

**MINUTES OF
CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL CABINET**

on 14 March 2023 at 7pm

Present:

Cabinet Members

Councillor S Robinson, Leader of the Council (Chair)
Councillor M Goldman, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Connected Chelmsford
Councillor C Davidson, Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford
Councillor M Mackrory, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development
Councillor R Moore, Cabinet Member for Greener and Safer Chelmsford

Opposition Spokespersons

Councillors K Bentley, J Raven, I Roberts, M Steel, A Thorpe-Apps and R T Whitehead

Also present: Councillors P Clark and S Goldman

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gisby, Hyland, Massey, Poulter and Sismey.

2. Declarations of Interest

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 24 January 2023 were confirmed as a correct record. No decisions at that meeting had been called in.

4. Public Questions

One statement was made at the meeting on behalf of the consortium of landowners and developers in support of the Masterplan being considered at Item 7.2. It was noted that the final proposals were the result of working closely with Council officers and extensive

engagement and would bring forward the delivery of new homes, community facilities and infrastructure improvements for Great Leighs and beyond.

5. Members' Questions

Two questions were asked by Councillor Bentley at this point of the meeting, other questions were asked by Councillors under the relevant items. Councillor Bentley asked about the Compass Gardens in South Woodham Ferrers, where a play area had been decommissioned with a planned car park extension in its place, but that this had not materialised. Councillor Bentley also asked why no City Councillors had been informed of the procurement process for a refreshments pitch at the site. In response the Cabinet Member for Greener and Safer Chelmsford, thanked Cllr Bentley for raising the issue of the play area and car parking and it was noted that a detailed response would be sent in writing after the meeting. In response to the procurement issue, Cllr Moore stated that this had been a routine and operational matter dealt with under officer delegation. It was noted that no Councillors were informed of matters of this nature and no information had been withheld from local Councillors. The Cabinet Member for Connected Chelmsford also stated that available tender opportunities were always published on the Council's website.

6.1 Amendment to Council Tax premiums in respect of empty properties (Connected Chelmsford)

Declarations of interest:

None.

Summary:

The Cabinet received a report setting out proposals to extend the imposition of Council Tax premiums levied in respect of empty properties once a property had been empty and unfurnished for 12 months or if a property was empty and substantially furnished (a second home).

Options:

1. To agree the extension of 100% premiums as detailed in the recommendations
2. To reject the extension of 100% premiums as detailed in the recommendations
3. To determine a lesser percentage than 100% to be applied in relevant cases

Preferred option and reasons:

To agree the extension of 100% premiums as detailed in the report.

RECOMMENDED TO THE COUNCIL that

1. A Council Tax premium of 100% is levied in respect of empty and unfurnished properties 12 months after the property becomes empty.
2. A Council Tax premium of 100% is levied in respect of unoccupied dwellings, which were substantially furnished.

3. The application of premiums in both cases is applied from 1 April 2024 or such other date as may be permitted following the passage of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill through Parliament, with the implementation date delegated to the Director of Connected Chelmsford.

(7.14pm to 7.15pm)

6.2 Discretionary Business Rate Relief Policy (Connected Chelmsford)

Declarations of Interest:

None

Summary:

The Cabinet received a report asking them 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:

The amendments and additions to the existing reliefs available to reduce business rates bills were a helpful assistance to local businesses.

RESOLVED that the additions and alterations to the existing Discretionary Rate Relief Policy as highlighted in Appendix A were agreed.

(7.16pm to 7.17pm)

6.3 Community Funding Scheme – Discretionary Grant Funding 2023/24 (Connected Chelmsford)

Declarations of Interest:

None

Summary:

The Cabinet considered a report asking them to agree the allocation of the discretionary grant funding for 2023/24 to voluntary and charitable organisations as part of the Councils Community funding Scheme.

Options:

1. To agree the recommendations contained in the report made by the Community Funding Panel.

2. To agree, with amendment, the recommendations contained in the report made by the Community Funding Panel.

Preferred Option and Reasons:

To agree the allocations as recommended which had been through a thorough process of assessment and aligned to the Council's corporate priorities.

RESOLVED that

1. Cabinet agrees to allocate £90,000 in 2023/24 to fund the 15 organisations in the amounts detailed and;
2. The Director of Connected Chelmsford be authorised to prepare and issue the grant offer letters and grant funding agreements to the organisations receiving grants for 2023/24.

