

**MINUTES OF  
CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL CABINET**

**on 28 January 2020 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 C K Davidson, Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford  
Councillor J Deakin, Cabinet Member for Safer Chelmsford  
Councillor M J Mackrory, Cabinet Member for Greener Chelmsford

**Cabinet Deputies**

Councillor M Bracken, Economy and Small Business  
Councillor R J Moore, Recycling and Ecology  
M Springett, Community Engagement and Local Democracy

**Councillors**

P Clark, A Davidson, S Dobson, J Galley, L Mascot, G H J Pooley, R J Poulter,  
T E Roper, A Sosin, M S Steel, M D Watson and R T Whitehead

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from the following spokespersons for the opposition groups:

Councillors R J Hyland, I C Roberts and M Sismey.

2. **Declarations of Interests**

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 19 November 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair. 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 not members of the Cabinet asked questions or made statements on the following matters:

Councillor K Bentley on the lack of public conveniences in the city, their continued closure and lack of maintenance, and whether there were any plans to provide additional and more modern facilities.

The Cabinet Member for Safer Chelmsford said that whilst there were no plans to carry out a review of public conveniences provision, it was something that the Council was likely to look at in due course. For now, Councillor Bentley would be sent the results of the last review, which explained the current approach to the provision of conveniences. In respect of the conveniences at Lionmede Park mentioned by Councillor Bentley in his question, it had been necessary to close them after tree roots damaged pipework to the toilet block.

Councillor R J Poulter on the decision to cease sending planning application notification letters and to rely instead on site notification notices to make people aware of the submission of an application. He was of the opinion that in rural areas site notices were less likely to be seen in view of the distance between properties and that, as an exception, notification letters should continue to be sent.

The Cabinet Member for Greener Chelmsford said that notification letters had been shown to be a less than effective means of making residents aware of planning applications as many people discarded them unopened. Providing additional site notices in appropriate locations was considered to be a more visible and cost effective way of bringing the submission of a planning application to people's attention and there were no plans to revert to letters.

6. **Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan (Safer Chelmsford)**

*Declarations of Interest:* None

*Summary:* On 16 July 2019, the Council had passed a motion declaring a climate and ecological emergency which, among other measures, required the authority to make its activities net-zero carbon by 2030, reduce carbon emissions as quickly as possible, and work with partners to promote and introduce the principles of sustainability in the planning and delivery of services and in all their activities.

An initial Action Plan had been produced to describe how the Council intended to respond to the emergency and the areas of activity on which it was proposed to focus.

*Options:* Approve the proposed Action Plan, with or without amendment, or decide not to adopt a plan.

*Chosen Option and Reasons:* The Action Plan as submitted would provide a firm foundation on which to base the Council's response to the climate and ecological emergency.

*Discussion:* Those who spoke on the Action Plan were supportive of it but sought clarification on some of its points and made suggestions about others. In response to one question, the Cabinet Deputy for Recycling and Ecology said that the targets in the Action Plan, such as that relating to achieving a net-zero carbon position by 2030, specifically related to the Council's activities and operations and were not targets being imposed on others. However, the Council intended to lead by example on this issue and, by working in partnership, hoped to take other organisations with it in meeting the wider objectives for Chelmsford set out in the Plan. Over time it was hoped to be able to extend targets to those in its supply chain and to encourage and incentivise others to adopt practical measures in keeping with the principles of the declaration. The example was given of the guidance and encouragement the Council could give to developers to build energy efficient homes and follow the highest environmental and construction standards. A site where this sort of co-operation between the Council, landowners and developers might work was the garden village development area in north Chelmsford.

Replying to other questions and suggestions, the Cabinet Deputy said that:

- A considerable amount of land was needed if the Council was to meet its targets for tree planting. It would be talking to a wide range of landowners, including parish councils and bodies like the Wildlife Trust, about planting and maintaining trees and would welcome suggestions for appropriate sites. Even small sites, such as those owned by community groups, could help meet the Council's overall target.
- The Council could not restrict access to the gas supply grid by developers or use the planning system to control the types of energy used in developments. It could, however, encourage developers to use energy sources other than fossil fuels.
- Current legislation did not allow the Council to operate or control bus services in the city.
- With regard to a suggestion that the Council establish an audit trail for waste not recycled in-house, regulations governing the destination of waste covered this to some extent and action 4(e) in the Plan to help small businesses adopt their own waste minimisation plans was a starting point for improvements. Other influencing factors were national policy on recycling and consumer expectations.
- The Waterways Working Group could look at ideas for a new weir and lock on the River Chelmer.
- The creation of a "green necklace" around South Woodham Ferrers could be included in the Neighbourhood Plan for the town and be led by the Town Council, although it would be dependent on the co-operation of landowners.
- Hydrogen powered vehicles were included in the definition of low emission vehicles.
- Flood defences for the River Crouch were the responsibility of the Environment Agency but the Council would encourage and promote their provision.

**RESOLVED** that the Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan submitted as Appendix 2 to the report to the meeting be approved.

