



**REPORT of
THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP**

to
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
24 SEPTEMBER 2024**

**MEMBER SCRUTINY ITEM REQUEST – NON-PROVISION OF IMPROVED FACILITIES,
SENSORY GARDEN, PROMENADE PARK, MALDON**

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to bring to the attention of the Committee a Member scrutiny item request and the conclusions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Working Group (the Working Group).

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee notes the Working Group's conclusion and decides how it wishes to deal with this Member Scrutiny Request.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 A scrutiny item request was submitted by Councillor P L Spenceley. The pro-forma based on her request is at **APPENDIX A** to this report. The request sought a review of the circumstances and issues around the non-provision of a community project at Promenade Park, Maldon. This scrutiny request has been considered by the Working Group in the light of information and a briefing from Officers (**APPENDIX B**).
- 3.2 The project in question involved the redesign of the sensory play garden at Promenade Park. The scheme and original budget of £100,000 was approved in 2017/18 with an update on the project brought to Members in 2020. Due to various issues including resource pressures, a significant staff turnover within that team, impact of Covid on work plans and issues with appointing a contractor, the project was delayed.
- 3.3 Since then, it became evident that the existing play equipment in the sensory area had reached the end of its life, and it became necessary to prioritise its replacement in 2024/25. Unfortunately, the budget originally allocated to the sensory garden project was only sufficient to fund the replacement play equipment and not able to cover the full original scheme.
- 3.4 It was confirmed that the existing play equipment would be replaced this year, and in addition it was noted that the Galleon Replacement Project (also being delivered this year) would include additional sensory features and elements.
- 3.5 Officers confirmed that they were looking at options to fund the delivery of the other elements of the sensory garden scheme, and that a potential source had been found. Members would be kept informed of this in due course with the intention of bringing this updated project forward as part of the 2025/26 work programme.

- 3.6 Officers advised that they had established some key issues that had contributed to the scheme not having come forward earlier, namely Project Management, Communications and Resources (to be able to deliver larger projects). Largely historic, these had already been reviewed and corporate actions put in place, particularly around Project Management.
- 3.7 This scrutiny request had been made in the public interest given that the project had been the subject of public consultation in 2020 and it was understood that it was a capital project with Section 106 planning obligation funding. Members had been engaged on this at the time but had not subsequently been updated on the project. There had also been a lack of communication with the public whose reasonable expectation was that this project would be delivered. At the end of 2023, as mentioned in paragraph 3.3 above, it became clear that the budget originally allocated for the project would only fund the replacement of the existing equipment which had reached end of life.
- 3.8 The Working Group was mindful of the lessons learned from this and noted that various changes had been made to ensure far more robust project management including Member engagement generally in relation to larger corporate projects. It has also since received an Officer presentation on the Project Management Office, and this presentation is at **APPENDIX C** for the further information of the Committee.
- 3.9 The Working Group concluded that having regard to the level of assurance provided by Officers, including the detail of the Project Management Office processes now in place, this request be reported to and considered by the Committee in terms of whether it needs to be included in the workplan for further scrutiny or make any recommendations for further improvements to those processes.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The Working Group has considered this request and is largely re-assured by the initial Officer response. The Council needs to ensure that meaningful communication with the public takes place to provide both an update on this particular project, and assurance as to its processes now in place for managing large corporate projects.

5. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2023 - 2027

5.1 Provide good quality services.

- 5.1.1 Thorough scrutiny processes support improved performance and efficiency which in turn will contribute to the quality of services provided, and functions undertaken by the Council.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – None directly, but individual scrutiny reviews will enable the impact on customers to be assessed.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – Equalities are considered as part of the reporting on review work undertaken by Officers.

- (iii) **Impact on Risk (including fraud implications)** – Scrutiny reviews enable potential Corporate Risks to the organisation and their mitigation to be identified.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Scrutiny reviews offer the potential for an assessment of financial impact to the organisation.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – Scrutiny reviews offer the potential for an assessment of any resource impact to the organisation.

Background Papers: None.

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