MINUTES OF

CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL CABINET

on 13 October 2026 at 7pm

Present:

Cabinet Members

Councillor S Robinson, Leader of the Council (Chair)
Councillor J Lardge, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure
Councillor C Davidson, Cabinet Member for Finance
Councillor N Dudley, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing
Councillor K Franks, Cabinet Member for a Fairer Chelmsford
Councillor J Hawkins, Cabinet Member for a Connected Chelmsford
Councillor R Moore, Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford

Cabinet Deputies

Councillor S Goldman, Deputy Cabinet Member for Cleaner Communities
Councillor T Sherlock, Deputy Cabinet Member for Economy and Sustainable Transport

Opposition Spokespersons

Councillors, G. Bonnett, S. Dobson, J. Jeapes, M. Steel, S. Sullivan, A. Thorpe-Apps and R. Whitehead

Also present: Councillors J. Armstrong, V. Canning, P. Clark, R. Hyland, J. Potter, S. Scott, S. Shah and A. Sosin

At the start of the meeting, the Leader of the Council and Leader of the Opposition, paid tribute to former Councillor Graham Pooley, who had sadly passed away earlier in the week. They reflected on their 20 years as a Borough and City Councillor and the different wards they had represented. They also highlighted their role in setting up the Helping Hands charity which had undoubtedly helped many residents of Chelmsford and their other vital work, such as setting up the Homelessness Forum in 2019. A minute's silence was also held in their memory.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Lee and Raven.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members of the Cabinet were reminded to declare at the appropriate time any interests in any of the items of business on the meeting's agenda.

None were raised.

3. Minutes and Decisions Called-in

The minutes of the meeting on 14 July 2026 were confirmed as a correct record. No decisions had been called in.

4. Public Questions

No public questions had been submitted for the meeting.

5. Members' Questions

Six questions were asked at this point of the meeting by members not on Cabinet.

The first question was from Cllr Jeapes, regarding concerns with the suitability of the Council's Planning Portal, following repeated issues raised with them and other Councillors by residents, they asked when a new system would be introduced to address those concerns. In response the Cabinet Member for Finance acknowledged the technical issues with the system and that these were often caused by the front-end part of the platform, seeking documents from the back-end document management system. They noted that workarounds using SharePoint had been utilised by officers and that LGR had been viewed as an ideal opportunity to replace the back-end system in collaboration with Brentwood and Maldon. However, the Government pausing LGR had caused uncertainty for this, but officers had continued to work on this and to determine the cost of a new system. It was noted that transferring data and mapping work to a new system would be an expensive and complex project, potentially taking 6-12 months to complete. The Cabinet Member also stated that early budget proposals were welcomed, and views on this specific issue were of course welcomed for further discussions. In response to a follow up question, the Cabinet Member and Leader of the Council again acknowledged the concerns raised on the topic and that they agreed it was a problem that needed to be resolved quickly.

The second question was from Cllr Sullivan, regarding an overspend on housing benefit of £100k due to losses on supported housing schemes, that the Council was working with CHESS to change their status to a registered social landlord and what proportion of the overspend was due to CHESS's status, how long a change might take and why it hadn't been pursued before. In response the Cabinet Member for a Fairer Chelmsford stated that, CHESS being a registered provider would be very helpful, but the Council could not force this. It was noted that the Council had been supporting CHESS and encouraging others to become registered providers since 2024 and that CHESS was anticipated to become one in 2027. It was noted that the implementation of the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act, may address this current anomaly and reduce the financial impact to local housing

authorities. It was also noted that 70% of the total supported housing subsidy loss was from CHESS.