7.12pm to 7.40pm

7.1 **Review of Fees and Charges for Car Parks 2020 (Greener Chelmsford)**

*Declarations of Interest:* None

*Summary:* Proposed fees and charges for the use of the Council's off-street car parks from April 2020 were submitted for consideration, together with a proposal that all Pay and Display car parks be converted to cashless operation.

*Options:* Approve or amend the proposed charges and proceed or not with the proposals for cashless operation.

*Chosen Option and Reasons:* The proposals would maximise income to the Council without resulting in significant resistance from users of the car parks. The introduction of full cashless operations for Pay and Display would improve efficiency and security.

*Discussion:* The Cabinet was asked whether it had a target for the provision of electric vehicle charging points and how it would address the apparent contradiction between its encouragement of the use of public transport and its need to maximise income from car parking. The meeting was told that there were now 14 charging points in Council car parks with more planned but that there was no target number. On the second question, there was a balance to strike between wishing to reduce car usage and preserving the important income from car parks. The charging policy discouraged long stay parking in favour of Park and Ride. Whether the City Council should take over responsibility for the operation of Park and Ride sites, and what charging regime was best for encouraging their greater use, needed to be carefully considered from a financial point of view and was the subject of ongoing discussion with the County Council.

In response to a question, the Cabinet Member said that the public were increasingly used to cashless payments and therefore he did not anticipate resistance to the use of cashless pay and display machines, particularly if the planned publicity about the change was successful. The Cabinet was also informed that the possibility of discounts for low emission vehicles using the Council's car parks would be considered.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. the proposed car park tariffs as detailed in Appendix A of the report to the meeting be approved for implementation in April 2020; and
2. the proposal that all Pay and Display car parks be cashless from April 2020 be approved and customers informed via a concentrated publicity campaign.

7.40pm to 7.56pm

## 7.2 **Brownfield Land Register (Greener Chelmsford)**

*Declarations of Interest:* None

*Summary:* In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Brownfield Land Registers) Regulations 2017, the Brownfield Land Register for Chelmsford had been updated and was recommended for publication. The report to the meeting also set out the methodology used in revising the register.

*Options:* Approve or not the proposed revised register.

*Chosen Option and Reasons:* The updated register was an accurate depiction of brownfield land availability in Chelmsford and met statutory requirements.

### **RESOLVED** that:

1. the updated Brownfield Register Methodology 2019 and Part 1 Brownfield Register 2019 set out at Appendices 1 and 2 of the report to the meeting published and added to the national register;
2. the Director of Sustainable Communities, having undertaken an annual review of the Brownfield Register Methodology and Part 1 Brownfield Register, be authorised, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Greener Chelmsford, to publish the Part 1 Brownfield Register in April each year and update the national register; and
3. the Spatial Planning Services Manager be authorised to update and publish the Part 1 Brownfield Register, on an on-going basis, when a new brownfield site is identified or an existing one changes status and update the national register.

7.56pm to 7.58pm

## 8.1 **Treasury Management Strategy 2020/21 (Fairer Chelmsford)**

*Declarations of Interest:* None

*Summary:* The Cabinet was requested to endorse the strategy for the management of the Council's financial investments in 2020/21 and to approve those prudential indicators that applied to the strategy.

*Options:* Support or vary the proposed strategy.

*Chosen Option and Reasons:* The adoption of the strategy would enable the Council to meet statutory requirements for its financial management.

**RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL** that it approve:

1. the proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2020/21 submitted as Appendix 1 of the report to the meeting; and
2. the proposed Treasury Management Indicators in Appendix 2.

*7.59pm to 7.59pm*

8.2 **Capital and Investment Strategy 2020/21 (Fairer Chelmsford)**

*Declarations of Interest: None*

*Summary:* The Cabinet considered a report which gave a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contributed to the provision of local public services. It also looked at how the associated risks were managed and the implications for the future financial sustainability of the Council.

*Options:* Approve or amend the strategy to reflect any changes to the Council's capital and revenue budgets.

*Chosen Option and Reasons:* The adoption of the proposals would enable the Council to meet statutory requirements for its sound financial management.

*Discussion:* The Cabinet was told that whilst members decided the overall strategy for the management of the Council's financial resources, decisions on when to borrow, how much, for how long and from which source were made by the Director of Financial Services on a case by case basis, having regard to risk, affordability and the overall strategy. The Public Works Loan Board was one source of borrowing and there were different interest rates depending on the length of a loan, with up to 2.82% currently being charged for borrowing over a 50 year period.

**RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL** that it approve the Capital and Investment Strategy for 2020/21.

*7.59pm to 8.04pm*

8.3 **Budget Report 2020/21 (Fairer Chelmsford)**

*Declarations of Interest: None*

*Summary:* The report to the meeting contained recommendations for the setting of the Capital and Revenue Budgets for 2020/21 and the level of Council Tax for that year.

*Options:* Agree or vary the proposed budgets and level of Council Tax, having regard to the financial sustainability of any amendments.

