

CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
held on 16 July 2025 at 7pm

PRESENT:

The Mayor, J Sosin
The Deputy Mayor, S Rajesh

Councillors C Adutwim, H Ayres, G Bonnett, N Chambers, D Clark, H Clark, P Clark, P Davey, A Davidson, C Davidson, S Davis, J Deakin, S. Dobson, N Dudley, D Eley, K Franks, L Foster, J Frasca, I Fuller, S Goldman, S Hall, J Hawkins, J Jeapes, B Knight, J Lardge, R Lee, S Manley, L Mascot, B. Massey, R Moore, M O'Brien, 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, , N Walsh, R Whitehead, P Wilson and S Young

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors, Armstrong, Bugbee, Canning, John, Hyland, Raven, Thorpe-Apps and Tron.

2. Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor reflected on the sad passing of former Councillor Tony Sach since the last meeting of the Council. The Mayor referred to Tony Sach's long service between 1999 and 2019 as a Councillor for the Writtle ward, their time on Planning Committee, as Cabinet member for Corporate Services and as Mayor of Chelmsford in 2009 - 2010. The Mayor expressed that they would be missed by everyone, and their thoughts continued to be with their families. A minute's silence was then held in their memory, before Cllr Robinson and Cllr Whitehead were invited to speak.

Cllr Robinson reflected on their time serving alongside Cllr Sach on Writtle Parish Council. It was added that Cllr Sach had supported the charity 'Kids Inspire' as their time as Mayor and concluded by extending the Council's condolences to Cllr Sach's family.

Cllr Whitehead supported Cllr Robinson's comments and added their condolences to Cllr Sach's family. It was added that Cllr Sach had attended King Edward VI Grammar School, and would later become managing governor, and served as a school governor at Lawford Mead Infants and Nursery School. Cllr Whitehead concluded by thanking members for recognising the contributions of Cllr Sach.

The Mayor informed the Council that since the start of their Mayoralty they had attended 70 engagements/meetings and has visited the twin town of Backnang for the Strassenfest which coincided with the 35th anniversary of Chelmsford being twinned with Backnang. The first Mayor's Charity event for Chelmsford CVS would be taking place on the 27th July.

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 meetings held on 19th February and 14th May 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

5. Public Questions

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

The first question asked what actions had been taken on behalf of residents in relation to the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

In response the Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford, thanked the member of the public for their question. The Cabinet Member stated that a comprehensive review of the Council's response to the climate and ecological emergency, along with its approach to meeting its biodiversity duties under the Environment Act 2021, was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 10 March 2025. This was the third formal review of progress since the original Climate Action Plan was adopted in January 2020, with previous reviews having taken place on 1 February 2021 and 26 September 2022.

The Cabinet member shared that progress continued across the Council's four key thematic priorities: securing sustainable housing and economic growth while promoting net-zero carbon development; lowering energy consumption and reducing greenhouse gas emissions; protecting and expanding natural habitats in line with the Council's biodiversity duty; and encouraging individuals, communities and businesses to care for their local environment and adopt more sustainable ways of living and working.

The recent report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also included an update on the Council's own operational emissions, highlighting significant progress towards the ambition of achieving net-zero carbon for Council operations by 2030. The most recent greenhouse gas emissions report, covering the 2024/25 period, was expected to be published shortly. A summary of the actions taken to date and plans for future years could be [viewed at this link.](#)

The second question was in relation to the empty property, Wickham House, Danbury, and called for a specific action to bring back Wickham House for further Cabinet consideration with a view to pursuing a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO).

In response the Cabinet Member for a Safer Chelmsford thanked the member of the public for their question. The Cabinet Member stated that the Council's primary focus was on fulfilling its statutory housing duties, such as improving housing conditions, investigating hazardous living situations, and meeting legal obligations related to housing safety and licensing. Bringing empty homes back into use, while desirable, was a lower priority due to limited resources. In relation to Wickham House, the Cabinet Member stated that whilst the property was known and long-vacant, the Council did not believe that there were strong enough grounds to pursue a CPO. An independent report from 2024 suggested that such action would likely be challenged and difficult to justify financially or legally. Therefore, the Council could not support Mr S request to bring this case back to Cabinet for a CPO.

