

CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
held on 25 February 2026 at 7pm

PRESENT:

The Mayor, J Sosin
The Deputy Mayor, S Rajesh

Councillors C Adutwim, H Ayres, G Bonnett, V Canning, D Clark, H Clark, P Davey, A Davidson, C Davidson, S Davis, N Dudley, D Eley, K Franks, L Foster, J Frascona, I Fuller, S Goldman, S Hall, J Hawkins, R Hyland, J Jeapes, B Knight, J Lardge, R Lee, S Manley, L Mascot, R Moore, V Pappa, J Potter, J Raven, S Robinson, E Sampson, S Scott, T Sherlock, M Sismey, A Sosin, M Steel, S Sullivan, M Taylor, A Thompson, A Thorpe-Apps, C Tron, N Walsh, R Whitehead, P Wilson and S Young.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Armstong, Bugbee, Chambers, Paul Clark, Deakin, Dobson, Massey and O'Brien.

2. Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor reflected on the sad passing of former Mayor Royston Von Tromp in December, it was noted that Royston had served as a Conservative Councillor between 1970-76 and 79-87. The Council also heard they had been the Mayor in 1981, it was noted that they would be missed and that thoughts were with their family and friends. Councillors Hyland and Potter paid tribute to them and reflected on their career as a teacher, being the Council's youngest Mayor in 1981, their patience and informed knowledge on many topics and their dedication to Galleywood and its Parish Council. They also reflected on their other roles including being the Chairman and Treasurer of the local Cricket Club. A minutes silence was held in their memory.

The Mayor informed the Council that by the end of February, the Mayoralty would have attended over 250 engagements. They also detailed upcoming events, including a fashion show at John Lewis, a Bollywood event at Boreham House and other fundraising events.

3. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded to declare at the appropriate time, any interests in the business on the meeting's agenda. None were made.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

5. Public Questions

[Three public questions had been submitted in advance of the meeting, which can be viewed via this link.](#)

The first and second questions raised concerns about infrastructure delivery, binding timelines for infrastructure delivery, increased demands for housing in Chelmsford and how those demands were incorporated into the Council's Local Plan. In response the Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford stated that the housing crisis in Chelmsford and across Southern England had resulted in 585 Chelmsford families recently being made homeless, with 2000 further families on the housing register. As a result, it was crucial for large numbers of new homes to be built, to ensure all young people have the chance of a home they can afford in the area where they grew up. The Cabinet Member also stated that infrastructure was vital and Beaulieu was an example of a neighbourhood which had been designed on the basis of ensuring developers provide necessary and timely infrastructure. The Cabinet Member highlighted infrastructure in Beaulieu such as the Neighbourhood Centre, all through school and new rail station. The Cabinet Member also highlighted that future phases of the Chelmsford Garden Community, which had a substantial Infrastructure Delivery Plan which set out what was required and when through various legal obligations. The Cabinet Member stated that there were requirements on developers to fund additional highway and transport mitigation schemes were needed and matters such as the future of the Army and Navy Roundabout were for the County Council to work with Central Government on.

The third question asked about private companies running bus services using the Council owned Riverside Leisure Centre Car Park and whether this had been authorised through a financial agreement with the Council, or if not what enforcement action was taking place. In response the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Property stated that no permission had been given to allow the use of the car park for the dropping off and picking up of asylum seekers and that no concessionary parking or financial arrangements were in place for this. The Cabinet Member also stated that the South Essex Parking Partnership were responsible for the enforcement of the Council's Car Parks and any contraventions may result in an issued Penalty Charge Notice.

A point of order was raised by Cllr Steel, regarding a question that had not been asked under public question time, this had been due to the email ending up in a junk/spam folder, but that a written response would be sent instead.

6. Cabinet Question Time

The following questions from Councillors were put to members of the Cabinet:

Question from Councillor S Davis to the Leader of the Council

In light of Central Government's most recent decision to no longer postpone local elections and to have already delayed proposed Mayoral elections until 2028, concerns remain about the deliverability and governance risks associated with Local Government Reorganisation.

