

**CABINET held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 15 JANUARY 2026 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor P Lees (Chair)  
Councillors A Coote, J Evans, N Hargreaves, J Moran and N Reeve

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), B Burton (Interim Director of Property), K Chambers (Head of Transformation and Project Management), C Claydon (Communities Manager), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager), C Forster (Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer), R Hefford (Head of Housing Solutions) and D Hermitage (Strategic Director of Planning)

Also present: Councillors G Bagnall (Vice-Chair of Scrutiny Committee), C Fiddy (Public Speaker), J Moran (Deputising for Conservative Group Leader) and G Sell (Liberal Democrat Group Leader)

**CAB66 PUBLIC SPEAKING**

Councillor Fiddy addressed Cabinet as a public speaker in relation to the London Road Decarbonisation Project decision. A summary of her statement is appended to the minutes.

**CAB67 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies were received from Councillors Sutton (Portfolio Holder for Communities), Gregory (Chair of the Scrutiny Committee) and Gooding (Leader of the Conservative Group).

Councillor Bagnall deputised for Councillor Gregory and Councillor Moran deputised for Councillor Gooding.

In respect of Item 9 – UDC Neighbourhood Planning Support, Councillors Evans and Hargreaves declared an Other Registrable Interest as Chairs of Stebbing Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and Chair of Newport, Quendon and Rickling Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group respectively. Both confirmed they did not sit on a parish council and were free to participate in the debate and vote.

**CAB68 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting on 16 December 2025 were approved as a correct record.

**CAB69 QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS FROM NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE**

## **COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)**

There were no questions or statements from non-executive members.

### **CAB70 MATTERS REFERRED TO THE EXECUTIVE BY THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE OR BY THE COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)**

Councillor Bagnall summarised Scrutiny Committee's position on the London Road Decarbonisation Project, following the Scrutiny Call-In meeting held on 6 January 2026 and the decision to refer the matter back to Cabinet for further reconsideration. He highlighted concerns relating to financial viability and value for money and said the payback period of approximately 90 years was unacceptable for any investment. He added that Scrutiny had examined cost versus benefits, technical concerns and the viability of the project. He said that the inability to change the scope of the project was problematic, as amending the scope could improve outcomes. A key issue related to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the fact that the council did not know whether it would own the building following LGR. He said if ownership of the building changed, installed equipment like air source heat pumps could potentially be removed, negating any benefit for the environment. He said there was further uncertainty relating to future borrowing interest rates and whether additional borrowing would be required if equipment needed refitting after 15 years. In conclusion, he urged Cabinet to pause the decision until the outcome of LGR was known and argued that the decision should not be rushed despite government grant time pressures, as significant unknowns could prove costly.

The Chair thanked Councillor Bagnall and Scrutiny Committee for diligently scrutinising the matter; while she welcomed challenge, she said the matter had been thoroughly considered by Cabinet and the decision had not been taken in haste.

Councillor Reeve said no new information had been presented during the Scrutiny debate that Cabinet had not already considered when initially debating the matter. He addressed the point raised by Councillor Fiddy about whether the council had a statutory duty on climate change, clarifying that the council did have such a duty under the 2008 Climate Change Act. He explained that this duty required the council to consider what actions it could take as a local authority to support national climate change goals, rather than prescribing specific actions. He concluded that the Cabinet position remained unchanged and that the matter had been exhaustively debated by both Cabinet and Scrutiny. He proposed approval of the original decision to continue the project.

Councillor Hargreaves seconded the proposal; he said that borrowing was matched to equipment life expectancy, eliminating hangover costs. He emphasised that the council had a moral duty regarding environmental responsibility. He said climate change would affect future generations and preventative action was worth the cost.

Councillor Moran said he had concerns about the timing of the project, specifically in light of LGR. He argued that the council should spend money on

projects that provided value while meeting the moral duty of tackling climate change. He said this was "the wrong time" for the project, given uncertainties with the future use of the building.

Councillor Evans supported the project and noted alignment with the ambitious policies set-out in the emerging Local Plan. He also confirmed that technical performance concerns had been addressed through contract specifications and that future tenants, whether council or commercial, would benefit from a comfortable, efficient building.

Councillor Coote said he was disappointed that previous political commitments to tackling climate change had changed.

Councillor Bagnall was invited to respond to Cabinet's comments; he said he supported sustainable climate actions but not wasteful spending of taxpayer money.

Councillor Reeve concluded the debate by explaining that decarbonisation projects, unlike renewable energy, were inherently loss-making but stated that it was Cabinet's view that the project was a moral duty and the work had to be accomplished.

The Chair took the matter to a vote. Cabinet approved the proposal unanimously.

RESOLVED to proceed with the original decision, as follows:

- i. Confirms the project is to continue, and;
- ii. Instructs Officers to build an additional £650,692 into the 26/27 capital programme.

**CAB71 CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (STANDING ITEM)**

Councillor Bagnall said there were no further matters to report from the Scrutiny Committee.

