

CHELMSFORD CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

held on 22 July 2020 at 7pm

PRESENT:

The Mayor (Councillor J A Deakin)
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor L A Mascot)

Councillors

R H Ambor	I S Grundy	I C Roberts
L Ashley	P V Hughes	S J Robinson
H Ayres	R J J Hyland	T E Roper
K Bentley	D G Jones	E J Sampson
M W Bracken	G B R Knight	C M Shaw
D J R Clark	J C S Lager	R J Shepherd
P H Clark	J S Lardge	M Sismey
W A Daden	R J Lee	A B Sosin
A E Davidson	M J Mackrory	J E Sosin
C K Davidson	R Massey	M S Steel
S M Dobson	L A Millane	C R Tron
N A Dudley	R J Moore	N M Walsh
J A Frasca	G H J Pooley	R T Whitehead
I Fuller	J A Potter	T N Willis
J Galley	R J Poulter	I Wright
M C Goldman	S Rajesh	S Young
S M Goldman	J M Raven	

1. Attendance and Apologies for Absence

The attendance of members was confirmed. Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors A John and M D Watson.

2. Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor announced that she had recently paid visits to the Wilderness Trust, Keene Homes and Essex Dance as well as attending a number of virtual events. A Quiz Night in aid of the Mayor's Charities would be held on 30 July and she hoped members of the Council would be able to attend.

3. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded to declare at the appropriate time any personal and prejudicial interests in the business on the meeting's agenda.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting on 27 May 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

5. Public Questions

A question was asked on the actions of members of the Cabinet at the meeting of the Chelmsford Policy Board on 16 July 2020 to support a review of elements of the proposed Master Plan for Warren Farm (West Chelmsford). The questioner asked whether this showed that the Administration was not fully backing their own Local Plan, which they recommended to Full Council in May and which stated that a bus link must be included for the proposed development at Warren Farm.

The Leader of the Council replied that the Administration was committed to genuine and comprehensive sustainability and the policy objectives in this regard in the Local Plan which include maximising opportunities for providing sustainable forms of transport as an alternative to the use of private cars. The issue with the bus link for the West Chelmsford strategic site was that it had been included in the Masterplan without a detailed assessment of its implications. The link would have an effect on the safety of residents of the Chignal Estate, affect their quality of life, impact on traffic management in the area, would pass next to a children's play area and would involve the loss of mature trees and hedges. Its sustainability had therefore been called into doubt and the Policy Board had asked that its safety, viability and benefits be looked at again. This was in line with the Administration's wish to improve the sustainability of the Local Plan where any shortcomings were identified. In this case, there was scope to promote all forms of sustainable transport, as well as public transport, and the Leader looked forward to discussing possible improvements with local representatives.

6. Questions to Cabinet Members

The following questions were put to members of the Cabinet:

1. Question from Councillor G H J Pooley to the Cabinet Member for Greener and Safer Chelmsford

Could the Cabinet Member for Greener & Safer Chelmsford please update us on progress during the past months following the Council's Declaration of a Climate and Ecological Emergency and accompanying Action Plan, in particular the progress in joining in this with other interested partners in the community?

The Cabinet Member replied that in the year or so since the Declaration the Council had committed to review its own practices and implement changes to address carbon emissions and boost biodiversity with a target of net zero carbon by 2030 within its own buildings and operations. Its electricity now came from 100% renewable sources; lighting in buildings and car parks had been replaced with LED and motion sensors; and procurement policy was reviewed with the effects on climate change in mind. The Council was looking to lead by example and was making progress across all areas of its activities. Working with local people, organisations and businesses to inspire innovation and co-operation in tackling the emergency was fundamental to the success of the Action Plan. To this end, the Love Your Chelmsford platform was being adapted to reach out to the local community and communicate the aims of the Declaration and Action Plan. The Love Your Chelmsford volunteers were helping to educate people about environmental and biodiversity issues and encourage them to get involved in various local projects and initiatives to green their environment and boost sustainability. The Council had also produced supplementary planning documents to encourage sustainable development and introduced the Livewell accreditation scheme for developers. It intended to host a Climate Summit and associated events in October 2020 to engage partners and drive forward the aspiration that the whole of Chelmsford be net zero carbon by 2030. The Cabinet Member also announced the nomination of Councillor Tom Willis as the Green Climate Ambassador to work closely with her and the Love Your Chelmsford team and extend links with parish councils, community groups, faith groups, schools, local organisations and businesses and to prepare for the Summit later in the year.