The third and fourth question related to breaches of planning permission in relation to the Gypsy and Traveller site at Meadow Lane.

In response the Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford thanked the members of the public for their question. The Cabinet Member stated that a Temporary Stop Notice had been issued by the Council on 1 July 2025, restricting further hardstanding and the importation or occupation of additional caravans. It was noted that the council did not have the ability to stop all activity, such as building of utility connections or fencing. Some breaches had occurred, and the site occupiers had been warned that further violations could lead to more enforcement action. Planning Contravention Notices had also been served to gather all necessary information before any next steps.

While further enforcement was being considered, details could not be shared publicly as to avoid compromising potential action. The Council did not have the legal authority to evict individuals residing on land they own or have permission to use; instead, planning breaches were addressed through enforcement notices, and failure to comply with these could lead to prosecution.

In response to concerns about whether the enforcement action taken was proportionate, the Cabinet Member explained that enforcement measures must align with national guidance and the councils Enforcement Plan. The Temporary Stop Notice was considered the most suitable immediate step to prevent further escalation, and a Planning Contravention Notice had been used to gather the necessary facts before pursuing formal enforcement. The Council stated that while an injunction was an available tool, it was not sought immediately to avoid the risk of premature rejection by the courts, injunctions were more likely to be granted when other legal avenues have first been exhausted.

The Council acknowledged that one of the main barriers to enforcement was the limited scope of powers granted under national legislation. Specifically, when individuals own the land or have permission to reside there, the Council had no authority to evict. The case remains a high priority and is being closely monitored. Additionally, it was stated that Chelmsford City Council had been working with a range

of external agencies in connection with this case, including the Environment Agency, Essex County Council, UK Power Networks, Essex & Suffolk Water, and Essex Police.

The Cabinet Member confirmed that although they were not able to respond to all of the matters raised in the full question within the meeting, a full written response was to be provided.

(7.10pm to 7.32pm)

6. Cabinet Question Time

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

Question from Councillor V Pappa to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Property

Every evening, as the clock strikes six, our city centre — the heart of our community — starts to fall silent. The shutters come down, the shops close, and yet thousands of Chelmsford's residents are just finishing work. This calls for a simple first step: a city-wide consultation, a pilot, and a report. Does the Cabinet Member agree that this should be looked at and that it is appropriate for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to put this on their next agenda?

In response the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Property stated that the Council could not require businesses to open in the evening; decisions were made by individual businesses based on footfall and commercial viability.

The Council are working closely with the city's Business Improvement District (BID), which are currently developing a new strategy to grow the evening and night-time economy. This includes engaging stakeholders and planning a campaign to promote events, hospitality, and cultural activity while encouraging businesses to consider extended hours where commercially viable. It was highlighted that Chelmsford had achieved the Purple Flag accreditation for the 12th consecutive year reflecting Chelmsford's status as a safe, welcoming, and diverse city centre during evening hours.

While many retailers follow national policies, the Council would continue supporting efforts to make the city centre more vibrant. The Cabinet Member suggested that conversations be held with the chair of Overview & Scrutiny to consider the issue.

Question from Councillor G Bonnett to the Cabinet Member for a Safer Chelmsford

Residents in my Ward are complaining that dog bins are not being collected and that this hot weather is making matters worse. I understand that there is a serious shortage of Street Care staff; what is the Cabinet Member doing to resolve this problem?

In response the Cabinet Member for a Safer Chelmsford stated that dog waste bins were being emptied as scheduled, and that there were enough resources to maintain the current collections, but not to add more bins. Recent staff changes meant new team members were still learning the routes.

Question from Councillor R Whitehead to the Leader of the Council

Question 1: The Mayor and Consort recently attended the Strassenfest in Backnang. There were four Mayors at the official ceremony, three wearing civic regalia but, due to the recent decision by the City Council not to allow the replica chain of office and badge to be taken to Backnang, our Mayor had no regalia. This was disappointing and does not reflect the standing of the Mayor and the City of Chelmsford. Whilst the City Council has to be aware of the value of the badge, the Mayor's chain was purchased by the Council to specifically to avoid damage to the valuable original regalia and is used extensively. Members will be aware of the need to observe the rules on their personal security and it is therefore concerning that the Mayor has to return the replica regalia to the Civic Centre – sometimes late in the evening – and no longer has the Mayor's car and Chauffeur for this purpose. It is possible to purchase a good copy chain of office and badge for under £1000 which would enable them to be taken home by the Mayor when appropriate to avoid the problem of security. Would the City Council accept a donation of £1000 to purchase a replica chain and badge so that our Mayors will have both a deserved symbol of office and ensure that their security is not compromised?