Given the seemingly never-ending shifts in timetable and policy at national level:

1. Does the Leader of the Council have full confidence that the proposed new unitary authorities will be established within the Government's stated timeline, or does he agree with me that LGR will be the next policy to be drawn out over a longer period before being scrapped altogether?
2. What specific assurances has the Council received from Ministers regarding legislative time, financial support, and implementation capacity to ensure these deadlines are met?
3. In the event of likely delays — whether due to parliamentary pressures, boundary reviews, financial constraints, or transitional complexities — what contingency plans are in place to:
 - * Maintain democratic accountability;
 - * Avoid further postponement of elections; and
 - * Protect frontline service delivery during any extended shadow period?

Given the scale of structural change being proposed, residents deserve clarity on whether this reorganisation is genuinely deliverable within the proposed timeframe, or whether further disruption and uncertainty should be anticipated.

In response to the question, the Leader of the Council stated that it was difficult to have confidence in plans due to u-turns from Central Government, but that due to the scale of the task the Council must continue to plan as though LGR would happen. The Leader stated that no assurances had been received from Ministers regarding the timetable, just that their aim was to make a minded decision by Mid-March. The Leader also stated that officers continued to work hard to ensure that if LGR happens, that Chelmsford would be in a good position to respond and ensure that front line services continued to provide good quality services to residents. The Leader confirmed that they felt LGR was deliverable within the proposed timetable, but an end to uncertainty was crucial.

Question from Councillor G Bonnett to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Property

It is of concern that the Labour Government's policies are forcing many businesses throughout the country to close down. I am delighted that the policies of the previous Conservative Administration which rejuvenated Chelmsford have meant that the City is thriving, but the night-time economy seems to have a large number of outlets closing, albeit that they are often replaced by new ones. Will the Council consider

introducing a trial period of free evening parking in one or two city-centre car parks to assist the further growth of this important sector of the economy?

In response the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Property stated that, short stay car park charges in the City Centre had been frozen to support shoppers and all businesses within the City Centre. They also highlighted the small charge of £1.70 at some City Centre Car Parks for evening and overnight and noted that this was much cheaper than private car parks and was unlikely to be the limiting factor in preventing residents or visitors enjoying the City Centre. The Cabinet Member also highlighted close work with the Business Improvement District over the last seven years to ensure that the City Centre continues to thrive, despite increasing burdens on local businesses from Central Government. In response to a follow up point, the Cabinet Member emphasised that £1.70 was a low fee and that free parking was also available in the evenings on some streets near the City Centre and that other views would be taken into consideration.

Question from Councillor S Sullivan to the Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford

The planning application for the installation of 8 single Solohaus Modular Temporary Homes with waste/refuse and amenity spaces has caused a lot of concern to, and approaches from, residents of my ward of Chelmer Village and Beaulieu Park. As is customary in recent times, this was notified to residents by yellow notices affixed to lampposts in the area. Many people did not see these, maybe because the area is adjacent to a major industrial park with low footfall from residents.

Neighbours have stated to me that when, and I quote "Something like this being considered for approval by the Council, then the people living in the neighbourhood, both residents and businesses, have a right to be made directly aware first by the Council. The notice there should be printed and put through letterboxes by Councillors or posted to us, as this has a big impact on us and the existing green environment."

I have yet to make a decision regarding the application, which closes for consultation this week, but feel that I have to question the notification process. Residents have asked, and I quote again, "I have tried already to add my Comments on the Council Planning Website but it times out or crashes or comes up with an error message, remote exception occurred. Are Planning trying to limit the number of objections they receive?"

My questions are, therefore, has the cabinet member reviewed the planning notification process recently, are they confident that residents of locally controversial proposals are made sufficiently aware, and have process improvements been considered? Have they satisfied themselves that there are no adverse consequences to local residents from the current practice?