**CAB72 REPORT OF DELEGATED DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET MEMBERS (STANDING ITEM)**

*Councillor Bagnall left the meeting at 7.30pm.*

The executive decision regarding the [Consultation Response - Local Government Reorganisation, published on 29 December 2025](#) was noted by Cabinet.

**CAB73 CCI TARGETS FOR 2026/27**

The Chair presented the report regarding Corporate Core Indicators for 2026/27. She noted that there was very little change from the previous year but highlighted that the long-term sickness target had been adjusted from 5.1 to 5.4 based on a 12-month rolling average, which was considered more realistic given that a small number of individuals could skew the statistics. She proposed approval of the recommendation set out in the report.

Councillor Hargreaves seconded the proposal.

Councillor Sell raised concerns about the household waste indicator, which remained at 50% across the year. He questioned whether the council was being ambitious enough, noting that other local authorities were achieving higher levels of recycling.

The Chair clarified that the council was actually performing better than average, though some authorities were doing better still. Councillor Reeve said that the goal was to ultimately reach 70% but the 50% target was both realistic and pragmatic. He highlighted the efforts for constant improvement and that a new staff member had been appointed to focus on this area. He was satisfied with the CCI as set-out in the papers.

In response to member comments regarding long term sickness and staff retention, the Chief Executive commended the council's HR function and said the compassionate but business-focused support for long-term sickness cases was extremely effective.

The proposal was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to approve the Corporate Core Indicator targets for 2026/27 as set out in the body of this report and [Appendix A](#).

#### **CAB74 UPDATE ON THE CORPORATE PROGRAMME**

The Chair presented the report regarding the Corporate Programme Update and said that the Council had invested in transformation leadership to drive forward its corporate programme. She commended the Head of Transformation and Project Management for her work and said the appointment had exceeded expectations. Furthermore, she said that the Corporate Management Team had agreed to form a Transformation and Project Service Team in order to deliver critical programmes across the council.

The report was noted.

#### **CAB75 UDC NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING SUPPORT**

Councillor Evans presented the report on Neighbourhood Planning Support and said that the Council must now fund this function following the government's decision to stop supporting such schemes. He said this would particularly affect the six larger parishes required to allocate housing through neighbourhood plans

under the emerging Local Plan. He said that the Council were proposing to support parishes with a number of measures, including £5,000 cash grants to each larger village; equivalent value in officer time for strategic allocations; support for smaller communities through the Rural Community Council for Essex (RCCE), and a consultation protocol developed with the parishes. He said that this represented a "radical change" and that the Council would continue to support neighbourhood plans, albeit without the financial assistance of central Government. He proposed approval of the recommendations set-out in the report.

Councillor Reeve said he supported the proposal and it would be a useful initiative for the two villages in his ward preparing neighbourhood plans. He said the documentation was helpful and clearly explained the support available.

In response to questions from Councillor Moran regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy eligibility, the Strategic Director of Planning confirmed that all parishes received 15% of CIL receipts regardless of neighbourhood plan status, rising to 25% if they had a plan in place.

Councillor Hargreaves highlighted the advantage neighbourhood plans provided under the new Local Plan format, where guidance on developable areas helped inform planning decisions.

Councillor Coote seconded the proposal.

The Chair took the proposal to a vote; the resolution was passed unanimously.

RESOLVED to approve the following:

- a. The proposed financial and officer support for Neighbourhood Planning groups from UDC as described by this report, which consists of:
  - i. £5,000 grant to Larger Villages who are proposing non-strategic housing allocations (part of which will fund an SEA)
  - ii. 'In-kind' officer support (to an approximate value of £5,000 in officer time) for specific technical support to Larger Villages who are proposing non-strategic housing allocations
  - iii. General Officer advice/ support for the Larger Villages (as above)
  - iv. Half a day per week funding for the Rural Community Council for Essex (RCCE) to enable them to support up to six Smaller Villages (total £14,700 per annum)
  - v. General officer advice/ support for other communities who may wish to pursue Neighbourhood Planning, subject to availability of resources.
  
- b. A proposed hybrid approach Note to supporting Neighbourhood Planning with UDC Officers primarily supporting the Larger Villages who are proposing non-strategic housing allocations, and RCCE primarily supporting Smaller Villages), albeit with realistic limits for how many communities can be supported at any one time.

- c. To agree to the annual review of the Council's approach/ protocol for supporting Neighbourhood Planning.

## **CAB76 HATE CRIME AND EDI POLICIES**

The Chair presented the report regarding the Hate Crime and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policies, and noted that the EDI policy had been updated for the first time since 2020 to reflect national legislation, statutory guidance and changes to local demographics. The policy included clearer definitions, improved reporting, and robust inclusive practices. She said the Hate Crime policy was designed to set out the council's approach to tackling hate incidents, including antisocial behaviour, with emphasis on easy reporting and keeping tenants informed of case progress. The housing team had also commissioned a mock inspection to identify service strengths and weaknesses. She proposed approval of the policies appended to the report.

Councillor Coote praised the EDI policy, particularly highlighting new commitments to providing accessible services, tackling inequality and exclusion, and offering free Wi-Fi access on council premises.

