

MINUTES OF CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL CABINET

on 10 September 2025 at 7pm

Present:

Cabinet Members

Councillor S Robinson, Leader of the Council (Chair)
Councillor L Foster, Deputy Leader of the Council
Councillor C Davidson, Cabinet Member for Finance
Councillor N Dudley, Cabinet Member for an Active Chelmsford
Councillor D Eley, Cabinet Member for a Safer Chelmsford
Councillor S Goldman, Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Property
Councillor R Moore, Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford

Opposition Spokespersons

Councillors J Armstrong, J Jeapes, M Steel and R Whitehead

Also present: Councillors H Clark, R Hyland, and A Sosin

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bonnett, Hawkins, Lardge, Raven, Sherlock, Thorpe-Apps and Wilson.

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.

3. Minutes and Decisions Called-in

The minutes of the meeting on 8 July 2025 were confirmed as a correct record. No decisions had been called in.

At this point of the meeting a Councillor referred to their question at the July meeting regarding the risk of wildfires in Chelmsford. They highlighted that the response they received had not been correct and that the Chelmsford Garden Community Council had to ask for information on multiple occasions and that they wanted this reflected in the minutes. It was clarified that the information had been provided but at a later stage than initially thought.

4. Public Questions

No public questions had been submitted for the meeting.

5. Members' Questions

No questions were asked at this point of the meeting.

6.1 Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030 (Deputy Leader)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to approve the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030 for publication, which had undergone consideration by the Policy Board and a public consultation of which the responses had been considered by a Policy Board working group. Chelmsford Policy Board had recommended that Cabinet approve and publish the strategy.

Options:

1. Cabinet approves the publication of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030
2. Cabinet approves with amendments the publication of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030
3. Cabinet does not approve the publication of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030

Preferred option and reasons:

Option 1 was the preferred option as it would enable the Council to have an up to date Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy which articulates the Council's ambition and priorities in respect of homelessness and rough sleeping, and helps to facilitate and co-ordinate the work of relevant organisations in reducing homelessness and rough sleeping.

Discussion:

The Cabinet were informed that the revised strategy established the Council's ambitions and priorities to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping and that it described the steps the Council would take. It was highlighted that an extensive consultation process had taken place, including with external partners. It was noted that the strategy set out the importance of, increasing supply, improving housing conditions, supporting vulnerable people and effective partnerships. In response to a question, it was noted that the focus of the document when referring to affordable housing, was on affordable rent properties.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approved the publication of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2025-2030 ensuring the Council can continue to evidence its compliance with its legal duties and to support continued investment from external partners.

(7.02pm to 7.08pm)

7.1 North Hill, Little Baddow Conservation Area (Greener Chelmsford)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to approve the designation of North Hill, Little Baddow as a Conservation Area, following consideration by Chelmsford Policy Board and a public consultation.

Options:

1. Approve designation of the Conservation Area at North Hill, Little Baddow.
2. Not approve designation of the Conservation Area at North Hill, Little Baddow.

Preferred option and reasons:

Option 1 was the preferred option, to ensure that Chelmsford City fulfils its duty to review and designate areas of special character, meaning that this would be a material consideration in determining planning applications.

Discussion:

The Cabinet heard that the Chelmsford Policy Board and a public consultation had led to the recommendation to declare the area as a Conservation Area. It was noted that it would bring a host of benefits to protect the heritage and community character of the area and officers were thanked for their hard work and comprehensive report. It was also highlighted that the number of Conservation Areas in Chelmsford, was above the Essex average highlighting the Council's proactive approach and ambition. Other members also thanked the work of officers in preparing the report and that they were looking forward to future declarations in other areas, along with some more recent reviews of existing Conservation Areas. It was also noted that the declaration would not have an impact on any allocated sites within the Local Plan as there were not any allocated sites within the designated area, also that there were no green or grey belt areas within the area.

RESOLVED that Cabinet approved the designation of North Hill, Little Baddow as a Conservation Area in accordance with Policy S3 of the adopted Chelmsford Local Plan (2020) and its emerging review.

(7.09pm to 7.15pm)

8.1 Submission of the five unitary proposal for local government reorganisation in Greater Essex (Leader)

Declarations of interest:

None

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to consider a proposal for submission to the Government on local government reorganisation (LGR) and the creation of five unitary authorities in Greater Essex.