The third question was from Cllr Bonnett, regarding the Highways Rangers Scheme, specifically how much of the allocated budget for the scheme had been spent to date, was the remaining budget sufficient for 2026/27 and would it continue in 2027/28. In response the Cabinet Deputy for Cleaner Communities stated that, they had been delighted to introduce StreetCare rangers in July, who had completed 116 requests for work since then, with a further 150 jobs waiting to be undertaken. They confirmed that the vast majority of costs were staffing and vehicle costs and that as it was fully staffed the current budget allocated for 2026/27 meant they would be fully utilised in 2026/27. It was also noted that the funding was in the base budget and the scheme was therefore expected to continue in 2027/28 and beyond.

The fourth question was from Cllr Thorpe-Apps, regarding relatively modest but recurring expenditures on external advice, consultancy and specialist support, against the context given of the Council's forecast budget deficits and stated need to identify savings. They asked for a consolidated cost across the past two years, an explanation why the services weren't delivered in house and what measurable outcomes or value for money had been delivered for residents. In response the Cabinet Member for Finance stated that the Council common with most organisations did spend money buying in a wide range of external services where required, for instance specialist legal advice, external cyber-security advice, required external auditors, internal audit expertise and software, to supplement the excellent teams of staff already at the Council. It was noted that the Council's criteria for the use of external professional advice and consultancy is where the required expertise was highly specialised, or where the work was a temporary demand that didn't justify recruiting permanent staff. They also noted that with regard to value for money, the external auditors had not raised any concerns and that they would welcome any specific questions or concerns from Cllr Thorpe-Apps that they wanted to discuss.

The fifth question was from Cllr Scott, regarding the critical shortage of rented properties and what action the Council could take to work with and influence housing associations to encourage single residents occupying larger properties to move into suitable like for like one bedroom accommodation where appropriate. They also asked what practical steps the Council could take to accelerate the process and ensure that every single opportunity to house a homeless family was actively pursued. In response the Cabinet Member for a Fairer Chelmsford stated that with 600 households in temporary accommodation, it was vital that the Council did everything it could to maximise the use of scarce housing. It was noted that the Council's housing policy already gave the highest possible priority to existing tenants wanting to downsize, but in practice many request this but a much smaller number go onto apply and move to a smaller home. It was noted that for some time, ideas had been explored to encourage this, but it was often the lack of an alternative property that stopped this happening. It was also noted that land had been allocated for additional housing in the updated Local Plan, specifically for downsizing and the positive Planning Committee decision on Fox Crescent would also assist. It was also noted that the Council would continue to work with Delta and other housing providers to explore other ideas.

The sixth and final question was from Cllr Shah who asked for a full breakdown on LGR costs, including shared Essex wide costs, several LGR related posts staying in place until the end of

2027/28, would the Government reimburse costs and what specific deliverables and operational improvements had been achieved. In response the Leader of the Council stated that, Chief Executive's across Essex were gathering information on costs but also that some of the costs would have been incurred anyway and that the partnership working with other authorities had been useful either way. The Chief Executive also stated that they had offered to co-ordinate the total cost for Essex, ahead of submitting a joint claim to Government on the matter, but that they were still awaiting information from six authorities. It was noted that opportunity costs would not be looked at as staff time was not recorded, instead the employing of specific posts or consultants. It was also noted that when it was available, the collated information would be shared with Councillors.

6.1 Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) Scheme 2027/28 (Connected Chelmsford)

Declarations of interest:
None.

Summary:
The Cabinet was informed that the Council was required to approve, by 11 March 2027, a Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2027-28. It was proposed that the Scheme adopted for 2026-27 be retained in its current form.

Options:

Retain the present scheme or adopt an amended version.

Preferred option and reasons:
The existing scheme would be affordable to the Council and fair to recipients of Council Tax support.

RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL that the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2026-27 be retained as the Scheme for 2027-28.

(7.39pm to 7.40pm)

6.2 Amendment to Discretionary Business Rate Relief Policy 2026/27 (Connected Chelmsford)

Declarations of interest:
None.

Summary:
The Cabinet were asked to consider amending the existing Discretionary Business Rate Relief policy to give effect to changes to business rate reliefs announced by the Government, regarding Electric Vehicle Charging Point Relief, to receive 100% relief until 2036, backdated to 1st April 2023.