In response to a question from Councillor Sell, the Communities Manager said the policies could be replicated across town and parish councils employing staff.

Councillor Reeve seconded the proposal.

The Chair took the proposal to a vote; the resolution was passed unanimously.

RESOLVED to approve the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and Hate Crime Policies for implementation, attached as Appendices [1](#) and [2](#)

## **CAB77 HOMELESSNESS & ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY**

Councillor Coote presented the report regarding the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and commended the officers for producing a detailed and well-written document. He proposed approval of the Strategy and invited questions from members.

Councillor Moran said he supported the Strategy but was surprised to see no reference to veterans; he noted that veterans were nine times more likely to be homeless than the general population. He said this was a significant omission given the military barracks in the area and the higher mental health issues affecting veterans, particularly from Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

Councillor Sell asked whether there should be cross-references to other council initiatives, such as the domestic abuse safeguarding work, noting that 19% of homelessness cases relate to domestic abuse.

The Chair thanked members for their comments and said she agreed that reference should be included in the Strategy relating to the Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans.

Councillor Evans seconded the amended proposal. The resolution was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to adopt the new [Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2026-2031](#), subject to minor drafting amendments in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant and Veterans.

## CAB78 LAHF4 PROPERTIES

Councillor Coote presented the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) report and invited questions from members. He said he was delighted to propose approval of the recommendation.

Councillor Sell said he had concerns about ward member notification and property location strategy. He said that when Afghan resettlement properties were acquired, they should be in sustainable, urban locations with good public transport access rather than in small parishes with limited transportation. He referenced positive experiences with Syrian refugees in Stansted, where the church community had provided valuable support, and suggested a similar approach could benefit Afghan families to prevent isolation.

The Monitoring Officer said ward members would be informed prior to families being resettled, but specific addresses would not be disclosed for data protection reasons. Furthermore, she highlighted the 'sustainability' section of the report, which stated that acquired properties would be in sustainable locations. She added that third sector and voluntary sector support would be directed to residents, though specific addresses would only be shared if residents gave consent.

Councillor Hargreaves seconded the proposal, which was passed unanimously.

RESOLVED:

- i. To note the Council's expression of interest to MHCLG by the deadline of 19 December 2025, with a view to accepting the offer of £832,000 LAHF4 grant funding from MHCLG towards the acquisition costs of four additional properties. In view of LGR it is recommended that the four properties be acquired by the council in the 2026/27 and 2027/28 financial years.
- ii. To approve the allocation of the commuted sums currently available to the HRA of c.£850,000 and to identify an additional £50,000 (from either future commuted sums or HRA borrowing), to top up to the maximum required sum of c.£902,000.

**CAB79 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

The Chair said the next item required discussion of a Part 2 report relating to the business affairs of the Council. She proposed exclusion of the public and press due to consideration of reports containing exempt information within the meaning of section 100I and paragraph 3 part 1 Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972.

Councillor Evans seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED to exclude the public and press due to consideration of reports containing exempt information within the meaning of section 100I and paragraph 3 part 1 Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972.

**CAB80 WALDEN PLACE HOUSE**

Councillor Coote presented the report regarding Walden Place and proposed approval of the disposal of the house on Walden Place grounds, as outlined in the recommendation. He said the decision had not been taken lightly but an offer had been made and it was uneconomical to retain the house as a council asset.

Councillor Reeve seconded the proposal.

Members discussed the report and there was a consensus that it was not cost effective to retain or develop the property.

Cabinet agreed unanimously to approve the recommendation set-out in the report.

RESOLVED to approve the disposal of Walden Place House as set-out in the report.

The information contained in the report was exempt from publication as it related to the business affairs of the Council; the exemption category is:

The information is exempt information under Section 100I of the Local Government Act 1972 as it involves the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

*The meeting was closed at 8.35pm.*

## **Summary of Public Statement(s): Cabinet - 15 January 2026**

### **Councillor Fiddy**

Councillor Fiddy addressed Cabinet regarding the London Road Decarbonisation Project decision, which had been referred back to Cabinet for reconsideration following the Scrutiny Committee Call-In meeting on 6 January 2026. She said she had significant concerns relating to the cost of the project, and that local authorities did not have a statutory duty to act on climate change. A previous government review had recommended giving councils this duty, but the government declined. She highlighted financial viability concerns, stating that the annual savings were only £15,000 against a total project cost of £1.343 million, resulting in a break-even point of around 89 years. She noted that this far exceeded the industry standard of 5-7 years payback that sustainability professionals expected. At the final project price, the cost per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> saved was £741, whereas the absolute upper threshold for the government's public sector decarbonisation scheme was £510 per tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> saved. She said that had the true price been known at application stage, the project would not have been eligible for the government grant. She also raised concerns about whether the council would own the building long-term following the local government review, making investment in permanent fixtures like air source heat pumps potentially wasteful. While she previously supported the project at lower costs and prior to the uncertainty caused by Local Government Reorganisation, the changed circumstances meant she could not support the proposal.