In response to the question, the Cabinet member for a Greener Chelmsford stated that they understood residents concerns and that it was absolutely reasonable for residents to be properly informed on planning applications. They stated that planning officers had to remain neutral and that it would not be appropriate for them to treat applications differently based on perceived levels of public interest. They highlighted that national

legislation set out publicity requirements for planning applications and that the Council had reviewed its own policy in 2021. They stated that for the specific application in question, six bright yellow site notices were displayed in key locations and that officers also put postcards through doors of neighbouring properties to notify residents and arrange site visits with those households. The Cabinet Member highlighted the personalised alerts that could be set up on the planning system, which were already used by several Councillors. They apologised that some residents had experienced technical problems when commenting online and that they and officers were aware of the issues with the 30 minute session limit, but that this was highlighted on the website to those making comments. They stated that due to the technical issues, the deadline for comments on the application had been extended to 13th March. In response to follow up points, the Cabinet Member stated that conversations would take place with Digital Services to work on resolving issues, but that the software was provided by a third party and with the prospect of LGR, officers would have to ensure that any software was compatible with that used by any authorities the Council merged with.

7. Reports from the Cabinet on 27 January 2026

7.1 Budget Report 2026/27

The Council had before it a report and recommendations from the Cabinet on the revenue budget for 2026/27 and its capital investments for that year. The proposed Council Tax resolution for the 2026/27 budget was included as part of the report.

The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the 2026/27 budget and stated that it was a very positive budget, due to a change of heart from Government, with a higher grant, up by £3.4m which had relieved most budget pressures. The Cabinet Member stated that effective lobbying from the Council's Chief Executive and Leader had led to higher funding to assist with the Council's housing crisis. They also stated that money had been allocated to respond to resident's concerns and to improve service areas, such as more dog bins, saving for new vehicles required in the future rather than borrowing when they were needed, the reinstatement of the Rangers Service, grant funding to charities and funds to the business community and urban areas. They stated that this had been the easiest budget to balance of their administration, but that a relentless upward pressure on costs remained, especially on the cost of homelessness, which was now over £9m, up from under £1.4m at the start of their administration. They stated that other costs continued to rise, but that the Council had retained strong control of their finances, leading to many fees and charges staying below the rate of inflation, with sound finances in place for the future. They also highlighted the City Council's strong reserves ready for LGR and concerns that the County Council's future budget gap would be passed onto the new Unitary Authorities.

Concerns were raised against the budget by opposition members including, the under resourcing of the planning department, Council Tax increases of the maximum permitted amount despite a strong financial position, increased garden waste charges despite it achieving more than budgeted for, and increased car parking charges. Opposition Members also praised the budget, especially the reinstatement of the Highway Rangers Service, more dog bins, the lack of borrowing required and the strong financial management of the Council in general.

The Leader of the Council stated that since their administrations first budget, there had been Covid , a lack of ability to increase Council Tax in line with inflation, but that the decision they had taken continued to improve services and continued to generate higher levels of income across services. They stated that this was due to the hard work of officers across the Council, including the finance team.. They also highlighted the very small amount of Council Tax that was retained by the City Council, which was dwarfed by the other precepting authorities. They also stated that 80% of the Council's income was now from grants, fees and charges. They also highlighted that Council Tax increases were expected by the Government and that grants to all local authorities were set on that basis.

In response to the concerns raised, the Cabinet Member for Finance stated that, some charges had gone up, but car park charges for shoppers had been frozen and that there were no other car park increases apart from those already advertised. They stated that they welcomed conversations with opposition members on ideas, but that the positive news from Government had come very late into the budget setting process. They stated that they may be able to invest further into certain services due to the strong position, but long term investment such as new IT systems was difficult to plan for currently, as the prospect of Local Government Reorganisation in a few years time and due to not currently knowing who the Council would merge with. They also highlighted that the Government expected Council Tax rises and that Council's that didn't do this, could end up in financial difficulties, but emphasised that the City Council rise of 3% was below the rate of inflation. They also thanked officers across the Council for their hard work in creating a strong financial position.