*Chosen Option and Reasons:* The recommended budget would be prudent and in the best financial interests of the city.

*Discussion:* The Cabinet was told that the budget was designed to help deliver the new Corporate Plan, "Our Chelmsford, Our Plan", approved by the Council on 22 January 2020, the priorities of which were tackling homelessness and the climate and ecological emergency. Replying to questions about some of the spending proposals, Cabinet Members said that:

- it was planned to install video and audio equipment in the Marconi and Crompton Rooms and audio in the Council Chamber to enable the webcasting of meetings;
- provision was being made for an assessment of the availability and need for affordable accommodation locally, to support development of the Housing Strategy;
- the capital provision for tree planting was a continuation of the current programme and might involve assisting parish councils with the cost of planting in their areas;
- the provision for property acquisitions was intended for the purchase of smaller commercial properties; and
- funding was being provided for further digital initiatives, including those approved by the Digital Portfolio Office, that would improve effectiveness and ways of working.

1. **RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL** that the following aspects of the budget for 2020/21 set out in Appendix 1 of the report to the meeting be approved:
  - (a) the new capital and revenue investments in Council services set out in Section 4;
  - (b) the Revenue Budgets in Section 9 and Capital Budgets in Section 10;
  - (c) the delegations to undertake capital schemes in Section 4, Table 5;
  - (d) an increase to the average level of Council Tax for the City Council which would increase the average annual Band D Council Tax to £199, as shown in Section 8;
  - (e) the fees and charges changes outside the budget guidelines as set out in Section 3;
  - (f) the movement in reserves shown in Section 6;
  - (g) the special expenses and Parish and Town Council precepts identified in Section 8, Table 11;

- (h) authority to the Chief Executive to agree, after consultation with the Leader of the Council, the pay award for 2020/21, within the normal financial delegations.
2. The Council note the Budget Forecast in Section 6 and the report of the Director of Finance on the risks and robustness of the budget in Section 7.
  3. **RESOLVED** that the following be approved:
    - (a) the Director of Finance be authorised to prepare a budget report and legal resolution for submission to the Council, including updating the Business Rate Retention Income following completion of the NDR1 statutory return to Government;
    - (b) should the final government grant settlement details change following this meeting, the Director of Finance be authorised, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford, to use reserves to maintain the Council Tax recommendation in 1(d) above;
    - (c) an additional budget of £56,000 for the replacement of a tractor, as referred to in Section 10, which for operational reasons needs to be delivered before the next Council meeting.

*8.04pm to 8.25pm*

8.4 **Council Tax Premium on Long Term Empty Properties for 2020/21 (Fairer Chelmsford)**

*Declarations of Interest:* None

*Summary:* Legislation gave the Council power to increase Council Tax charges for long term empty properties. The report to the meeting considered the effect and desirability of using those powers in Chelmsford.

*Options:*

1. Increase or not the Council Tax premium charged on properties which have been empty for five years or more from 100% up to a maximum of 200% from 1 April 2020, or
2. Increase or not the Council Tax premium charged on properties which have been empty for 10 years or more to a maximum of 300% from 1 April 2021.

*Chosen Option and Reasons:* Increasing the premiums was most likely to achieve the objective of encouraging owners of long-term empty properties to bring them back into use as early as possible.



**RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL that:**

1. an Empty Homes premium of 200% as specified in section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended), be levied on dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than five years immediately before the day in question (i.e. “long term empty dwellings”), the total charge to be 300% of the Council Tax that would be payable if the dwelling was occupied by two adults and no discounts were applicable, the charge to take effect from 1 April 2020; and
2. an Empty Homes premium of 300% as specified in section 11B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended), be levied on dwellings which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than 10 years immediately before the day in question (i.e. “long term empty dwellings”), the total charge to be 400% of the Council Tax that would be payable if the dwelling was occupied by two adults and no discounts were applicable, the charge to take effect from 1 April 2021.

*8.25pm to 8.27pm*

**8.5 Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (Fairer Chelmsford)**

*Declarations of Interest:* None

*Summary:* The Cabinet was asked to decide how the Council would manage the practical arrangements for supporting voluntary groups that provided assistance to families seeking accommodation from Syria and the surrounding area under the Government’s Community Sponsorship Resettlement Programme.

*Options:* Approve delegations to officers to deal with requests for assistance under the programme or refer all such decisions to the Cabinet.

*Chosen Option and Reasons:* Delegating the decisions to officers would enable the Council to respond quickly to future applications.

**RESOLVED** that the Director of Financial Services, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford, be given the authority to approve all current and future applications under the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme.

*8.27pm to 8.30pm*

**9. Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

10. **Reports to Council**

Item 8.1 – Treasury Management Strategy 2020/21

Item 8.2 – Capital and Investment Strategy 2020/21

Item 8.3 – Budget for 202/21

Item 8.4 – Council Tax Premium on Long Term Empty Properties

The meeting closed at 8.30pm

Chairman