

MINUTES OF CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL CABINET

on 10 September 2024 at 7pm

Present:

Cabinet Members

Councillor S Robinson, Leader of the Council (Chair)
Councillor L Foster, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for a Fairer Chelmsford
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 R Moore, Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford

Cabinet Deputies

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

Opposition Spokespersons

Councillors, J Armstrong, S Dobson, J Jeapes, M Steel, R Whitehead and P Wilson

Also present: Councillors N Chambers, R Hyland, B Massey, V Pappa, S Scott, A Sosin and M Taylor

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs S Goldman, Hawkins and Raven.

The Chair welcomed the two new deputy Cabinet members to their first meeting, Cllrs Hawkins and Lardge, as the Deputies for Support and Cultural Services. Cllr Foster was also welcomed in their new role as Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for a Fairer Chelmsford. It was noted that the new roles had been put in place, since Cllr Goldman had stepped down from the Cabinet after being elected as the MP for Chelmsford. It was also noted that the deputy roles were designed to allow a wider range of Councillors to have leadership roles, with the roles designed to take up half the time of a full Cabinet role.

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 9 July 2024 were confirmed as a correct record. No decisions had been called in.

4. Public Questions

[One public question had been submitted in advance, relating to the planned closure of HMV in High Chelmer Shopping Centre and can be viewed via this link.](#)

The Cabinet heard that the shop had been open for decades but was now set to close, after being given notice by High Chelmer management without discussion or advance warning. The Cabinet heard that Chelmsford would lose an important music and media store and they were asked what local politicians would do on behalf of residents, as the closure was not in the best interests of the community. The Cabinet were also informed that the shop was culturally and socially important and part of one of the few thriving industries in the UK and that the Council should intervene due to strong public opinion.

In response to the question raised, the Deputy Leader of the Council stated that the Economic Development team were aware of the closure, but not of the circumstances surrounding the decision or future plans, and that they had reached out to High Chelmer management to fully understand the situation. They also stated that the Council had limited control over specific businesses that operate and the retail landscape was largely driven by market forces, consumer demand and the preferences of property owners and management companies.

The Deputy Leader also stated that the Council remained committed to promoting Chelmsford as a destination for businesses which met the needs of the local community, whilst contributing positively to the local economy and that work would continue with the Business Improvement District to help shape Chelmsford's retail offer. The Cabinet also heard that the Council had reached out directly to HMV to understand the situation, to offer support in identifying a suitable alternative premises and to provide signposting to redundancy support to share with those employees at risk or redundancy.

In response to a follow up question, querying what local politicians would specifically do, the Deputy Leader, reiterated the steps that had already been taken as covered in their initial answer and stated that it was not within a local authorities power to dictate which retail premises should be on a High Street.

5. Members' Questions

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

In response to a question from Cllr Scott, regarding the planned removal by the Government of the Winter Fuel Allowance, the Leader of the Council stated that it was not a matter the Cabinet or Council was responsible for. They also stated that their administration did not support the Government plans and that the MP for Chelmsford had signed a motion in parliament against the removal. In response to a follow up question on the potential homelessness as a result of the change, the Leader stated that any homelessness

applications would be processed by the team in the usual way. They also referred to the list of warm spaces on the Council website, which the Cabinet Member for a Safer Chelmsford, agreed to check was up to date.

In response to questions from Cllr Hyland, regarding a concern at the Moreland development in South Woodham Ferres and on housing completions, the Leader of the Council, thanked Cllr Hyland for the advance notice of the questions and stated that the Cabinet were not responsible for planning applications and specific questions on housing delivery, would be more suitable at the November Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford, did though respond to the elements of the questions they were able to. The Cabinet heard that regarding the Moreland Development, the situation regarding a sewer tanker having to be emptied daily, was not ideal and under the planning application, the development should be connected to the mains sewerage. The Cabinet Member stated that a neighbouring landowner had damaged the connection, leading to the temporary solution and that they were now disputing the right of the developer to connect through their land. It was noted that a new connection should be in place within the next two weeks.

In response to Cllr Hyland's question on housing completions, the Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford stated that, they were not able to withhold planning permissions from developers, who had not built out their other permissions. It was also noted that permissions did have a three year time limit for commencement before elapsing, but that the Council also needed to be able to demonstrate a pipeline of future permissions and completions to meet requirements. The Leader of the Council also noted that they shared the frustrations raised with housing completions, and the difficulty in meeting affordable housing targets, when completions were based on decisions from older grants of planning permission. It was also agreed that Cllr Hyland, be sent written responses to the two questions, by the Cabinet Member for a Greener Chelmsford.

Other questions were asked by opposition members under the relevant items already on the agenda.

6.1 National Planning Policy Framework Consultation Response (Greener Chelmsford)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to consider the proposed consultation responses to the Government's consultation on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other changes to the planning system. The Cabinet heard that the proposed changes to the NPPF had been published by government for consultation, on 30th July 2024, with a closing date of 24 September. It was noted that the consultation set out specific changes, including measures to seek to achieve universal national local plan coverage, economic growth and the building of 1.5 homes over the next five years.

