



## Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 20 November 2024 when there were present:-

Chair: Cllr D Blackwell

Cllr W Gibson  
Cllr B Palmer  
Cllr M Fuller

Cllr M Fuller  
Cllr R Lillis  
Cllr S Mountford

## VISITING MEMBERS

Cllr S Ainsley  
Cllr L Breading  
Cllr S Brooke  
Cllr B Campagna  
Cllr A Edwards

Cllr G Howlett  
Cllr J Knott  
Cllr K Knott  
Cllr L McCarthy-Calvert  
Cllr G Watson

## APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr R Savage.

## OFFICERS PRESENT

A Hutchings	-	Chief Executive
C Adlem	-	Director, Corporate & Customer
I Butt	-	Director, Place & Communities
M Harwood-White	-	Director, Commercial & Assets
D Ghela	-	Assistant Director Housing, Health & Partnerships
A Parrott	-	Assistant Director Climate & Growth
S Worthington	-	Democratic Services Manager
H Boyd	-	Democratic Services Officer

## 130 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

## 131 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 16 October were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### 132 COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

The Proper Officer reported that, pursuant to Cabinet Procedure Rule 13.10, the following question had been received from Cllr G Watson to the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing & Housing

“As Overview & Scrutiny Committee has a busy work plan, can I please ask when the first housing improvement annual report is anticipated to be ready to go to Overview & Scrutiny Committee?”

Cllr Lillis responded to the question explaining that, subject to Cabinet’s agreement, the Programme would be launched tonight and would return to Cabinet in January for final details and resources to be approved. It was therefore anticipated that the first quarterly report to Cabinet would be the end of the financial year (March 2025). It was further suggested that a report would be brought to Overview & Scrutiny Committee in June 2025 providing a full 6 months of progress to report. Cllr Lillis emphasised the importance of sharing early progress with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to enable the committee to make any recommendations whilst the Programme was still underway.

### 133 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Executive which presented to Cabinet the report of the Local Government Association (LGA) following a Corporate Peer Challenge undertaken between 3-5 September 2024, together with associated action plan for delivery.

The Corporate Peer Challenge was a comprehensive and highly valued improvement tool which involved a team of senior local government Councillors and Officers reviewing key Council information and spending three days on-site to provide robust, strategic and credible challenge and support.

The LGA’s report highlighted progress made by the Council since 2022, including workforce reorganisation, improved governance and decision-making, and cultural shifts toward community-led approaches. It praised the Council’s leadership and difficult decisions on major issues such as the Castle Point Plan, housing and finances. Positive feedback from employees and partners indicated increased collaboration and enhanced leadership.

The report identified areas requiring further focus, to restore the Council to good health and place it on a sound financial footing and ensure resilience. These areas were reflected in seven recommendations outlined in the report. The Action Plan to address these recommendations, already partially implemented, included measures such as a refined budget-setting timetable, development of a Corporate Plan, and enhanced internal and external communications. The Castle Point Challenge, which outlines the Council’s ambitions for the Borough, was cited as a key initiative.

The plan for how those recommendations would be actioned was set out in Appendix 2 and it was proposed that this be published on the Council Point Borough Council website, alongside the full report.

The LGA will return within 8–10 months for a progress review. In the meantime, the Action Plan will be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for ongoing monitoring.

Members expressed their gratitude to the LGA for their valuable insights and acknowledged the importance of sustained efforts to achieve financial stability and resilience. They also looked forward to demonstrating further progress during the next review.

In addition, Members highlighted the Castle Point Challenge, which was available on the Council website, with hard copies also available for those interested.

A motion moved by Cllr D Blackwell and seconded by Cllr Palmer that the recommendations set out at paragraph 3.1 of the report be approved was agreed unanimously on a show of hands.