2. Question from Councillor J Frasca to the Cabinet Member for Connected Chelmsford

How has the Council been communicating with the public during the Coronavirus emergency?

The Cabinet Member paid tribute to the work of Council staff in continuing to provide services to the people of Chelmsford during the pandemic. She expressed appreciation in particular to the efforts of the Corporate Communications and Customer Services teams, which had given valuable information and assistance to residents in recent months. Highlighting some of the measures taken she said that:

- The Customer Service Centre remained fully open, apart from a small number of afternoons to catch up on online interactions.
- Numerous proactive news releases had been issued about temporary closures, business grants, the Council's financial situation and the re-opening of its facilities
- The public had been updated throughout lockdown through social media, using community Facebook groups as well as the Council's own Facebook, Twitter and Instagram channels, with extremely high engagement rates
- The Council's first ever online Q&A had been held to combat misinformation and to help residents with questions and fears about coronavirus
- Animated videos had been produced in-house for the first time to support communications around the predicted budget shortfall, as well as the reopening of the Council's four leisure centres
- The We are Here campaign to highlight the work being done by key workers, people redeployed to work on the community hub and CVS staff, had run on social media from 6 - 18 May
- The first-ever live broadcasts of Council meetings had been supported and promoted

- A leaflet had been produced with key service information and hotline numbers for residents, which was sent to every household in Chelmsford at the beginning of lockdown
- Weekly e-bulletins had been issued to residents with key information about service changes, national guidance and guidance for staying safe when visiting various venues and areas in the city. These had an extremely high open rate with the highest being 65% and average of 56% across the 10 e-shots to date – the average open rate for e-shots ordinarily was around 40%
- A Summer edition of *City Life* had been published, providing information and reassurance to every household in Chelmsford.
- The Communications Team had filmed, edited, produced and promoted a virtual VE Day ceremony, which had been popular and a morale booster for the city during lockdown. There had been 8,000 views on Facebook, 62 shares and 564 likes on Facebook.
- The Team had assisted and promoted videos to keep residents informed, to encourage social distancing and to reassure the public that the Council was doing all it could to protect residents and businesses from the virus and the financial effects of lockdown
- The Council's social media channels had been used to support information campaigns from national bodies such as the NHS and Public Health England as well as the Police and County Council
- The Communications Team responded to every comment on the videos, particularly on the budget shortfall animation, robustly addressing any myths and misinformation while assisting residents with concerns or queries
- 150 of Chelmsford's independent convenience stores had been sent social distancing posters.

7. Reports from the Cabinet Member for Fairer Chelmsford

7.1 Capital Programme Update and Provisional Outturn for 2019/20

The report to the meeting detailed capital expenditure incurred in 2019/20 and the resources used to finance it; set out variations to approved capital schemes and the Asset Replacement Programme; and presented a budget for asset replacements in 2020/21. The Cabinet on 8 July 2020 had approved a new scheme and cost increases of £178,000, shown in Appendix 1 of the report to the meeting and detailed in paragraph 3.1 of the report; and the proposed Asset Replacement Programme for 2020/21, the increase in scheme costs of £106,000 and the rephasing of spend of £129,000 from 2019/20 as shown in Appendix 3 and detailed in paragraph 4.2 of the report.

