

MINUTES OF CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL CABINET

on 3 June 2025 at 7pm

Present:

Cabinet Members

Councillor S Robinson, Leader of the Council (Chair)
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

Cabinet Deputies

Councillor J Hawkins, Cabinet Deputy for Support Services
Councillor J Lardge, Cabinet Deputy for Cultural Services
Councillor T Sherlock, Cabinet Deputy for Sustainable Transport

Opposition Spokespersons

Councillors, J. Armstrong, G Bonnett, J Jeapes, J Raven, M Steel, A Thorpe-Apps, R. Whitehead and P. Wilson

Also present: Councillors H Clark, Hyland and A Sosin

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Foster.

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.

None were declared.

3. Minutes and Decisions Called-in

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

4. Public Questions

One public question had been submitted in advance for the meeting, asking about a record of the council vote to implement entrance fees for the Chelmsford Museum, the meeting a vote took place at and the number voting for and against.

In response the Leader of the Council stated that Chelmsford City Council (in common with every other council in the country) was facing huge financial challenges and the costs of emergency housing and fuel had more than trebled. It was noted that the City Council had to find savings of more than £4 million in order to balance the budget this year, and over £6 million last year, that was the context for admissions charges at the Museum of Chelmsford and that the museum would still cost residents over £800,000 a year.

The Leader of the Council also stated that, charges had been explored and signed off as part of a wider proposal looking at securing the financial sustainability of the venue. This had covered a broad range of initiatives including items such as memberships, new events for members, commercial events, venue hire and improving the retail offer, whilst child admissions would still be free. It was noted that not every decision had to come to a formal meeting, many items can be decided under delegated powers, in particular if they referred to amounts below certain limits. The cabinet deputy for Cultural Services, Cllr Lardge, had been regularly consulted and briefed on the changes, including admission fees. It was noted that a final proposal had been approved by the appropriate Director on 24th January 2025 and had been signed off under the Officer Scheme of Delegation as set out in the constitution.

5. Members' Questions

At this point of the meeting, Cabinet Members were asked questions by members of the opposition and other Councillors.

Councillor Thorpe-Apps asked a question about the strategic allocation of CIL which was allocated through Cabinet discretion and where it was guided. They stated that CIL receipts for South Woodham Ferrers would be ringfenced, unlike for Warren Farm and why no ringfencing existed in that example. They stated that it would be in support of the Local Plan to ringfence to support local infrastructure.

In response the Cabinet Member for Greener Chelmsford stated that, in order to fund required infrastructure, a number of financial mechanisms were used. It was noted that Strategic CIL was pooled into one fund, which could be used for infrastructure needed to support new development across the Council's area. It was also noted that most developments had cumulative impacts, best mitigated by using the strategic CIL pool to target the most needed improvements. The Cabinet Member also stated that SWF was a defined settlement with any impacts likely to be felt within the settlement itself, therefore leading to it being appropriate to

ringfence the spend of CIL within that area. The Cabinet also heard that for other sites, including West Chelmsford, the impacts were likely to be felt across the City Centre area and it was therefore helpful to pool the strategic CIL and prioritise it accordingly, also that the S106 agreement for the site would ensure that site specific infrastructure requirements were delivered separately to any CIL collected, ensuring the site is acceptable in planning terms. The Cabinet Member also stated that due to Writtle Parish Council having a Neighbourhood Plan they would receive 25% of CIL payments (c.£2m) which could be spent to mitigate any impact from the development

Councillor Hyland asked a question about the introduction of garden waste collection charges and asked if it was a stealth tax, charging the public twice for doing the right thing by recycling.

In response the Cabinet Member for a Safer Chelmsford stated that, the Council had held off for many years in introducing the charge, had been one of the last districts in the Country to do so and had to due to rising costs and budget pressures. They stated that income had been lagging well behind funding, which had dropped in real terms by around £11m per year since 2010/11 and that there was not a statutory duty to collect garden waste free of charge, unlike household and food waste. The Cabinet Member explained that the costs of collecting non statutory recycling or garden waste had been met from charges to other services such as Car Parking as Council Tax was not sufficient to cover the services the Council had to provide. It was also noted that the service was an opt in service, around 50% of eligible properties had signed up and alternative forms of recycling garden waste such as home composting were possible. In response to follow up points about other stealth tax increases, concerns around poorer parts of the City being penalised and free monthly collections, the Cabinet Member stated that Council Tax increases were capped, the public had been well informed of the changes, those on Council Tax Support received discounts and no other charges were currently planned.

Councillor Hyland asked a second question about LGR and the headline figures being used by each Council to assess size of transition and about a cost benefit analysis.