Question 2: Whilst it is accepted that the financial situation is not as healthy as we would like it to be, the City Council's Cultural Strategy encourages cultural exchanges and with the High School deciding not to send pupils to Germany next year there is a danger of Twinning declining at a time when working together in Europe has once again become very important. This is the 35th Anniversary of the Town Twinning Partnership with Backnang and this was marked by the Mayor of Backnang when our Mayor, Councillor Janetta Sosin visited the town at his invitation last month. Backnang has hosted our Mayors six times since their new Mayor was elected, whilst we have only hosted their Mayor only once. Will the City Council invite the Mayor of Backnang to come to Chelmsford in 2026?

In response the Leader stated that there was no formal policy prohibiting the wearing or taking of the mayoral regalia. Decisions regarding regalia were made individually by each Mayor, based on personal preference and insurance considerations. It was noted that some previous mayors had also chosen not to take the chains overseas and that each Mayor has the full support of The Council to take the decisions that they feel comfortable with when attending events.

In relation to question two, the Leader acknowledged the importance of maintaining strong relationships with European partners, particularly through town twinning, and supported the idea of continuing these exchanges. In relation to hosting the Mayor of Backnang, the Leader stated that whilst financial constraints may be a barrier for facilitating these visits, but discussions will be held at the Mayor's Working Group to find ways to develop the partnership.

Question from Councillor R Whitehead to the Leader of the Council

The Local Government Act 2000 provides that where authorities operate executive arrangements, for instance where there is a Leader and Cabinet, or Mayor and Cabinet, then all functions are to be exercised by the executive unless specified otherwise by the Act or enactments or regulations made under it.

The Regulations define non-executive functions. These functions, which include setting the budget and strategic policy framework are reserved for the full Council, rather than the executive. This separation ensures that decisions which significantly impact the community or require a high degree of scrutiny are handled transparently and with greater accountability.

The regulations delineate that strategic and quasi-judicial decisions should be reserved for the full Council. This ensures that decisions which have significant consequences receive the necessary scrutiny and democratic legitimacy. Despite the executive's day-to-day management role, the overarching financial strategies and significant amendments to these strategies must be considered by the full Council to align with the broader governance framework and financial health of the council.

The recent decisions on the use of a huge amount of CIL monies for developments at South Woodham Ferrers and at Cabinet last week for £66.3M at the Beaulieu sites – as detailed in the decisions published on the City Council's Website – are clearly 'Strategic Policy Decisions' and in the opinion of the Conservative Group should have been taken at Full Council.

The Council's Constitution is being updated, but will the Leader now agree that the decision to fund the viability gap and fund infrastructure should be brought to Council?

Does he further consider that ring-fencing money for Property Developers in these developments is not what CIL should be used for as other parts of the City will lose out?

In response the Leader clarified that under the Local Government Act 2000, decisions on infrastructure delivery and the allocation of CIL was an executive function and therefore legally within Cabinet's remit, not Full Council. Cabinet was acting within its powers when approving the use of CIL for developments.

In relation to the use of CIL, the Leader explained that while CIL was intended to fund infrastructure, developers were allowed to reduce affordable housing if infrastructure costs threatened their profit margins. In these cases, the Council's independent viability advice indicated that reinvesting CIL into infrastructure was necessary to retain affordable housing on the sites in question.

The Leader acknowledged that this use of CIL was not ideal and may limit spending elsewhere in the district. However, due to the housing crisis and high levels of local need, including hundreds of families in temporary or unsuitable accommodation, prioritising affordable housing was essential. Both the Leader and Chelmsford MP,

Marie Goldman, were raising concerns nationally about the impact of viability rules on housing delivery.

