

MINUTES

of the

CHELMSFORD POLICY BOARD

held on 16 January 2020 at 7pm

Present:

Councillor G H J Pooley (Chair)

Councillors N Chambers, W Daden, I Fuller, M Goldman, S Goldman,
N Gulliver, G B R Knight, R Moore, R J Poulter, I C Roberts, A Sosin,
M Springett, N Walsh, R T Whitehead and T N Willis

Also present:

Councillors P Clark, R J Hyland and M J Mackrory

1. **Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J Galley.

2. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting on 3 October 2019 were signed as a correct record.

3. **Declaration of Interests**

All Members were reminded to disclose any interests in items of business on the meeting's agenda and that they should do so at this point on the agenda or as soon as they became aware of the interest. They were also obliged to notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days of the meeting, if they had not previously notified her about it.

4. **Public Question Time**

There were no questions or statements from members of the public.

5. **Affordable and Social Housing Working Group**

The Board received a report setting out the recommendations of the Working Group established to look at ways of improving the supply of social housing and appropriate private sector housing in Chelmsford. Having examined the historic context for the provision of such housing, considered the role of the planning system and received information on the Council's delivery record, the Working Group had looked at how housing need was assessed, how affordable housing was defined and how supply related to need. The Working Group then looked at the type and size of affordable housing needed to meet demand and the impact of changes to the national benefits system.

The Working Group's report contained the main conclusions from its study and the options it had identified for Council-led interventions to address them. All those options would potentially help improve the supply of affordable housing, with the provision of further temporary housing and three and four bedroom social rented homes being the priorities.

In response to questions, the Committee was informed that:

- The financial implications of the Working Group's recommendations would be considered as part of the capital and revenue budgets being discussed by Cabinet and Council in the coming weeks. Until specific proposals for the acquisition of properties came forward, it was not known what the actual cost would be.
- Properties used as temporary accommodation were let on an occupation agreement/non-secure tenancy and the Right to Buy legislation did not apply to them.
- The fact that the rents of affordable properties in Chelmsford tended to be below the cap of 80% of market rents reflected the practice of Registered Providers, particularly in the case of larger properties, charging rents that were below local housing allowance levels; the lower rents were not indicative of the condition of the properties.

The Committee's discussion concentrated on the financial implications of the recommendations. The view was expressed that borrowing to pay for the capital expenditure involved was not the best fiscal approach and that the sale of assets like the John Shennan playing fields site would be a better way of meeting the cost of property acquisitions. Others pointed out that the saving on the cost of paying for short term accommodation for the homeless placed considerable pressure on Council resources and that the proposals to acquire properties for this purpose would, in the longer term, be to its financial advantage.

It was the general view that whilst the recommendations could be supported in principle, it needed to be made clear that they were subject to the Cabinet and Council providing the necessary resources and to the Cabinet being satisfied with the business case for individual proposals. This view was accepted and the recommendation amended accordingly.

RESOLVED that the following recommendations of the Affordable and Social Housing Working Group be approved and that the proposed approach be considered by the Cabinet when agreeing or recommending to the Council the revenue and capital budgets and the business cases for the proposals:

That the City Council:

1. acquires 20 larger family sized street properties for use as temporary accommodation in 2020/21, with further acquisition in future years to achieve the objective for all necessary temporary accommodation being owned/controlled by this Council;
2. prioritises for development four smaller and more deliverable sites owned by the City Council for 100% affordable housing to provide affordable and social rent properties (circa 40 units) in partnership with a Registered Provider (RP) in the period 2021/22;
3. promotes Entry-Level Exception Sites for RP land-led schemes with Homes England in early 2020; and
4. continues to investigate the acquisition of land by the Council for additional affordable housing and entry-level exception sites.

(7 04pm to 8.07pm)

6. **Movement Around the City Working Group**

The Board considered proposed terms of reference for a working group to look at ways of improving movement around the city that had the potential to reduce congestion and journey times, encourage more sustainable travel choices and help improve air quality.

It was agreed that the services provided by bus companies and the associated role of the County Council in that was an important consideration and should be included in the Working Group's work.

RESOLVED that:

1. the proposed terms of reference for the working group on movement around the city submitted to the meeting be approved, subject to the addition of the following as a fourth work stream:
 - d) enable and facilitate collaboration between the City Council, transport providers such as the bus companies and Essex County Council.
2. the working group comprise three Liberal Democrats, one Conservative and one Independent member, the membership to include Councillors Hyland and Lager.

(8.07pm to 8.18pm)

7. **Castle Point Borough Council Local Plan**

Castle Point Borough Council had sought the views of the City Council on its draft Local Plan in accordance with Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. A suggested response to the consultation, generally welcoming Castle Point's commitment to meeting its housing needs in full but seeking assurances that its intentions were deliverable and clarification of housing numbers, was presented for the Board's consideration.

RESOLVED that the suggested response to the Regulation 19 consultation on Castle Point Borough Council's Local Plan set out in the appendix to the report to the meeting be approved.

(8.18pm to 8.22pm)

8. **Future Work Programme**

A proposed work programme for the Board had been circulated with the agenda and an updated was tabled for discussion.

It was noted that the programme was likely to be subject to change, with items such as the South Woodham Ferrers Neighbourhood Plan being included for consideration later in the year and a supplementary list of possible items but without firm dates being added.

RESOLVED that the Work Programme of the Policy Board submitted to the meeting be approved.

(8.22pm to 8.30pm)

9. **Urgent Business**

There were no matters of urgent business.

10. **Reports to Cabinet/Council**

The report of the Working Group on affordable housing would be referred to a future meeting of the Cabinet.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm

Chairman