Options:

1. Approve the proposal for submission to the MHCLG on 26 September 2025
2. Approve, with amendment, the proposal and delegate authority as above.
3. Decline to approve the proposal

Preferred option and reasons:

Option 1 met the Government's statutory deadline to submit final LGR proposals by 26th September 2025 and the proposal presented an evidence-based, sustainable model which retains local identities, improves services and makes savings.

Discussion:

The Cabinet heard that the detailed report set out why the five unitary model was the preferred choice and that it would deliver growth ambitions, keep Local Government local and make more short and long term savings than other proposals. It was noted that there would be less transitional costs than switching to three unitary Councils and analysis had been carried out highlighting that social care costs were most efficient at a medium size unitary authority. It was noted that the proposal met all six of the Government's criteria and would secure financial stability, alongside maintaining Civic pride.

Officers were thanked for all of their hard work in preparing the proposal, which had been taking up a lot of resources and it was noted that that it was the only proposal with cross party support, including from 10 of the 15 Council Leaders in Essex and that a prompt decision from the Government was hoped for. Other members also highlighted their support for the proposal, alongside noting that it would be down to the Government to select the final proposal or proposals for public consultation.

RESOLVED that Cabinet;

1. Agreed the proposal for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)
2. Delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make any final changes before submission.

(7.16pm to 7.27pm)

9. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

10. Reports to Council

No items were subject of recommendations to 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 11.1 and 11.2 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).

11.1 Property Acquisition: A Centrally located surface car park (Economic Development and Property)

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.

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to approve the acquisition of the freehold for a car park, that would generate an income with growth potential and give the Council direct control over tariffs and service standards and would preserve a prime site for potential redevelopment in the long term.

Options:

1. Do Nothing - The property remains in private ownership.
 - The Council has no control over tariffs, service levels, or future use of the site.
 - Risks loss of influence in city centre parking strategy.
2. Acquire the Freehold (Preferred) - Purchase the site at the agreed cost level.
 - Council secures ownership in a central location.
 - Flexibility to continue with the existing operator or the Council can assume direct control.
 - Provides strategic long-term redevelopment potential, subject to overcoming planning constraints.

Preferred option and reasons:

The acquisition would give the Council direct control over tariffs and service standards, a secure modest surplus after financing, and preserve a prime site for potential redevelopment in the long term.

RESOLVED that;

1. The Director of Public Places, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Property, be authorised to negotiate and finalise terms for the acquisition of the freehold interest, subject to satisfactory due diligence.
2. Cabinet approved the acquisition of the property, with officers seeking an urgency action for the allocation of the additional capital budget.

(7.28pm to 7.29pm)

11.2 Property Acquisition: A block of flats in the City Centre for use as Temporary Accommodation (Economic Development and Property)

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.

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to approve the acquisition of the property to make a significant contribution to the Council's provision of temporary accommodation and supported accommodation.

Options:

1. Do Nothing – The property will be sold to parties other than the City Council.
 - The Council miss the opportunity to provide additional accommodation and reduce costs.
 - The property could be sold or let to another Authority for use as temporary accommodation.
2. Acquire the Freehold (Preferred) - Purchase the site at the agreed cost levels
 - Council secures of the property in a central location
 - The purchase gives the Council the opportunity to work with third parties to provide supported accommodation.
 - Use of the property to reduce temporary accommodation costs.

Preferred option and reasons:

The acquisition would make a significant contribution to the Council's provision of temporary and supported accommodation and enhance the Council's ability to meet urgent housing needs, reduce reliance on external placements and strengthen partnerships to support households affected by domestic abuse.

RESOLVED that;

1. The Director of Public Places, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Property, be authorised to negotiate and finalise the terms for the acquisition of the freehold interest, subject to satisfactory due diligence.
2. Cabinet approved the purchase of the property, with budget approval for the acquisition to be sought by way of an urgency action.
3. As part of the budget process, Cabinet to review the existing capital budget allocation of £4.51m for housing initiatives, with savings to be sought to partially offset the cost of the proposal. The amendments will be recommended to Council in the February budget report.

(7.30pm to 7.31pm)

The meeting closed at 7.31pm

Chair