Options:

To agree or reject the proposed amendments.

Preferred option and reasons:

To agree the proposed amendments because they implement a policy encouraging the expansion of electric vehicle charging stations at no cost to the Council

RESOLVED that;

1. The addition of the wording in paragraph 2.4 as Section 6 to the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy 2026/27 attached as Appendix A is agreed.
2. The revised policy is recommended to Full Council for agreement.

(7.40pm to 7.41pm)

7.1 Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategy (Fairer Chelmsford)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to consider and approve, a revised version of the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy, which had been amended to reflect national requirements, which had been introduced by central government after the publication of the Council's current version in autumn 2025.

Options:

1. Approve the revised version being adopted as the Council's statutory strategy for homelessness and rough sleeping.
2. Request further amendments in which case the pre-existing strategy would continue to be the Council's strategy in the meantime.

Preferred option and reasons:

Option 1 was the preferred option as the Council was required to have an up-to-date strategy including recent amendments as stipulated by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) by December 2026.

Discussion:

It was noted that the changes were required by MHCLG and that the Council would also implement the Government's rough sleeping programme as well. In response to questions it was noted that targets on preventing homelessness cases should be ambitious, but that they were set for cases that were actually possible to be prevented and that partnership working with the NHS and other authorities would continue to be important and expectations needed to be managed carefully. It was also noted that a gradual decline in private landlords was expected for various reasons including age demographics but that, many landlords were still keen to work with the Council, via the private sector leasing scheme, which had additional financial incentives for landlords. It was also noted that the main issue was simply a lack of housing supply, but that the Council would continue to focus on affordable rent properties, with the percentage set to increase from 22 to 24% in the updated Local Plan.

RESOLVED that the revised version of the Council's statutory strategy for homelessness and rough sleeping, as attached at Appendix 1 be approved.

(7.41pm to 7.54pm)

8.1 Mid-Year Financial Review 2026/27 (Finance)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were provided with an update on the Council's overall financial outlook for current and future years and were requested to agree or vary the proposals contained within the report. The Cabinet were informed of the financial forecast and that it would be used as a basis to prepare the 2027/28 budget.

Options:

To agree or vary the proposals contained within this report whilst paying regard to the financial sustainability of any amendments.

Preferred option and reasons:

The preferred option was to accept the report's projections and recommendations. The report outlined the likely financial outcomes based on current approved policy and budgets.

Discussion:

It was noted that the Council's revenue budgets were forecast to have annual deficits, but that this was not unusual and was to be expected given Government funding limitations and inflation. It was also noted that the normal budget process should enable future budget shortfalls to be alleviated, however, the budget gap for 2028/29 was forecast to be more challenging. Cabinet also noted that the report identified some key areas where additional investment had been made in services and the approach to setting a budget and Council Tax for 2027/28. Cabinet were also informed that the pausing of LGR had caused uncertainty and clarity was required on the Government's plans. It was also noted that following the better than expected Government settlement in late 2025, extra funding had been provided to services in the current year 2026/27., However, it was identified, that just the same as in past years it was still necessary to resolve a forecast budget gap for the next year, 2027/28, of £1.2m. .

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member confirmed that it was difficult to consider hypothetical interest rate questions, but that a balanced budget would be provided in January, with savings and possible deferrals made on the capital programme where required. It was also noted that posts in sport marketing for example, were income generating posts and therefore very important for the Council's revenue budget, alongside statutory required posts for Biodiversity Net Gain officers. It was also acknowledged again, that it was planned to urgently sort issues with the planning portal, and points on that would be taken away to be considered as part of the 2027-28 budget.

RESOLVED that Cabinet;

1. Noted the in-year monitoring and the financial forecast
2. Approved the actions to produce a Budget recommendation to Council in February 2027

3. Approved the amendments to the capital programme as set out in Appendix 2

(7.55pm to 8.16pm)

9.1 Revised Masterplan and Planning Brief Procedure (October 2026) (Planning and Place Shaping)

Declarations of interest:
None.