Savings of £200,000 had been made to the capital programme and £20 million had been rephased to later years. The Cabinet Member was asked whether it was financially prudent at this difficult time to retain in the budget £4 million for trees and tree planting. The Cabinet Member and others emphasised the importance of the tree planting programme and its ecological and environmental benefits. He said that the £4 million provision was mainly for the purchase of land on which to plant trees and little of the expenditure would be incurred before 2021/22, before which the Medium Term Financial Strategy would be reviewed and updated.

During the discussion of the report, reference was also made to the funding for the strategy to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping and to provide affordable housing, which was an important aspect of the capital programme.

RESOLVED that the following be noted:

1. the latest proposed budgets for capital schemes of £144.656m, shown in Appendix 1 and detailed in paragraph 3.1;
2. the outturn on the 2019/20 Asset Replacement Programme of £3.181m, shown in Appendix 3 and detailed in paragraph 4.1;
3. the Asset Replacement Programme for 2020/21 of £4.285m as shown in Appendix 3 and detailed in paragraph 4.2; and
4. the method of funding of the capital expenditure incurred in 2019/20, as set out in the table in paragraph 5.

(7.31pm to 7.50pm)

7.2 Treasury Management Outturn 2019/20

The report to the meeting detailed the findings of the annual review of the Council's Treasury Management function and the rates of return on investments in 2019/20.

RESOLVED that the Treasury Management Outturn report for 2019/20 be noted.

(7.50pm to 7.57pm)

7.3 Medium-Term Financial Strategy

A Medium-Term Financial Strategy for the period 2021/22 – 2025/26 was presented which was intended to serve as the framework for delivering a stable and sustainable financial position to enable the Council to achieve its strategic objectives and help to support the preparation of the 2021/22 budget.

The report also sets out a Medium-Term Financial forecast, but recognising that the course of the coronavirus pandemic, and its effects on the Council's finances, were extremely difficult to predict, the Strategy would be further reviewed in the third quarter of 2020/21, ahead of budget setting for 2021/22. This would allow the assumptions used within the forecasting model to be refined using the most up-to-date data. It was important, however, that the Council considered the risks to its financial position in a timely manner and put measures in place early to secure a sound financial position.

The Cabinet Member said that government support was a critical factor in dealing with the shortfall in income during the pandemic. It was not yet clear how much support would be forthcoming but it was unlikely to cover the budget gap and would be for the current financial year only.

In response to a comment that the members of Opposition Groups did not have sufficient access to the background data on which the Medium Term Financial Strategy had been based, the Cabinet Member said that he was always willing to speak to other members in advance of meetings to provide them with any information they needed on reports. Notwithstanding that concern, Opposition Group members appreciated the difficult financial circumstances faced by the Administration and expressed support for the Strategy.

RESOLVED that the following be approved:

1. the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2021/22 – 2025/26 in Appendix 1 to the report to the meeting;
2. the approach to reserves set out at section 7 and at Appendix 4, including the transfer of reserves in both 2019/20 and 2020/21 to support the General Fund balance set out in paragraph 7.13;
3. the updates to the capital strategy set out in Appendix 3, which reflect the additional internal borrowing as a consequence of the transfers above; and
4. the budget guidelines for preparation of the 2021/22 budget set out at Appendix 5.

(7.57pm to 8.12pm)

8. Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee

The Council considered the Annual Report of the Audit Committee for 2019/20, submitted in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) recommended practice.

The report included among other things a review of the Committee's terms of reference; its work on the audit charter and internal audit strategy; the publication of information about the audit function; the Committee's work programme for 2019/20 and its planned work for 2020/21.

The Council was informed that the Annual Report had been amended to clarify that the reference in paragraph 2.1 to independent members meant external people appointed to the Committee, rather than members of the Chelmsford Independents Group.

RESOLVED that the Annual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee for 2019/20 be approved for publication.