In response the Leader of the Council stated that, much of their time had been taken up by LGR and would continue to do so and that money would have to be spent on it. It was noted that the Government had agreed to make some funds available to local authorities to prepare their submissions and that districts were commissioning some work, that was more orientated to districts rather than existing commissioned work which focused on issues for County tier Council's. The Leader of the Council stated that they wanted Local Government to remain as local as possible, LGR would cost a large sum of money up front and that savings did not appear possible in the next 5-10 years, but it was the Government who were pushing on with the plans. It was noted that before submission of the Council's responses there would be an all member briefing and a special Cabinet meeting if required, depending on timescales. In response to a follow up about time and data metrics, the Leader of the Council stated that LGR had been a Government proposal and at this stage it was not possible to quantify the financial costs, although it was clear they would be high.

Councillor Whitehead asked a question about progress with the Local Plan and in response was informed that the relevant milestones for transitional arrangements had so far been

achieved, feedback from the most recent consultation would come to Chelmsford Policy Board soon with a submission for examination later in the year.

6.1 Beaulieu Station Car Park Proposed 2025/26 Fees and Charges (Economic Development and Property)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to consider proposed fees and charges for Beaulieu Station Car Park, which would consist of 290 spaces, with 38 free for blue badge users. It was noted that the Council would be responsible for managing the car park, so were required to set fees ahead of the opening of the new station later in the year. The Cabinet heard that the proposed fees were competitive to other station operated car parks and would lead to an expected net annual income of £103,533 after taking into effect staffing costs and a small displacement of car parking from Townfield Street car park to the new station.

Options:

1. Approve the fees and charges as presented.
2. Approve the fees and charges as presented with amendments.
3. Decline to approve the Fees and Charges.

Preferred option and reasons:

The proposed tariffs would ensure that the Beaulieu Station car park operated competitively within the wider off-street parking market in Chelmsford, to effectively manage demand and to generate sufficient income to be able to adequately maintain and re-invest in the facility.

Discussion:

In response to questions, it was confirmed that plans for permit parking in Beaulieu were underway and would be in place before the station opened. It was also confirmed that other station car park charges had been looked at and the proposed fee was higher than Townfield Street Car Park to prevent lots of displacement from the City Centre to the new Car Park. It was also noted that season ticket fees were being explored by officers, but firstly the daily fee needed to be set, but that season tickets would be available before the station opens. The Cabinet also heard that other roads nearby the station may require parking restrictions as a result, but this would need to be looked at on a case by case basis and that restrictions could be put in quickly if required.

RESOLVED that the Fees and Charges as presented be approved.

(7.20pm to 7.28pm)

7.1 Proposed Changes to the Constitution (Leader)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to consider proposed changes to the Constitution, that had been recommended by the cross-party Constitution working group and covered areas including financial arrangements, executive and non-executive decisions and budget/policy frameworks.

Options:

1. Recommend the proposed changes to Council.
2. Recommend amendments to proposed changes to Council.
3. Do not recommend to Council that proposed changes are made.

Preferred option and reasons:

Option 1 was the preferred option as the changes had been recommended by the Constitution Working Group.

RECOMMENDED to Council that that the proposed changes set out in Appendices 1-3 of the report are made to the Constitution.

(7.28pm to 7.29pm)

8.1 Community Infrastructure Levy Governance Review (Greener)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to consider proposed changes to the Council's Community Infrastructure Governance document as set out in the report. It was noted that the changes reflected the required constitutional change that decisions on how CIL was spent was an executive function along with some other minor changes. It was noted that the revisions improved clarity and ensure the governance process was more aligned with the Council's strategic priorities.

Options:

1. Agree the proposed changes to the Community Infrastructure Governance document.
2. Agree the proposed changes to the Community Infrastructure Governance document, with amendments
3. Do not agree the proposed changes to the Community Infrastructure Governance document.

Preferred option and reasons:

The preferred option was option 1, as the changes reflected the Constitutional change that decisions on how CIL was spent was an executive function of Cabinet and other minor updates.

Discussion:

In response to a question, it was confirmed that this was a separate policy to the Constitution and therefore did not require approval from Full Council.

RESOLVED that the proposed changes set out in the report are made to the Community Infrastructure Governance Document for publication on the Council's website.

(7.30pm to 7.35pm)

8.2 Updated Essex Parking Guidance and Standards (Greener)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to consider a recommendation from the Chelmsford Policy Board, to approve updated Essex Parking Guidance and Standards. It was noted that the documents had been commissioned through the Essex Planning Officers Association and looked ahead to the future, with changing car use including larger cars, EV charging and the need for accessible spaces. The Cabinet also heard that the existing documents were out of date and the updated guidance was required.

Options:

1. Approve the updated Essex Parking Guidance and Standards.
2. Not approve the Updated Essex Parking Guidance and Standards.