(7.17pm to 7.18pm)

7.1 Neighbourhood Plans Update and Delegations (Sustainable Development)

Declarations of Interest:

None

Summary:

The Cabinet considered a report providing them with an update on the progress of Neighbourhood plans in the Council's administrative area. The report also sought Cabinet's approval to delegate to the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development, the statutory functions of considering examiner's reports and recommendations, and deciding what action should be taken in response, including (where applicable) the decision to proceed to referendum.

Options:

1. Approve the delegation of the statutory functions referred to above to the Director of Sustainable Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development.
2. Alternatively, to require the functions to be exercised by Cabinet.

Preferred Option and Reasons:

Option 1 – Delegating these statutory functions would enable timely progress on future stages of the statutory Neighbourhood Plan process.

Discussion:

In response to a question, the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development stated that there would be no requirements to update plans before their stated end date. If for

example they conflicted with newer policy the most recently adopted plan would take precedent.

RESOLVED that;

1. Cabinet delegated to the Director of Sustainable Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development, the statutory functions of considering examiner's reports and recommendations for the six Neighbourhood Plans under preparation and deciding what action should be taken in response, including (where applicable) the decision to proceed to referendum and;
2. Cabinet noted the update on progress on Neighbourhood Plans in the Council's administrative area.

(7.19pm to 7.25pm)

7.2. Strategic Growth Site Policy 7 – Great Leighs Masterplan (Sustainable Development)

Declarations of Interest:

None

Summary:

The Cabinet received a report seeking their approval of the masterplan for the Site Allocation known as Great Leighs – referenced by Strategic Growth Site Policy 7 of the Chelmsford Local Plan. It was noted that this had been recommended by the Chelmsford Policy Board.

Options:

1. The Cabinet approve the Masterplan as presented, updated to reflect the content of the minutes form Chelmsford Policy Board on 28 February 2023
2. The Director of Sustainable Communities or Spatial Planning Services Manager, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for sustainable Development, be authorised to make any revisions requested by Cabinet.

Preferred Option and Reasons:

Option 1 – the masterplan demonstrates how the requirements of the Local Plan would be delivered on the site.

Discussion:

In response to a point raised about school provisions, it was noted that officers would engage with Essex County Council as the education authority and have discussions with them at the relevant time. Officers were also thanked for their hard work in producing masterplans over the past four years.

RESOLVED that the Chief Executive should exercise his delegated authority to approved the masterplan.

(7.26pm to 7.34pm)

8.1 Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement (Leader)

Declarations of Interest:

None

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to approve for publication the annual statement on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

Options:

1. Approve the statement on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.
2. Approve a variation of the statement on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

Preferred Option and Reasons:

Option 1 is the preferred options as there is a legal requirement to approve and publish a statement for the 2022/23 financial year. The proposed statement was a comprehensive and factual account of the Council's current position.

RESOLVED that the proposed statement on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking for 2022/23 be approved and published.

(7.34pm to 7.35pm)

8.2 Cabinet Report on Greater Essex Deal (Leader)

Declarations of Interest:

None

Summary:

The Cabinet were asked to note a report from Essex County Council that set out the proposal for a devolution deal for Greater Essex. It was noted that the three upper tier authorities in Essex planned to submit an expression of interest for Greater Essex to enter negotiations with the Government for either a level 2 or level 3 devolution deal.

Options:

To note the report.

Preferred Option and Reasons:

Option 1 as the report is just for noting.

Discussion:

The Cabinet noted that rounds of discussion had been taking place at various levels regarding the submitting of an expression of interest to the Government. It was noted that no decisions were to be made at this stage, as it was just an expression of interest being submitted by the upper tier authorities. Members queried what benefits would be available to local authorities such as Chelmsford but noted it would be interesting to see what happens after the expression was submitted. It was also noted that at a recent County

Council meeting, assurances had been made that no financial liability would be placed on other Councils to assist Thurrock Council as a result of a possible devolution deal.

(7.36pm to 7.44pm)

9. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

10. Reports to Council

RESOLVED that Item 6.1 be the subject of report to the Council.

The meeting closed at 7.44pm

Chair