

**MINUTES OF
CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL CABINET**

on 15 March 2022 at 7.00pm

Present:

Cabinet Members

Councillor S J Robinson, Leader of the Council (Chair)
Councillor M C Goldman, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Connected Chelmsford
Councillor M J Mackrory, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development
Councillor R J Moore, Cabinet Member for Greener and Safer Chelmsford

Opposition Spokespersons

Councillors K Bentley, S Dobson, R Hyland, I C Roberts, M Sismey, M S Steel
and R T Whitehead

Also present: Councillor G H J Pooley

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C K Davidson, Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford, Councillors W Daden, J Galley and R J Poulter, Opposition Spokespersons, and Councillor N Dudley, Cabinet Deputy.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members of the Cabinet were reminded to declare at the appropriate time any pecuniary and non-pecuniary 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 25 January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record. No decisions at that meeting had been called in.

4. Public Questions

There were no questions or statements from members of the public.

5. Members' Questions

Councillors who were not members of the Cabinet asked the following questions:

Councillor M J Steel on whether the City Council had been consulted on or involved in the planning and management of the Ride London events that would pass through Chelmsford on 27-29 March. He was particularly concerned about the effect on local residents and businesses of road closures and other restrictions to movement on 29 May.

The Cabinet Member for Greener and Safer Chelmsford replied that the City Council had been involved from the outset in the planning for Ride London and would continue to be involved to maximise the opportunities for Chelmsford and to promote cycling whilst seeking to mitigate any adverse implications. The Cabinet Member went on to detail the arrangements for the event, its route, the steps taken by the Ride London organisers and Essex County Council to publicise the event, the measures taken to mitigate its effect on local residents and businesses, and the steps being taken to maximise the benefits it could bring. City Council officers were part of the Essex-wide event management structure for the event.

(7.02pm to 7.12pm)

6. Discretionary Rate Relief Policy 2022-23 (Connected Chelmsford)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Government had announced an extension to small business rate relief for an additional year beyond 31 March 2022 and an extension to the retail, hospitality and leisure relief for the 2022/23 financial year. Local authorities had been asked to use discretionary relief powers to implement those changes and the Cabinet was requested to approve changes to the Council's existing policy on discretionary rate relief with effect from 31 March 2022.

Options:

Retain the present policy or make the proposed amendments.

Preferred Option and Reasons:

The amendments and additions to the existing reliefs available to reduce business rates bills would be a helpful assistance to local business.

RESOLVED that the additions and alterations to the existing Discretionary Rate Relief Policy as highlighted in Appendix A to the report to the meeting be agreed.

(7.12pm to 7.14pm)

7. Chelmsford Housing Strategy 2022-27 (Fairer Chelmsford)

Declarations of Interest:

None

Summary:

The Housing Working Group had carried out an assessment of the main housing challenges facing Chelmsford and the City Council as the local housing authority. A consultation document that set out their initial findings, and included feedback from Registered Providers, was approved for wider consultation at a meeting of the Chelmsford Policy Board on 5 July 2021. Feedback from that consultation had been used to inform the final version of the Chelmsford Housing Strategy 2022 – 2027, attached at Appendix 1 to the report to the meeting. The Strategy was supported by a Statistical Appendix, attached at Appendix 2 to the report, which provided more detailed information on the supply of, and demand for, a range of affordable homes.

The Strategy had been supported by the Policy Board at its meeting on 3 March 2022, which, with some minor amendments to the text, had recommended that the Cabinet approve it.

Options:

Approve or amend the proposed Strategy tariffs set out in Appendix A to the report to the meeting.

Preferred Option and Reasons:

The proposed the Strategy would be a positive response to the housing challenges facing the city.

Discussion:

The Cabinet received a brief presentation on the Strategy, the vision for which was “To address the housing needs of all Chelmsford residents so everyone can reasonably aspire to having a home that meets their needs.” It was supported by the following strategic priorities that aimed to achieve a better, more balanced supply of homes that met the Council’s statutory duties and the City’s strategic housing needs:

- Increasing the supply of affordable homes with a focus on larger units.
- Increasingly the supply of affordable homes from the existing housing stock.
- Supporting landlords and tenants of privately rented homes.
- Enabling the right supply of specialist housing to meet local need.
- Developing effective partnerships.
- Monitoring trends and performance to inform future actions.

During discussion of the report, the Strategy was welcomed as a means of providing more affordable homes and reducing the City Council waiting list. However, concerns were expressed about building above the numbers set out in the Local Plan and the effect this would have on existing infrastructure and facilities. The Cabinet was also asked about progress with the provision of the Beaulieu Medical Centre and whether the Council would

ensure that it would be delivered before agreeing to expand the Broomfield masterplan above the Local Plan numbers.

The Leader of the Council said that the Housing Strategy sought to achieve a better, more balanced supply of affordable homes from new and existing housing stock and to put forward measures for increasing the supply above the numbers in the Local Plan. Recently adopted supplementary planning documents and advice notes aimed to assist that process. He agreed that providing the necessary infrastructure to support all development was vital and both Community Infrastructure Levy and supplementary planning obligations would continue to help achieve that. The Local Plan review, its Viability Assessment and Infrastructure Delivery Plan would also identify the infrastructure required and how it could be delivered. He was conscious that increasing the numbers of housing units over that provided for in the Local Plan on certain sites could add to the pressures on infrastructure but he argued that the city was facing a housing crisis and steps needed to be taken urgently to tackle it.

The Council had been in discussions with developers in the Beaulieu area about the provision of a health care centre and it now appeared that work on it would begin in July 2022 and take just over a year.

In response to a question about under occupancy in three- and four-bed homes, the Cabinet was informed that the City Council relied on information provided by registered social landlords (RSLs) and housing associations on the numbers of such properties. It was part of the Strategy to find out more about why people did not downsize and, if they did, what type of properties they were looking to move to. Priority was given to seeking alternative accommodation for those wishing to downsize and the Council was working with its partners to increase the numbers.

Asked about the causes for the increase in the number of empty homes, especially those owned by housing associations, officers said that this was a recent trend and the reasons were not fully understood. More work was needed with RSLs to establish where the empty properties were and why they were empty. The Leader added that the Council was working with CHP to reduce the void periods of their properties and that private owners of empty properties were actively encouraged to bring them back into use.

RESOLVED that

1. the Chelmsford Housing Strategy 2022-27 submitted as Appendix A to the report to the meeting be approved and that it and the Statistical Appendix be published; and
2. any subsequent textual or presentation changes be delegated to the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development.

(7.14pm to 7.41pm)

8. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

9. Reports to Council

None of the items to the meeting needed to be referred to the Council for approval.

The meeting closed at 7.42pm

Chair