(8.12pm to 8.15pm)

9. Annual Report of the Governance Committee

The Annual Report of the Governance Committee for 2019/20 was presented for approval. It provided information on the statutory and procedural requirements of the standards regime; the terms of reference and membership of the Governance Committee; the work carried out by the Committee in 2019/20; details of complaints received about councillors; the training and development carried out for members; and the Committee's future work programme.

RESOLVED that the Annual Report of the Governance Committee for 2019/20 be approved for publication.

(8.15pm to 8.17pm)

10. Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The annual report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the activity of the scrutiny function of the Council for 2019/20 was submitted for information.

The Chair of the Committee outlined its main areas of work over the past year, which had included examining the annual report on health and safety, a review of the performance of the Parks and Green Spaces service, and considering the findings of a task and finish group on the redevelopment of the riverside Leisure Centre. The Committee had also monitored the performance of key services and activities and had received the annual presentation on the work of Essex Police and the Safer Chelmsford Partnership.

RESOLVED that the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2019/20 be approved for publication.

(8.17pm to 8.19pm)

11. Membership of the Planning and Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The Council was requested to approved two changes to the membership of the Planning Committee. The Leader also informed members that he had appointed Councillor S Goldman to replace Councillor M Bracken as the Cabinet Deputy for the Economy and Small Business. Consequentially, Councillor Goldman needed to be replaced on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor N Dudley should also cease to be a member of that Committee following her appointment as a Cabinet Deputy. It was proposed that Councillors M Bracken and C Shaw be appointed in their place.

RESOLVED that

1. The following changes to memberships of committees be approved:

- a. The appointment of Councillor J Frasca to replace Councillor A Davidson as a member of the Planning Committee, and the appointment of Councillor A Davidson as one of the designated substitutes on that Committee.
 - b. The appointment of Councillors M Bracken and C Shaw to replace Councillors N Dudley and S Goldman on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
2. The appointment of Councillor S Young as Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be approved.
 3. The appointment of Councillor S Goldman as the Cabinet Deputy for the Economy and Small Business be noted.

(8.19pm to 8.21pm)

12. Notice of Motion – Standing Against Racism and Discrimination

In accordance with notice duly given, it was moved by Councillor L Ashley, seconded by Councillor S J Robinson:

“Chelmsford City Council

(a) Acknowledges the recent protests concerning Black Lives Matter and that these do not represent isolated incidents.

(b) Notes that race hate recorded crime nationally has more than doubled in six years from 35,845 to 78,991 in 2018-19. In Essex in 2018-19 a total of 2,846 hate crime offences were reported.

(c) Believes that this indicates that discrimination exists across society including in Chelmsford and the City Council should take action to reduce and hopefully eliminate it.

(d) Welcomes the fact that Chelmsford is becoming a more diverse city and values the contribution that BAME residents bring to our city but believes that there is much more to do to become a fully inclusive city for all our residents in order that they feel safe and thrive.

(e) Acknowledges the need to challenge ourselves as individuals and in our own organisation about the dangers of unconscious bias.

(f) Notes the Government’s finding that the impact of COVID-19 has a disproportionate impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people.

(g) Notes that the council has already begun a process to find out what our BAME residents experience on a day to day basis in the city.

(h) Welcomes the initiative of the council leadership to establish a “Meeting of Many Minds” group, inviting key members of the BAME community to discuss openly incidents and experiences of racial discrimination from first-hand experiences.

(i) Notes that this Council previously adopted a motion to stand against anti-semitism.

Chelmsford City Council resolves to

(a) Adopt the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims definition of Islamophobia, namely "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."

(b) Continue focus groups and meetings, so that we can find out more about how we support our diverse communities and what they expect from us, as Councillors and the City Council as a whole.

(c) Improve knowledge and understanding by using our museums, theatres, festivals and outside events to showcase the diversity of our city.

(d) Monitor the figures relating to hate crimes and action taken via the Community Safety Partnership.

(e) Support the work of the Working Group on Connectivity and Local Democracy to tackle discrimination, encourage participation and open up community discussion. It seems an appropriate forum for challenging our approach to all areas of potential discrimination, beginning with the role that we can play in tackling racism.

