

**MINUTES**  
**of the**  
**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

held on 10 March 2025 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor J. Jeapes (Chair)  
Councillor A. Thompson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors, C. Adutwim, D. Clark, H. Clark, P. Davey, S. Davis, L. Mascot, M. Steel, N. Walsh  
and P. Wilson

Also in attendance –  
Councillors, L. Foster, R. Moore and S. Robinson

**1. Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies were received from Councillors V. Canning, J. Deakin, S. Dobson and K. Franks.

Councillor N. Walsh and Councillor C. Adutwim substituted for Councillor J. Deakin and Councillor K. Franks respectively.

**2. Chairs Announcements**

No announcements were made for this meeting.

**3. Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

**4. Decision and Action Sheet**

The Committee considered and noted the decision and action sheet since the last meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

**5. Declaration of Interests**

All Members were reminded to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary interests or other registerable interests where appropriate in any items of business on the meeting's agenda. None were made.

## 6. Public Question Time

One public question had been submitted in advance of the meeting, which was asked in person and [can be seen via this link](#).

The question related to maintenance of the grand vista at Beaulieu and surrounding areas.

In response to the question, it was explained that the context and reasoning for the introduction of the policy for creating and managing species-rich grassland was set out in section four of the paper supporting item 12 on the agenda for this meeting titled *“Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency and Meeting the Council’s Biodiversity Duties”*.

The introduction of these provisions was set out in the Environment Act 2021, that Local Authorities would have a ‘biodiversity duty’ to implement plans and policies that enhance biodiversity.

Best practice guidance published by ‘Plantlife’ informed the development of the council’s policy for creating and managing species-rich grassland. This included a change to the maintenance regimes of green spaces and a greater emphasis on increasing the biodiversity of grassland areas rather than maintaining relatively sterile frequently close-mown grass.

The questioner was informed that the policy for creating and managing species-rich grassland was not a rewilding exercise or cost cutting exercise.

(7.02pm to 7.15pm)

## 7. Decisions Called-In

The Committee noted that no decisions taken by the Cabinet had been called-in.

## 8. Cabinet Portfolio Update from the Leader of the Council

The Committee received an update from Councillor Robinson on their role as Leader of the Council. Key points noted:

An update was given on the work that been undertaken in relation to devolution and LGR sharing that a paper was due to go to the next Cabinet meeting and then to the Essex Leader and CEO meeting the following week.

The corporate peer challenge had been completed with a positive outcome with emphasis on the partnership work and excellent service delivery.

A review of office spaces at the Civic office was underway to make better use of space including the proposal to lease the Coval building for business start-ups.

A summary of the housing crisis was provided and it was shared that the financial and social cost of temporary accommodation continued to dominate much of the council's thinking and time. The Leader and Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford had been contributing to a cross-departmental officer group to brainstorm possible ideas for reviewing processes for managing the homelessness crisis which had contributed to a slowing in the increase of temporary accommodation numbers. It was added that the refugee challenges were now incorporated within the general housing crisis.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Portfolio Update from the Leader of the Council be noted.

*(7.15pm to 7.25pm)*

## 9. Cabinet Portfolio Update from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for a Fairer Chelmsford

Councillor Foster updated the Committee on their role as Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for a Fairer Chelmsford. They provided an overview of their key roles and responsibilities, with summaries in the following areas: Strategic Housing, Corporate Property, Property and Purchases and Disposals.

The number of people on the housing register had increased from 1123 in March 2023 to 1808 in January 2025. The importance of suitable accommodation and affordable rent was emphasised. In relation to measures taken, Members were advised that a multi-disciplinary Housing Action Group had been established and developed 27 action points. A list of completed and ongoing measures was provided. It was expressed that trying to implement change, as well as dealing with the flow of those in need of housing continuously flowing, was challenging. Multiple reports had been to Council and Cabinet detailing changes to policies to increase case management and prevention. Work was ongoing with housing providers and Chelmer Housing Partnership to encourage downsizing and increase the supply of appropriate social housing. The Local Authority Housing Fund had been applied to purchase 34 properties across stages two and three. 24 single homeless accommodation units had been provided by CHESS. 12 units of affordable accommodation were located on Woodhall Road. A decision was taken by the council to utilise under occupied car parks for social and temporary housing.

Planning permission had been secured for 72 affordable housing units in areas across Chelmsford and a procurement exercise was to be completed to deliver this with partners.

A list of investments was provided to the Committee these included:

- Eagle House
- Apiary Yard
- Springfield Lyons
- 81-85 High Street
- The Aquarium

In relation to purchases, the Committee was informed that a 20-acre site for the development of a crematorium and cemetery had been purchased as well as a 28-acre site to support the tree planting programme.

In relation to disposals, the Committee was informed that ongoing negotiations were being held with the leaseholder to dispose to facilitate redevelopment of council land at the Meadows Shopping Centre, and that preparation of the procurement process was to be brought forward to develop Waterside.

In response to questions members were advised that Cabinet Members and officers were working hard with providers and partners to ensure affordable housing with external developers and pressures were present, but the council was confident in its negotiation position to get as close as possible to the 35% affordable housing threshold.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Portfolio Update from the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for a Fairer Chelmsford be noted.