Preferred option and reasons:

Option 1 was the preferred option, to ensure that Chelmsford City Council makes consistent decisions on planning proposals and applications using the most up-to-date supporting evidence. As discussed at Chelmsford Policy Board, an option to amend the parking standards and guidance was not considered feasible or necessary.

Discussion:

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the documents would allow a zonal approach, with space requirements depending on how well connected an area was to other forms of sustainable transport. It was also noted that the Council and the Planning Committee would still have the final say and the standards could be tweaked as required on a case by case basis, giving the Council flexibility, but with a consistent and up to date starting point.

RESOLVED that the updated Essex Parking Guidance and Standards Parts 1 & 2 as set out at Appendix 1 of the report in the consideration of development proposals and planning applications in accordance with Policy DM27 of the adopted Chelmsford Local Plan (2020) and its emerging review be approved.

(7.36pm to 7.40pm)

9.1 Beaulieu Park Train Station – Taxi Rank Permit Scheme (Safer)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to consider the introduction of a Taxi Rank Permit Scheme for Beaulieu Park Train Station, following a public consultation on the scheme and the consideration of responses by the Council's Regulatory Committee. It was noted that the area of land allocated for a taxi rank was owned by the Council and that the Council would manage the rank and as the landowner the Council could charge a fee for access to the land. It was noted that the Regulatory Committee had considered the consultation responses and had recommended an initial 30 permits be made available on a first come first served basis, but with a priority given to disabled access vehicles, with initial 6 month permits available with options to extend. It was also noted that after the initial 30 had been issued, any further ones would be for the full 12 month period.

Options:

1. To approve the introduction of the Taxi Rank Permit Scheme on the terms recommended by Regulatory Committee.
2. To approve the introduction of the Taxi Rank Permit Scheme on amended terms as agreed by Cabinet.
3. To not approve the introduction of the Taxi Rank Permit Scheme.

Preferred option and reasons:

Option 1 was preferred option as this would enable the City Council to control access to the taxi rank to ensure it is used correctly and also delivered a suitable provision of taxis for people using the station. The income from scheme could also be used to help fund the ongoing management of the City Council owned parts of the Station.

Discussion:

In response to questions it was confirmed that, a drop off/pick up area would be available free of charge and that South Essex Parking Partnership staff would be on site to assist with monitoring the scheme.

RESOLVED that;

1. the introduction of the Taxi Rank Permit Scheme on the terms recommended by Regulatory Committee be approved and;
2. authority be delegated to the Director of Public Places to issue such permits.

(7.40pm to 7.42pm)

9.2 Review of Empty Homes and proposed approach to bring homes back into use (Safer)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet received a report outlining a proposed change in approach to dealing with empty homes and were asked to approve the proposed approach. It was noted that the proposed change in approach would enable better use of the staff resource available and would focus on properties that had been empty for shorter periods, increasing the likelihood of them being

reoccupied. It was also noted that mandatory legal obligations had to be delivered first and foremost and that the bringing of empty homes back into use, was not a legal obligation. The Cabinet also heard that recent LGA guidance needed to be incorporated and this was an opportunity to bring the approach in line with the Council's Housing Strategy. It was noted that there were often complex reasons behind why a home was empty and the proposed approach would focus on those properties that had more recently become empty.

Options:

1. Approve the proposed approach to deal with empty properties.
2. Not approve the proposed approach.

Preferred option and reasons:

Option 1 was the preferred option, to enable better use of the staff resource available to bring empty properties back into use. This change of approach would focus on properties that had been empty for shorter periods increasing the likelihood of the properties being reoccupied with less intervention and renovation works.

Discussion:

In response to questions, it was confirmed that information on the amount of empty properties now paying the increased Council Tax Premiums would be circulated after the meeting and that the Revenues and Benefits team were able to check incorrect statements on Council Tax liability and recover monies or put properties onto the right basis.

In response to questions regarding a moral duty to bring homes back into use, mitigations or caveats for special cases and long term empty homes, it was confirmed that officers were being realistic with what they were able to do, legal obligations for the relevant team had to take priority and the renters rights act would put more obligations onto the team later in the year. It was also noted that it was a very resource intensive task to track down owners of long term empty properties and whilst the Council would prefer to be able to do so, there were not sufficient resources or funding available to do so, therefore a focus on ensuring homes already in use were at high standards would be preferred.

It was also noted that the Council had already introduced the maximum Council Tax levels for long term empty properties that it could legally, and further financial pressure could not be applied. It was also noted that officers would monitor the new approach via looking at empty homes and would continue to monitor the overall number of empty homes.

RESOLVED that;

1. the approach outlined in the report be approved and;
2. that if Compulsory Purchase arrangements are considered to be required following investigations into empty properties, that the details of these properties are brought back to Cabinet to request approval to pursue a Compulsory Purchase Order.

(7.43pm to 8.03pm)

The meeting closed at 8.03pm

Chair