A question was raised in relation to the outcome of the ongoing legal proceedings. The Monitoring Officer explained that at the time of this meeting the outcome and its implications was not known.

Question from Councillor D Clark to the Cabinet Member for a Safer Chelmsford

In a judgment delivered on 16 April 2025, the UK Supreme Court ruled that the protected characteristic of "sex" in the Equality Act 2010 refers to biological sex, not acquired gender or legal sex recognised through a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC)

What action has the Council taken to ensure that their staff feel supported as a result of this decision?

In response the Cabinet Member for a Safer Chelmsford shared that the Council remained committed to supporting all staff and upholding dignity and respect in the workplace, regardless of gender identity. A Transgender Policy was in place, including action plans to support employees through gender transition, and a confidential Employee Assistance Programme.

In response to the Supreme Court ruling on the definition of "sex" under the Equality Act, the Council was redesignating accessible toilets as unisex facilities, and this would be reviewed pending further guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

The Council also monitored employee feedback and HR cases to identify areas for improvement and was supported by an Equality Champions Group, chaired by the Chief Executive, to explore proactive measures for staff support.

(7.32pm to 7.58pm)

7. Proposed changes to the Constitution

The Council were asked to approve the proposed changes to the constitution that had previously been presented at Constitution Working Group, Governance Committee and Cabinet.

RESOLVED that the proposed changes to the constitution be approved.

(7.58pm to 8.02pm)

8. Update on Political Groups

The Council received a report setting out changes to political groups, specifically that that Cllr Jude Deakin was no longer a member of the Liberal Democrat Group and were now an Independent Councillor not in a political group.

RESOLVED that the update on Political Groups was noted.

(8.02pm to 8.03pm)

9. Treasury Outturn 2024–25

The Council was presented with the Treasury Management Outturn Report for the financial year ending 31 March 2025.

The Chair of the Treasury Management and Investment Sub-Committee introduced the Treasury Management Outturn Report for the financial year 2024/25. It was explained that the report had already been reviewed by the Treasury Management and Investment Sub-Committee and Cabinet and was now recommended for approval by Full Council. The report highlighted that treasury income had exceeded expectations by £0.8 million, primarily due to slower-than-forecast capital expenditure. Borrowing levels were also significantly lower than anticipated.

It was noted that some investments were adversely affected by American tariff proposals, which were being closely monitored. It was shared that all treasury activities remained compliant with the Treasury Management Strategy approved in February 2024.

RESOLVED that the recommendations of the Treasury Management and Investment Sub-Committee and Cabinet in relation to the Treasury Management outturn report be approved.

(8.03pm to 8.05pm)

10. Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee presented the Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee for 2024/25. The report provided an overview of the committee's responsibilities, membership, and the work undertaken during the year. It was intended to demonstrate the committee's contribution to the council's governance framework.

Officers and committee members were thanked for their support over the previous year.

The Council were requested to note the content of the 2024/25 Annual Report of the Committee.

RESOLVED that the Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee 2024/25 be approved for publication.

(8.05pm to 8.07pm)

11. Annual Report of the Governance Committee

The annual report of the Governance Committee 2024/25 was submitted for information.

The Chair of the Governance Committee shared that, of the 33 complaints received during the year, none required further investigation. Thanks were expressed to the Monitoring Officer and the council's Independent Persons for their work in handling complaints and supporting the committee's functions.

RESOLVED that the Governance Committee's Annual Report for 2024/25 be approved for publication.

(8.07pm to 8.08pm)

Urgent Business

The Council heard a motion to consider an item of urgent business.

RESOLVED that the urgent business be heard by Full Council.

The Leader of the Council brought forward an urgent item concerning Cllr Bugbee absence from council meetings due to ill health. Under Section 85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, a councillor who does not attend a meeting for six consecutive months is subject to automatic disqualification, unless the council were to approve a leave of absence in advance.

It was explained that Cllr Bugbee's current period of absence would reach the six-month threshold by 19 August 2025, and that due to ongoing illness, was unlikely to attend a meeting before that date. It was proposed that council approve her continued absence until the 3 December 2025 Full Council meeting.

RESOLVED that the relief from disqualification for Cllr Bugbee be extended to 3 December 2025.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm

Mayor