*(7.25pm to 7.35pm)*

## 10. Annual Report of Key Housing Delivery Statistics

The Committee received a report on housing delivery monitoring statistics for 2023/24 and provided Members with an update on existing, new, and proposed national and local initiatives that impact on the delivery of new housing.

Members were advised that the statistical data provided in the report was out of date due to this item originally being intended to go before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in October 2024, minor changes were listed in the report.

There had been a 25% decrease in the delivery of affordable housing units with 164 delivered in 2023/24, compared with 219 in 2022/23. This was linked to the phasing of affordable housing on larger strategic sites.

Chelmsford had delivered more new homes than required over the last year and forecasts indicated that completion rates were set to remain above the annual housing requirement over the next 5 years.

The number of new homes with extant planning permissions had fallen by 23% during this monitoring period, however, the number of new homes that had been completed had increased by the same percentage.

The Council would continue to monitor and respond to changes to the national planning framework to support the delivery of housing and other essential infrastructure identified in the Local Plan.

In response to question relating to objections to planning applications it was explained that Highways had a holding objection in relation to planning applications in the Chelmsford Garden Community, but officers are expecting an announcement to be made soon so progress could continue.

In relation to how the Council could increase the volume of social housing for rent, it was advised that the proportion was determined in the review of the Local Plan with regard to national planning policy requirements and evidence base documents, including the Strategic Housing Needs Assessment and Local Plan Viability Update. It was noted that

affordable rents were capped at Local Housing Allowance levels to ensure the wider accessibility.

**RESOLVED** that Annual Report of Key Housing Delivery Statistics report be noted.

*(7.36pm to 7.55pm)*

## 11. Cabinet Portfolio Update from the Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford

Councillor Moore updated the Committee on their role as Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford. They provided an overview of their key roles and responsibilities, with summaries in the following areas: Bereavement Services, Parks & Green Spaces, Planning Policy, Local Plan, Development Management, Planning Enforcement and Chelmsford Garden Communities.

Collaborative work across all the portfolios was being undertaken frequently, with emphasis on communications, Love Your Chelmsford and parks teams.

Fortnightly Cabinet briefings were coordinated by the Director of Public Places for the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to meet with relevant managers to share progress and updates across the directorate.

It was explained that key areas of focus included the reduction of energy and waste, protecting the environment, and ensuring that public and green spaces were safe and accessible. In July 2019, Chelmsford City Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency, and local action was being taken to protect and connect green spaces to reverse habitat loss.

Potential land for the cemetery and crematorium had been identified and work was ongoing in relation to securing this.

An update was provided to Members in relation to the ongoing local plan review and changes to the National Planning Policy Framework.

In response to a question in relation to viability in housing development, Members agreed that a session on viability would be beneficial. It was agreed that this would be discussed with the Chair outside of the meeting for a possible future item.

**RESOLVED** that the Cabinet Portfolio Update from the Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford be noted.

*(7.56pm to 8.04pm)*

## 12. Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency and Meeting the Council's Biodiversity Duties

The Committee received a report on how Chelmsford City Council had been responding to the climate and ecological emergency and how the council's biodiversity duties had been met.

The Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan was agreed by the council in January 2020 encouraging the council to make changes to policies and guidance to reduce waste

and tackle pollution and to improve the habitat and ecological value of green spaces and river corridors, promoting greater biodiversity across the area.

Two key strands had been identified in the approach; to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change, and to reverse the decline in nature. The action plan takes into account expert advice from the Essex Climate Action Commission and reflects the provisions and duties subsequently set out in the Environment Act 2021.

The Climate and Ecological Emergency Action was incorporated into the priorities of 'Our Chelmsford. Our Plan' in its recent update in December 2023.

In response to a question relating to carbon emissions and the absence of off-setting data it was shared that a net-zero carbon position for the City Council's activities and operations was unlikely to be achieved by 2030 without some degree of carbon-offsetting, it was explained that specific figures relating to the off-setting of emissions was hard to measure but the councils position was that the tree-planting scheme would be beneficial enough to allow scope for the necessary offsetting.

**RESOLVED** that the Response to the Climate and Ecological Emergency and Meeting the council's Biodiversity Duties report be noted.

*(8.05pm to 8.15pm)*

### 13. Appointments to Outside Bodies

The Committee received a report detailing the activities of the council's representatives on outside bodies within the last municipal year 2024/25.

**RESOLVED** that the report on Appointments to Outside Bodies be noted.

*(8.15pm to 8.17pm)*

### 14. Work Programme

The Committee considered a report on its work programme which had been updated following the last meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2025. It was advised that as additional items had been added for future meetings, officers would discuss with the Chair and Vice Chair the appropriate meetings for them to be considered.

**RESOLVED** that the work programme be noted.

*(8.18pm to 8.19pm)*

### 15. Urgent Business

There were no matters of urgent business.

## Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for items 11.1 and 12.1 on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within paragraph 3 of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A to the Act (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person including the authority holding that information).

## 16. Review of Parking Provision

*Public interest statement: It is not in the public interest to release details of this report at present, on the grounds that the report contains information that is commercially sensitive and to place the information in the public realm will be detrimental to the negotiations to be undertaken by the Council.*

The committee heard a report detailing the parking provisions within the City Centre and provided an update on performance and policy changes.

**RESOLVED** that the Review of Parking Provision report be noted.

*(8.19pm to 8.37pm)*

Chair