Summary:
The Cabinet were asked to consider approving the revised Masterplan and Planning Brief procedure for publication.

Options:

1. Approve the revised Masterplan and Planning Brief procedure for publication.
2. Approve the revised Masterplan and Planning Brief with any amendments for publication.
3. Not approve the revised Masterplan and Planning Brief procedure for publication.

Preferred option and reasons:
To approve the revised Masterplan and Planning Brief Procedure as the amendments are intended to improve transparency, increase certainty for developers and stakeholders, and support the timely delivery of high-quality development across Chelmsford while maintaining the Council's commitment to sustainable growth and effective placemaking.

Discussion:
The updated document did not change the fundamental three route approach comprising Strategic Masterplans, Masterplans and Planning Brief's, instead focusing on clarifying roles and responsibilities, updated governance and approval arrangements and greater guidance on the context of each stage. It was also intended to improve transparency, increase certainty for developers and stakeholders, and support the timely delivery of high-quality development across Chelmsford while maintaining the Council's commitment to sustainable growth and effective placemaking. Cabinet also noted that any future minor changes would be dealt with under delegation to officers.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approved the revised Masterplan and Planning Brief Procedure as the amendments are intended to improve transparency, increase certainty for developers and stakeholders, and support the timely delivery of high-quality development across Chelmsford while maintaining the Council's commitment to sustainable growth and effective placemaking.

(8.16pm to 8.19pm)

10. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

11. Reports to Council

Items 6.1 and 6.2 were the subject of recommendations to Full Council.

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 12.1 and 12.2 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).

12.1 Financial Support for Affordable Housing Development at Rectory Lane East Car Park (Fairer Chelmsford)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

Cabinet were asked to approve the provision of a capital contribution of up to £600,000 to support the delivery of 22 affordable rented apartments at Rectory Lane East Car Park and secure the continued viability of the development. The final contribution would be limited to the actual evidenced abnormal costs incurred.

Options:

1. Approve a capital contribution of up to £600,000
2. Approve a reduced capital contribution
3. Do Nothing

Preferred option and reasons:

Option 1 was the preferred option as the Council would secure nomination rights to 22 units of affordable housing in perpetuity.

Discussion:

It was noted that officers felt the £600k sum would be sufficient and that the issues were not ones that could have been foreseen at an earlier stage.

RESOLVED that Cabinet;

1. Approved the establishment of a capital budget of up to £600,000 and a revenue financing budget of £32,000 per annum to fund the Council's contribution towards the delivery of 22 affordable rented apartments at Rectory Lane East Car Park, and authorised a capital contribution of up to £600,000, with the final amount payable based on evidenced abnormal development costs and not exceeding the approved budget and;

2. Delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford, to negotiate and complete all necessary legal and funding agreements.

(8.19pm to 8.25pm)

12.2 Property acquisition for supported accommodation (Fairer Chelmsford)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

Cabinet were asked to approve the acquisition of a freehold interest for £600,000 plus acquisition costs, securing the long-term provision of supported accommodation and helping to reduce reliance on temporary accommodation.

Options:

1. Do Nothing
2. Support CHESS to Acquire the Property
3. Acquire the Freehold Interest

Preferred option and reasons:

Option 3 was the preferred option as the Council would own a property that would deliver seven units of supported accommodation within Chelmsford.

RESOLVED that;

1. Cabinet approved the acquisition of the freehold interest for £600,000 and an additional £50,000 for associated legal, valuation and professional costs. An ongoing revenue budget of £35,000 is also required to finance the purchase.
2. the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford, be authorised to negotiate, finalise and complete all legal documentation associated with the acquisition.
3. the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford, be authorised to agree and complete a new lease with CHESS Homeless, including revised rental arrangements and nomination rights in favour of the Council.

(8.26pm to 8.27pm)

The meeting closed at 8.27pm

Chair