On being put to the vote, the budget proposed in the report to the meeting was approved, with the voting being as follows:

For the motion: Cllrs Aduwim, Ayres, Bonnett, Canning, D Clark, H Clark, Davey, A Davidson, C Davidson, Dudley, Eley, Franks, Foster, Frasca, Fuller, S Goldman, Hall, Hawkins, Jeapes, John, Knight, Lardge, Lee, Manley, Mascot, Moore, Pappa, Potter, Raven, Robinson, Sampson, Scott, Sherlock, Sismey, Steel, Sullivan, A Sosin, Taylor, Thompson, Thorpe-Apps, Tron, Walsh, Whitehead, Wilson and Young

Against the motion: Cllrs Davis and Hyland

Abstained: Cllrs Rajesh and J Sosin

RESOLVED that

1. That the Council notes the report of the Section 151 Officer on the risks and robustness of the budget in Section 8 (Appendix 1).
2. That the Council approves:
 - A. The budget report in Appendix 1, including:
 - i. the new revenue and capital investments in services identified in Section 5;
 - ii. the Capital Programme in Section 11;
 - iii. the Revenue Budgets in Section 10.

- iv. An increase in the average Band D level of Council Tax for the City Council to £234.85 (+2.97%), which is within the referendum threshold, in Section 9.
- v. The movement in reserves and the Medium-Term forecast shown in Section 7 and note the s151 officer's assessment.
- vi. The inclusion of special expenses, parish-tier council precepts, and other precepting authority charges, once confirmed, as detailed in Section 9.
- vii. A delegation to the Chief Executive to agree, after consultation with the Leader of the Council, the pay award for 2026/27 within the normal financial delegations.
- viii. A delegation to manage the use of the LGR reserve. The proposal is set out in Section 7.

B. The Council Tax Resolution in Appendix 2 which fulfils the legal requirements to set a Council Tax for 2026/27.

(7.40pm to 8.14pm)

7.2 Capital, Treasury and Investment Strategies for 2026/27

The Council received a report setting out a proposed approach to the management of its cash, capital investments (the capital expenditure programme) and other types of investment, including property, which the Cabinet had recommended be adopted.

In response to questions the Cabinet Member for Finance stated that, the mention of a Housing Company had always been included to allow for that option if required and that Councillors would receive information on business cases if required.

RESOLVED that the Capital, Treasury and Investment Strategies 2026/27 as submitted to the meeting be approved.

(8.15pm to 8.19pm)

7.3 Discretionary Exception to Council Tax Premiums in respect of second homes

The Council received a report asking whether an additional local discretionary exception to Council Tax premiums, imposed in respect of second homes should be applied and to consider a delegation to officers for such decisions in the future.

RESOLVED that;

1. The implementation of an additional local discretionary exception to Council Tax premiums imposed on second homes as defined in paragraph 2.4 and;
2. Future decisions on such matters be delegated to the Director of Connected Chelmsford in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Member

(8.20pm to 8.21pm)

8. Pay Policy Statement 2026/27

The Council was requested formally to approve the annual Pay Policy Statement in accordance with Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011. The Council were also asked to approve the pay packages for two new posts in accordance with Paragraph 13 of the pay policy, for two Assistant Director roles to replace a Director role which would be deleted following a retirement.

In response to a question the Leader of the Council highlighted the importance of the new posts, to ensure continuity and that the roles created more flexibility for the future than a short term director appointment would with LGR on the horizon.

RESOLVED that;

1. the Pay Policy Statement for 2026-27 be approved and
2. the Pay for the two assistant Director posts be approved

(8.22pm to 8.25pm)

9. Community Governance Review

The Council were asked to further review the timetable and Terms of reference for the Community Governance Review (CGR) in light of transitional provisions for LGR, which included the consideration of the Council retaining the legal power to make a reorganisation of community governance order, so that it could complete the process to create a new Parish. The Leader of the Council stated that the change would mean the creation of a new Parish tier Council, would remain in the power of the City Council, rather than the new Unitary and meant that a decision would be made at the July 2026 Council meeting rather than December 2026.

In response to questions and comments regarding, the legality of a shorter consultation period and an alternative proposal to act even quicker, the Leader of the Council stated that they had to work around the election timetable, had chosen a middle path, rather than speeding up even further or delaying and that the Council's Legal Services had been involved in the decision, along with external legal advice. The Leader also noted that working group meetings on the topic would take place soon, the informal response target of the first consultation had been exceeded and that the changes would allow the Council to retain control of the situation.

RESOLVED that the revised Terms of Reference, with the revision to the timing of decisions and second stage consultation be approved.

(8.26pm to 8.39pm)

The meeting closed at 8.42pm

Mayor