(f) Report back regularly to all councillors."

During the discussion of the motion, the view was expressed that whilst its aim and principles were to be supported, its failure to refer to all the protected characteristics in equality legislation and its reference only to Islamophobia without reference to other religions meant that some members could not support the motion in its current form. Councillor Whitehead therefore proposed that the following amended motion, which he said encompassed all religious and racial discrimination, be adopted:

"Chelmsford City Council

1. Acknowledges the recent protests concerning Black Lives Matter and that these do not represent isolated incidents.
2. Notes that race hate recorded crime nationally has more than doubled in six years from 35,845 to 78,991 in 2018-19. In Essex in 2018-19 a total of 2,846 hate crime offences were reported.
3. Believes that this indicates that discrimination exists across society including in Chelmsford, and the City Council should take further action to reduce and eliminate it.
4. Acknowledges the need to challenge ourselves as individuals and in our own organisation about the dangers of unconscious bias.

5. Notes that this Council previously adopted a motion to stand against anti-semitism.
6. Acknowledges the work already done to ensure that Chelmsford welcomes the fact that it is becoming a more diverse city and values the contribution that BAME residents bring to us.

Chelmsford City Council resolves to

- I. Confirm the establishment of the “Meeting of Many Minds” group, inviting key members of the BAME community to discuss openly incidents and experiences of racial and religious discrimination from first-hand experiences.
- II. Continue focus groups and meetings, so that we can find out more about how we support our diverse communities and what they expect from us, as Councillors and the City Council as a whole.
- III. Improve knowledge and understanding by using our museums, theatres, festivals and outside events to showcase the diversity of our city.
- IV. Monitor the figures relating to hate crimes and action taken via the Community Safety Partnership.
- V. Support the work of the Working Group on Connectivity and Local Democracy to tackle discrimination, encourage participation and open up community discussion. It is an appropriate forum for challenging our approach to all areas of potential discrimination, beginning with the role that we can all play in tackling racism and religious discrimination.
- VI. Set up a new Working Group comprising the Leaders (or their nominated representative) of the three Political Groups to establish how the results of these measures will be monitored and to report back regularly to all councillors.”

The amendment was seconded by Councillor P Clark.

Debating the amended motion, members said that the original motion had been drafted to emphasise the urgent need to address particular issues, including Islamophobia, but did not preclude tacking action against all forms of discrimination and racial hatred. The amended motion did not address the issues referred to in the original motion and fell short in not proposing specific action to tackle the problems identified.

On being put to the vote, the amended motion was lost.

Returning to the debate on the original motion, reference was made to the lack of information on race hate incidents in Chelmsford specifically and the concern that without that type of local information it would be difficult to assess the effectiveness of the proposals to address discrimination and racism.

On being put to a recorded vote, the original motion was carried, with the voting being as follows:

For the motion:

Councillors L Ashley, H Ayres, M Bracken, D Clark, A Davidson, C Davidson, N Dudley, J Frasca, I Fuller, M Goldman, S Goldman, D Jones, J C S Lager, J S Lardge, R Lee, M Mackrory, L Mascot, R Moore, G Pooley, S Rajesh, S Robinson, E Sampson, C Shaw, A Sosin, J Sosin, C Tron, N Walsh, T Willis, S Young

Abstained on the vote:

Councillors R H Ambor, K Bentley, P Clark, W Daden, J Deakin, S Dobson, J Galley, I Grundy, P Hughes, R Hyland, G B Knight, R Massey, L Millane, J Potter, R Poulter, J Raven, I Roberts, R Shepherd, M Sismey, M Steel, R Whitehead, I Wright.

RESOLVED that

“Chelmsford City Council

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(f) Notes the Government’s finding that the impact of COVID-19 has a disproportionate impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people.

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(f) Report back regularly to all councillors."

The meeting closed at 9.28pm

Mayor