The Cabinet heard that the proposed changes were wide-ranging and sought to affect urgent change, in particular, the way new homes were planned for. It was noted that to enable the step change in the delivery of new homes, the Government would need to make significant investment in infrastructure provision and subsidy to deliver affordable housing which was not covered by the consultation. It was noted that the proposed re-introduction of statutory strategic sub-regional plans were welcomed, as strategic cross boundary matters could be

addressed more effectively than individual Council's local plans. The Cabinet also heard that concerns on the use of Grey Belt terminology had been raised in the responses. The Cabinet noted that the most pressing matter for the progression of Chelmsford's Local Plan were the proposed Local Plan transitional arrangements, which would need amending to ensure Council's such as Chelmsford, that were well advanced with their plan making, were allowed to continue rather than having to start again with all the associated cost and delay that would arise. The Cabinet Member also thanked officers for their hard work in drafting the responses to the consultation at short notice.

Options:

1. Support the proposed consultation responses.
2. Not support the proposed consultation responses.
3. Support in part and/or amend the proposed consultation responses.

Preferred option and reasons:

To support the proposed consultation responses as the Council's formal response to the consultation.

Discussion:

The Opposition spokesperson for Greener Chelmsford, also thanked officers for their hard work in drafting responses to the consultation. They informed the Cabinet that their group supported the vast majority of the responses, but asked if it was possible to strengthen some of the responses and add further detail on areas including the definition of the grey belt, where it was felt that could be particularly detrimental. They also asked if they could send some further detail to the Cabinet Member and officers outside of the meeting, to see if they could be incorporated into the Council's formal response.

The Cabinet also heard concerns from another opposition member, about the lack of general infrastructure for future developments, and the importance of it being in place before developments were started. The Cabinet heard that the responses could be strengthened in that regard and stated that it was difficult to enable growth in communities, without the infrastructure elements being in place, with the capacity of the A12 and A414 in particular being highlighted.

The Cabinet heard from officers that any minor comments passed on by the opposition group, could be looked at with the Cabinet Member and potentially incorporated into the response, but anything substantive should be raised at the meeting rather than via email. The Cabinet were also informed that officers always looked to prioritise infrastructure where possible, ready for future developments and each development had to be able to mitigate its own impact on elements such as highways.

The Cabinet also heard concerns regarding the proposed one month transitional period, for Council's such as Chelmsford, that had well developed Local Plans. It was noted that this should be made clear in the response, as it was the main issue that could affect Chelmsford. The Leader of the Council agreed and stated that they had held meetings with the Housing Minister, to emphasise that point and that they had also raised concerns about needing more powers to enforce affordable housing targets.

RESOLVED that subject to any minor amendments arising from discussions between the opposition spokesperson for Greener Chelmsford and the Cabinet member for Greener Chelmsford, the responses to the consultation questions set out at Appendix 1 be supported and sent to Government as this Council's formal response.

(7.18pm to 7.38pm)

7.1 Waste Strategy for Essex (Safer Chelmsford)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to decide whether to support the principles and priorities of the Waste Strategy for Essex which had been formally adopted by Essex County Council in their statutory role as waste disposal authority. The Cabinet heard that the strategy had been developed by Essex and the 12 Borough, District and City Council's within Essex and that it had been driven by the need to rethink the approach to waste management and its practices. The Cabinet heard that four principles underpinned the approach to treat waste as a resource, by moving to a circular economy, applying the waste hierarchy, collaborating and innovating and educating and engaging.

The Cabinet were also informed that by 2035, the strategy aimed for 65% of waste to be reused, recycled or composted and that the City Council were well positioned to meet the target. It was also noted that the City Council already offered a comprehensive kerbside separated collection service under its own policies and that it was already compliant in all aspects with the Waste Strategy for Essex, in terms of resident access to collection services. The Cabinet were informed of the importance of increasing the collective recycling performance and reducing black bin waste as much as possible, to reduce the amount being sent for incineration. The Cabinet heard that there were no inherent conflicts or tensions between the Strategy and the Council's own policies and that the Strategy did not limit the City Council's ability to determine its own and future collection arrangements. The Cabinet Member thanked officers and the previous Cabinet member for their help in assisting with the production of the strategy.

Options:

1. To support the principles and priorities of the Waste Strategy for Essex.
2. To not support the principles and priorities of the Waste Strategy for Essex.
3. To support in part the principles and priorities of the Waste Strategy for Essex.

Preferred option and reasons:

To support the principles and priorities of the Waste Strategy for Essex as there would be benefits to working in a partnership and there were no inherent conflicts or tensions between the Waste Strategy for Essex and the City Council's own recycling and waste collection policies and practices.

Discussion:

The Opposition spokesperson for Safer Chelmsford stated that their group were also in support of the strategy. They stated that it was comprehensive, clear and succinct and thanked officers for their work in helping to produce the strategy.

In response to a question regarding, the potential for toxic waste being produced when waste was incinerated and how the strategy would deal with this, the Cabinet heard that the question would be best answered by the County Council itself as the relevant waste disposal authority. Officers did inform the Cabinet however, that they understood a long term contract for the treatment and disposal of residual waste had recently been let by the County Council but that the Rivenhall plant would not be ready until later in October. It was therefore understood by officers that as a temporary measure, processing would take place elsewhere with residual waste exported and put into an energy to waste plant in Europe.

RESOLVED that the principles and priorities of the Waste Strategy for Essex be supported as set out in the report.

(7.39pm to 7.49pm)

8. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

9. Reports to Council

No reports were subject of a recommendation to Council.

The meeting closed at 7.50pm

Chair