue directly to staff.

To ensure transparency, consistency and fairness, officers will therefore introduce a formal reporting process for Member-generated service requests.

Proposed Process

A dedicated reporting form and email address will be introduced to centralise requests and ensure that all matters are logged appropriately.

Requests will be reviewed weekly by the Clerk and assessed against available evidence, urgency, risk and operational priorities.

Where appropriate, matters will then be discussed during officer management meetings and allocated accordingly.

This approach is intended to:

- Improve accountability and record-keeping.
- Protect staff from inappropriate or excessive direct approaches.
- Ensure service requests are assessed consistently.
- Allow operational resources to be prioritised fairly.
- Reduce duplication and inefficiencies.
- Support existing Complaints, Vexatious Complaints and Code of Conduct procedures.

For clarity, anonymous allegations and unsubstantiated reports will continue to be managed in accordance with existing Council policies.

Members are also reminded that information sent to or received through Council email systems constitutes Council business and may be shared internally where necessary to investigate, respond to or manage service requests appropriately.

Member Access to Officers

The proposed arrangements are not intended to restrict communication between Members and officers. Rather, they are intended to ensure that interactions are appropriately managed and recorded.

Members will continue to be able to:

- Request telephone appointments.
- Request face-to-face meetings.
- Raise service concerns on behalf of residents.
- Seek information relating to Council services.

Appointments will be managed through normal administrative channels to ensure officers can fulfil their operational responsibilities whilst remaining available to support Members.

The Clerk will also provide periodic reporting to the Finance and Governance Committee regarding request volumes and emerging themes, enabling Members to monitor resource implications and service demand.

Unfortunately, officers consider these arrangements necessary to establish clear boundaries between governance and operational management and to ensure staff can carry out their duties effectively, professionally and without disruption.

Members are also reminded to have regard to the Council's revised guidance on declarations of interest, particularly where matters relate to Council services in which they may have a personal interest as users or stakeholders.

Recommendation

That the Community Services and Assets Committee:

1. Notes the contents of this update.
2. Notes the progress being made on asset management and open spaces matters.
3. Notes the proposed introduction of a formal Member service request process.
4. Supports the continued application of existing complaints, vexatious complaints and governance procedures in relation to Member enquiries and officer interactions.

Prepared by:

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Clerk and Proper Officer