

MINUTES
of the
CHELMSFORD POLICY BOARD
held on 5 July 2021 at 7:00pm

Present:

Councillor I Fuller (Chair)

Councillors D Clark, W Daden, S Dobson, N Gulliver, G B R Knight, G H J Pooley, R J Poulter, M Sismey, A Sosin, N Walsh, T Willis and S Young

Also present: Councillors L Ashley, A Davidson and M J Mackrory

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors H Ayres, J Galley and R T Whitehead, who had appointed Councillors S Young, S Dobson and M Sismey respectively as their substitutes.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded that they must disclose any interests they knew they had in items of business on the meeting's agenda and that they must do so at this point on the agenda or as soon as they became aware of the interest. If the interest was a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest they were also obliged to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of the meeting. Any declarations are recorded in the relevant minute below.

3. Appointment of Vice Chair

RESOLVED that Councillor A B Sosin be appointed as Vice Chair of the Policy Board for 2021-22.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the meetings on 4 March and 15 March 2021 were confirmed as correct records.

5. Public Questions

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

6. Private Rented Sector Offer Policy

The Policy Board considered a proposed policy which would enable the Council to offer accommodation provided by private landlords, when appropriate and with the applicant's consent, as an option for discharging the Council's statutory duty to those who were homeless and entitled to an offer of settled accommodation.

In response to questions from the Board, officers said that:

- as the policy could only be used to discharge the Council's duties under homelessness legislation it could not be used to alleviate overcrowding;
- the management agent referred to in the policy was the agent through which the property was let and that agent would be required to meet set standards;
- the period of 12 months under which contracts to ensure the affordability of a property for an applicant would operate would be the minimum period. Should an applicant's financial position change for the worse during that time, the Council would continue to assist them. Whilst the Council would prefer that the contracts did not have break clauses, it would be responsible for providing alternative accommodation for applicants unable to remain in the accommodation for the full term of the contract;
- the policy could be amended to make specific mention of the need for properties to meet minimum statutory safety requirements.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet be recommended to approve and adopt the Private Rented Sector Offer Policy submitted to the meeting.

(7.02pm to 7.14pm)

7. Consultation on Chelmsford Housing Strategy 2022-2027

The Policy Board received a consultation document which would inform the preparation of the Chelmsford Housing Strategy 2022-2027. The document set out the initial findings from the Council's Housing Working Group and the results of early engagement with Registered Providers to ensure that the Council gained wider feedback from the community and other groups, organisations and charities involved in housing in Chelmsford.

Responding to questions on specific aspects of the consultation document, officers informed the Board that:

- the Council would continue to take robust action to bring empty properties back into use and work with partners to achieve that aim;
- self-build property was governed by a statutory register, which the Council helped to monitor, and by the Planning Obligations SPD rather than any housing strategy. Reference to it in the consultation document reflected a demand rather than a need and its role as a means by which housing could be provided;
- assessment of the viability of a development included the build costs, the cost of providing infrastructure and the cost of the affordable housing element. In the case of some smaller developments, such as those of between 11 and 20 units, the Council

may accept a commuted sum from the developer if the provision of affordable housing made the development unviable. This was considered on a site-by-site basis and the starting point was always to seek to include affordable housing in a development;

- housing need assessments continued to identify the demand for different property types and tenures in a locality but they increasingly took into consideration the wider need in Chelmsford and how meeting need at a local level could contribute to meeting the overall demand in the city;
- the reference in the document to the need for accommodation with on-site support for 20 young people was considered to be accurate and an on-going requirement.

The Board welcomed the consultation document which, with the Homelessness Strategy, would help tackle and prevent homelessness, increase the supply of housing and co-ordinate the support offered to the homeless and those in temporary accommodation.

RESOLVED that the document at Appendix 1 to the report to the meeting be approved for consultation to help inform the preparation of the Housing Strategy for 2022-27 and that any subsequent textual or presentation changes are delegated to the Director of Sustainable Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford and Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development.

(7.14pm to 7.44pm)

8. St Peter's School Site Masterplan

A masterplan was submitted for Strategic Growth Site Policy 1b, the site of the former St Peter's School in Fox Crescent. The Council's Spatial Strategy required that the site provide:

- around 185 new homes of a mixed size and type, including affordable housing
- two special needs schools
- open space for recreational activities
- equipped play provision
- new or relocated community facilities to meet evidenced need
- integration of flexible workspace facilities

The masterplan was being brought forward by Essex Housing, the housing subsidiary arm of the landowner, Essex County Council.

The focus of the Board's discussion of the masterplan was the question of access to the site, the provision of a footpath to Canberra Close and parking in Fox Crescent. Although the Highway Authority was of the view that the one main access road shown in the masterplan would be sufficient for a development of this scale, the Board felt that its size and multiplicity of uses were an argument for the provision of a second access. Unless there were strong technical reasons for not doing so, members felt that officers of the City and County Councils should explore the possibility of providing another access to the development site.

Rather than rule out the possibility of creating a footway access from the site to Canberra Close, the Board felt that local councillors and residents should be consulted on the idea before the masterplan was finalised. Members also believed that further thought was

required on the proposal to remove on-street parking in Fox Crescent and the options for its replacement within the development site. It was acknowledged that reconsidering the access and parking issues could have implications for the treatment of the Fox Crescent frontage of the site, the retention of trees and hedges, landscaping proposals and the impact on the site's ecology.

The Board was informed that the independent living element of the masterplan was distinct from the County Council's care home services. Members hoped that its provision would reflect the need and demand for that type of accommodation.

RESOLVED that the officers discuss with Essex County Council the access, parking and other issues raised at the meeting on the masterplan for Strategic Growth Site Policy 1b, the former St Peter's School site, Fox Crescent and that, depending on the results of those discussions, a revised masterplan be submitted to a future meeting of the Board.

(7.44pm to 8.58pm)

9. Chelmsford Policy Board Work Programme

The Board received the latest version of its Work Programme for 2021-22.

RESOLVED that the latest Work Programme of the Board be noted.

(8.58pm to 9.00pm)

10. Urgent Business

There were no items of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm

Chair