

**MINUTES OF
CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL CABINET**

on 28 January 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 L Foster, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for a Fairer Chelmsford
Councillor R Moore, Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford

Cabinet Deputies

Councillor S Goldman, Cabinet Deputy for Economy and Strategic Projects
Councillor J Lardge, Cabinet Deputy for Cultural Services
Councillor T Sherlock, Cabinet Deputy for Sustainable Transport

Opposition Spokespersons

Councillors, J. Armstrong, J Jeapes, J. Raven, M Steel, and R. Whitehead

Also present: Councillors B. Knight and A. Sosin

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Hyland, Sismey, Thorpe-Apps and Wilson.

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.

3. Minutes and Decisions Called-in

The minutes of the meeting on 12 November 2024 were confirmed as a correct record. No decisions had been called in.

4. Public Questions

No public questions had been submitted for the meeting.

5. Members' Questions

Cllr Steel asked a question regarding land that they understood had been purchased in Little Waltham for tree planting. They asked if the purchase could be confirmed, the price, the number of trees and how planting had been going so far and if the land was still open to the public.

In response the Cabinet Member for Greener Chelmsford, stated that the land referred to had been purchased using funding that had been assigned in the budget for a woodland creation scheme. They stated that the land was of a large enough size, that the Council would be able to plant the remaining trees required to hit the set target. The Cabinet also heard that the land would be used as a tree planting volunteer site and that there were rights of ways in between sections of the land. In response to a further question regarding the specific cost, it was confirmed that this figure could not be revealed, due to the commercial nature, but that the figure could be sent to Cllr Steel outside of the meeting.

6.1 Budget Report 2025/26 (Finance)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The report to the meeting contained recommendations for the setting of the Revenue and Capital Budgets for 2025-26 and the level of Council Tax for that year.

Options:

To agree or vary the proposals contained within this report whilst paying regard to the financial sustainability of any amendments.

Preferred option and reasons:

Recommend the report to Council for consideration so meeting statutory obligations.

Discussion:

The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the 2025/26 Budget and informed the Cabinet, that this had been the most difficult budget they had experienced. However, they had still been able to propose a balanced budget meaning services relied upon by residents would continue to be delivered, the council tax increase was at the 3% level set by Government and that finances remained sound and reserves healthy.

The Cabinet Member for Finance highlighted that finances had been under pressure for over two decades but pressure had increased further in the last five years and that the assistance

expected from Government had not arrived, instead further funding was in future to be taken away from the Council. The Cabinet heard that as in previous years, the cost for temporary accommodation had continued to rise, wages and National Insurance contributions had continued to rise and Council Tax could only be raised by 3%. The Cabinet also heard that the recent peer review noted that Chelmsford had been “delivering commendable outcomes for the people of Chelmsford” and that the proposed budget would enable this to continue. The Cabinet Member for Finance also stated that once the proposed budget had been agreed, the Council would put together a financial plan to address the next 2 years .

The Cabinet heard from other Councillors at the meeting that costs had continued to increase faster than revenues and that a back to basics approach on all spending was required to resolve the financial problems. The Cabinet also heard that the previous administration also had to deal with issues such as the lowering of Government grants. The Cabinet also heard that the opposition held different views on capital spend to the administration, which would be discussed further at Full Council. Due to Local Government Reorganisation it would only be useful to forecast a budget no further than two years away and that the majority of residents were still happy with the day to day services being provided. The Cabinet also heard that due to how well the Council managed temporary accommodation, it had led to greater numbers seeking assistance in Chelmsford.

In response to the comments and questions raised, the Cabinet Member for Finance stated that there had been many more issues, that had affected the Council’s finances in recent years, compared to the previous administration. They also stated that generating additional income from buying properties for rental income, had now been stopped by central government, something the previous administration was allowed to do. The Cabinet also heard that the previous administration’s budgets had forecasted external borrowing in the future, which still remained the case. The Cabinet Member for Finance also stated that they wanted the largest capital programme possible, that was affordable. To that end the programme would be reviewed in the next year to ensure it remained affordable. The Cabinet also heard that costs such as temporary accommodation were now much higher than 5 years ago which had caused most of the Council’s current budget problem. The Cabinet were informed that simply stopping non statutory spending was not practical and that the Council had to be ambitious, in making Chelmsford a better place for its residents to live in. The Cabinet Member for Finance also stated that the Council only housed those with local connections, many who had become homeless due to the local and national housing crisis. The Cabinet also heard that in relation to LGR, the goalposts for future finances had effectively been moved but that it remained important to hand over sound finances in the future.

The Cabinet also heard from the Leader of the Council, who emphasised the systematic differences in the financial problems facing local government, compared to in previous years. They also stated that the Council’s finances would be broadly ok without the higher costs for temporary accommodation, which remained the largest financial issue facing the Council. They highlighted the 505 homeless households within Chelmsford, with average costs of around £13k annually per household. The Cabinet also heard that risks would not be taken with investments or spending, but as detailed in the budget, investment spending would take place on Capital projects at Riverside Ice & Leisure for example.

RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL the contents of Appendix 1, the budget report, being:

- i. The new Revenue and Capital investments in Council Services shown in **Section 5**
- ii. The delegations to undertake the new capital schemes identified in **Section 5**, Tables 12a and 12b

- iii. The Revenue Budgets in **Section 10** and Capital Budgets in **Section 11**
- iv. An increase in the average Band D level of Council Tax for the City Council to £228.07 (2.96%), the maximum allowed before a referendum, in **Section 9**
- v. The movement in reserves shown in **Section 7**

- vi. The Budget forecast in **Section 7** and in **Section 8** the s151 officer's review of the budget, which Members are required to note.

- vii. Special expenses, Parish and Tier Councils' precepts as identified in **Section 9**, Table 22 (These will not be available until Full Council).
- viii. Delegation to the Chief Executive to agree, after consultation with the Leader of the Council, the pay award for 2025/26 within the normal financial delegations.

RESOLVED that;

- i. A delegation to the S151 Officer to update the budget report for Parish and Tier precepts, changes to final Government settlement, and Business Rate Retention income following completion of NNDR1 statutory return to Government, after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance.
- ii. A delegation to S151 officer to prepare a legal Budget resolution for submission to Council for consideration after consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance.
- iii. The changes to fees and charges determined by Full Council on 18th December 2024 as reflected in Section 4.

(7.06pm to 7.31pm)

6.2 Capital, Treasury Management and Investment Strategies 2025/26 (Finance)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet received a report setting out a proposed approach to the management of the Council's cash, capital investments (the capital expenditure programme) and other types of investment, including property.

Options:

1. Accept the recommendations contained within the report and appendices.
2. Recommend changes to the way the Council's investments are to be managed.

Preferred option and reasons:

Recommend the report to Council without amendment for consideration and thereby meet statutory obligations.

RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL that they approve the Capital, Treasury Management and Investment Strategies

(7.32pm to 7.33pm)

6.3 Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2025/26 (Finance)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet was informed that the Council was required to approve, by 11 March 2025, a Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2025-26. It was proposed that the Scheme adopted for 2024-25 be retained in its current form. The Cabinet noted that in future years the report would be presented in the Autumn.

Options:

Retain the present scheme or adopt an amended version.

Preferred option and reasons:

The existing scheme would be affordable to the Council and fair to recipients of Council Tax support.

RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL that the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024-25 be retained as the Scheme for 2025-26.

(7.34pm to 7.35pm)

6.4 Discretionary Business Rate Relief Policy 2025/26 (Finance)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to amend the existing Discretionary Business Rate Relief policy to give effect to changes to business rates reliefs announced by the Government.

Options:

- 1 To agree the proposed amendments
- 2 To reject the proposed amendments

Preferred option and reasons:

To agree the proposed amendments to update the policy and give effect to Government changes in Business Rate liabilities.

Discussion:

RESOLVED that the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy 2025/26 be agreed

(7.35pm to 7.37pm)

7.1 ARU Masterplan (Greener)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to approve the Masterplan for the Rivermead Campus of Anglia Ruskin University, as recommended by the Chelmsford Policy Board in November 2024.

Options:

1. Cabinet approve the Masterplan, which was recommended to be approved by Policy Board on 7 November 2024
2. Cabinet do not approve the Masterplan
3. Cabinet amend the Masterplan

Preferred option and reasons:

To approve the Masterplan as recommended by the Policy Board, which had not had any changes made since.

Discussion:

The Cabinet were informed that the masterplan highlighted a strong future vision for Anglia Ruskin University and there was a duty upon educational institutions to evidence that they were planning for the future. The Cabinet Member for Greener Chelmsford, stated that they were happy to support the recommendation from the Chelmsford Policy Board to adopt the Masterplan. They highlighted that the document importantly, reflected the need to involve a wider community and diverse mix of stakeholders and that high levels of engagement had taken place. The Cabinet Member also thanked officers for their assistance in helping to produce a masterplan that was suitable to be adopted.

The Opposition Spokesperson for Greener Chelmsford highlighted the flexibility of the masterplan and that the proposed expansion for the University was positive news for Chelmsford. They asked about the impact of student housing on nearby rental prices and whether the masterplan could adapt to keep pressure off the current housing market. In response, the Cabinet heard that the masterplan detailed opportunities for the residential zone which would be looked at but that accommodation costs could not be set as part of planning applications.

RESOLVED that the masterplan be approved.

(7.37pm to 7.44pm)

8. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

9. Reports to Council

Items 6.1,6.2 and 6.3 were subject of a recommendation to Council.

Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for item 10.1 on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within paragraph 3 of Part 1 of the Schedule 12A to the Act (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person including the authority holding that information).

10.1 Waterhouse Lane Car Park (Deputy Leader)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet received a report providing them with an update on a proposed change of use for the Waterhouse Lane Car Park. The Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford informed Cabinet about the proposed change of use and that a future report would be brought to Cabinet to formally approve any change.

Options:

Cabinet were only asked to note the report

Preferred option and reasons:

Cabinet were only asked to note the report

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.53pm

Chair