



**MINUTES of
STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
17 SEPTEMBER 2020**

PRESENT

Councillors	Mrs P A Channer CC, M F L Durham CC, M R Edwards, K M H Lagan, C Mayes, N G F Shaughnessy, N J Skeens, Mrs J C Stilts, C Swain and Mrs M E Thompson
Substitute Members	Councillor E L Bamford
In attendance	Councillors C Morris and W Stamp

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

In the absence of a Chairman and Vice-Chairman, the Director of Resources sought nominations from the Committee for a Chairman for the meeting. Councillor K M H Lagan proposed Councillor C Swain and this was duly seconded. Councillor Mrs P A Channer proposed Councillor M F L Durham and this was duly seconded.

As the nomination for Councillor Swain to be Chairman for this meeting was received first, the Director of Resources put this to the Committee and upon a vote being taken this was agreed.

RESOLVED that Councillor C Swain be appointed as Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee for this meeting.

IN THE CHAIR : COUNCILLOR C SWAIN

2. CHAIRMAN'S NOTICES

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the first remote meeting of this Committee, held under new regulations which came into effect on 4 April 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the request of the Chairman, the Committee Services Officer then reminded Members of some housekeeping issues, the etiquette for the meeting and asked all Officers present to introduce themselves. This was followed by a roll call of all Members present.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs J L Fleming, R H Siddall and Miss S White. In accordance with notice duly given Councillor E L Bamford was attending as a substitute for Councillor Mrs Fleming.

4. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

Councillor M F L Durham declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Member of Essex County Council, advising that he was deputy cabinet member for Economic Development which included planning, and this was relevant to the second item of business on the agenda.

Councillor Mrs P A Channer declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Member of Essex County Council.

5. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 20 February 2020 be agreed (by assent).

6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was none.

7. IT POLICIES

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources updating the following Council policies due to the addition of new hardware and software following the recent transformation project. Members were advised that the revised policies would provide clear requirements for system usage within the Council both for Members and Officers:

- ICT Acceptable Use (attached as Appendix 1 to the report);
- Email and Communications (attached as Appendix 2);
- Information Security (attached as Appendix 3).

It was noted that if approved these amended policies would meet the requirements of a recent internal network security audit recommendation

A lengthy debate ensued, during which a number of questions were raised by Members and information provided by Officers, including:

- Members were advised how data, which included emails and texts, sent on behalf of the Council belonged to that organisation. Therefore, following specific authorisation and in response to a particular need (which had to be identified), IT were able to implement a monitoring check on a specific email account, for example. In response to further questions the Officer provided further information on the process involved and recent monitoring carried out.
- It was noted that other documents such as Human Resources policies along with the Code of Conduct for Members were also relevant and some matters mentioned by Members would fall within the remit of these documents rather than IT policies.

- It was clarified that personal devices belonged to the user and the Council would not have access to these, however the Council would control any data accessed on that device through a Maldon District Council (MDC) portal.
- In response to a suggested amendment that Members should be informed if their emails were being looked at, the Director of Resources advised that he was happy to include that within the policy as long as there was no legal practice against it.
- The Council as a data controller had to comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 which ensured that the Council kept data safe and only held it for as long as needed.
- Some information was held for seven years on the IT systems, although some planning information was kept for up to 50 years.

During the debate the Officer provided some best practice guidance on the use of out of office email notifications when a person was away from their computer for a period of time. In response to questions the Officer agreed to ensure that the wording within the policy was reviewed.

In response to a question, the Director of Resources advised that he would seek clarification from the Data Protection Officer regarding confidential emails sent by a resident to a Councillor being monitored by the Council.

Councillor K M H Lagan proposed that the policies not be adopted, amended by Officers and brought back to the Committee for approval. This proposal was duly seconded. Councillor Lagan advised that amendments should include a section in each policy for Members as there were differences between Members and Officers and if Members emails were being monitored the Member in question should be informed up front. Members were reminded at this point that the Director of Resources would seek a legal view on some of the matters raised and advise the Committee accordingly.

Following further discussion, Councillor Lagan clarified his proposal, that Officers review the policies and amendments raised by this Committee, once amended they send the amended policies round to Members for comment before them being brought back to the next Strategy and Resources Committee. This was duly seconded and agreed by assent.

RESOLVED that Officers review the following policies taking in to consideration the comments and amendments raised by Members and the revised policies be brought back to the next meeting of this Committee:

- ICT Acceptable Use;
- Email and Communications;
- Information Security.

8. CONSULTATION ON CHANGES TO THE CURRENT PLANNING SYSTEM

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance seeking Members' agreement of the draft response to the Government's consultation on changes to the current planning system (attached at Appendix 1 to the report). It was noted that the consultation (due to close on 1 October 2020) proposed significant changes to the planning system, which would impact on the annual housing target for the Maldon District and the ability to deliver affordable housing on sites under 50 dwellings in size.

The report summarised the changes proposed by the consultation which fell under the following headings:

- The standard method for assessing housing numbers in strategic plans;
- Delivering First Homes;
- Supporting small and medium-sized developers;
- Extension of the Permission in Principle consent regime.

It was noted that the proposed changes would impact on minimum local housing need requirement and the delivery of affordable housing.

A lengthy debate ensued, and Members raised a number of questions regarding the consultation and the Council's proposed response. Officers responded to questions and the following information was provided:

- Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework did not require legislation as it was a Government document and regularly updated.
- Essex County Council were submitting a joint response to the consultation with the Essex Planning Officers' Association and it was confirmed that Maldon was working together with them to ensure a consistent response.
- It was noted that Maldon was one of only a small number of Authorities who had adopted a Local Development Plan and it was felt that more emphasis should be given in the answers provided in relation to this.
- Members were advised that Officers had discussed the questions in detail and a general consensus response identified, however it was noted that there was some level of assumption applied as the full detail was not available in some cases.
- Concern was raised regarding the change to the method for calculating local housing need and in response Officers provided further detail regarding the proposed change and the impact this would have on the District.
- Officers were concerned regarding the impact of the proposal to compare house prices with salaries and therefore more homes had to be built to push the price down. This would have an impact on authority like Maldon where house prices were higher than salaries.
- The impact of the proposal on affordable homes for the vulnerable and elderly was raised.

Following further discussion regarding the responses proposed, Councillor Mrs P A Channer proposed that in addition to the consultation response the Leader of the

Council and relevant Directors send a letter highlighting the particular concerns of the Council and copy this to the local MPs. This was duly seconded. In response the Director of Strategy, Performance and Governance agreed with the suggested letter and commented that Officers recognised the seriousness of the implications of the proposals for the Council. He suggested that the letter be sent prior to 1 October to ensure it was considered alongside the consultation responses. The Chairman then put the proposal to the Committee and this was duly agreed, by assent.

In response to the forthcoming white paper from the Government, Members were advised that due to timescales this would be brought to the Council meeting on 1 October.

Councillor Mrs Channer proposed that Officer review and strengthen the responses to the consultation in consultation with the Leader of the Council. This was duly seconded and agreed, by assent.

RESOLVED

- (i) That prior to 1 October 2020, the Leader of the Council and relevant Directors send a letter highlighting the concerns raised by Members in relation the proposed Changes to the Current Planning System and copy this to the local MPs;
- (ii) that the proposed response to the Changes to the Current Planning System Consultation be amended and agreed in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

The meeting closed at 3.06 pm.

C SWAIN
CHAIRMAN