### **Resolved**

- (1) To note the report of the Local Government Association, as set out in Appendix 1 (the “CPC Report”).
- (2) To approve the Action Plan, as set out in Appendix 2.
- (3) To publish the Report and the Action Plan on the Council’s website no later than 30 November 2024.
- (4) To refer the Action Plan to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for monitoring as part of that Committee’s workplan.

## **134 HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Place & Communities setting out the steps and processes that would comprise the Council’s Housing Improvement Programme and requesting allocation of budget to deliver the Programme.

The Housing Improvement Programme was established to address significant shortcomings in the Council’s housing services, as identified by the Regulator for Social Housing following a C3 regulatory judgement issued in September 2024.

The judgment cited failures, including a missed deadline for the 2023/24 Tenant Satisfaction Measures survey and broader deficiencies in data integrity, tenant engagement and health and safety compliance.

The Council acknowledged the findings of the Regulator, including its failure to meet new Consumer Standards introduced in April 2024. The Regulator's role is to inspect every social landlord in the country; as a result of the judgment, the Regulator was now undertaking a wider inspection of the Council's housing service. The regulator's subsequent inspection began with a physical review of services, and the Council confirmed its commitment to full cooperation and transparency throughout the process.

As part of the preparatory work for the inspection, officers had undertaken an assessment of the service against the Consumer Standards. This work identified some critical and significant areas of concern that were self-referred to the Regulator on 5 November 2024.

- **Data Integrity:** Housing service data was fragmented across systems, undermining reliability. Immediate actions were initiated to address inconsistencies and improve integration.
- **Tenant Engagement:** The absence of a clear communication strategy resulted in gaps in tenant feedback and service improvement. The council had begun implementing new surveys and engagement processes to rectify these issues.
- **Health and Safety Compliance:** Although no immediate emergency risks were identified, significant work remained to ensure 100% compliance with statutory requirements, particularly in areas such as asbestos and legionella management.

The Housing Improvement Programme would address all the issues identified by the Regulator in terms of meeting the required consumer standards but was wider than the scope of the inspection and was intended to overhaul and modernise the entire housing service provision.

The programme will be governed by the Housing Improvement Programme Board (HIPB), comprising Members, Officers and a tenant representative. The Board, supported by a Housing Improvement Programme Team (HIPT), would monitor progress with quarterly updates to Cabinet and annual reviews by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Housing Improvement Programme would have five workstreams: Data Integrity, Tenant Engagement, Health and Safety, Resourcing and Partnerships, and Communications. Actions already underway included initiating a new Stock Condition Survey, overhauling the complaints process, and centralising repair request handling.

Members noted that key tasks, including staff training and updated policies, were scheduled for completion by March 2025. The Programme aimed for sustained improvement by March 2026, with critical issues addressed within the first ten months.

The Council outlined its efforts to re-engage tenants through surveys, newsletters, and direct involvement in shaping service delivery. Members

emphasised the importance of rebuilding trust and ensuring tenant safety as a top priority.

Members reaffirmed the Council's commitment to addressing historic failings, meeting regulatory standards and delivering high-quality housing services for tenants.

The Leader expressed his commitment to the programme, affirming that the Council would take all necessary steps to meet regulatory standards, deliver high-quality housing services, and move forward swiftly and effectively, with financial constraints not standing in the way of progress.

A motion moved by Cllr D Blackwell and seconded by Cllr Fuller that the recommendations set out at paragraph 3.1 of the report be approved was agreed unanimously on a show of hands.

### **Resolved**

- (1) To note the contents of this report.
- (2) To approve the establishment of the Housing Improvement Programme.
- (3) To approve the establishment of the Housing Improvement Programme Board and the Housing Improvement Programme Team and their respective terms of reference as set out in Appendices 2 and 3.
- (4) To appoint the Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Housing as Chair and to appoint the Leader of the Council, the Deputy Leader of the Council, Cllr Kate Knott and Cllr Jamie Huntman to be members of the Housing Improvement Programme Board.
- (5) To allocate £165,000 from within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) in the current financial year to fund the initial stages of the Housing Improvement Programme.
- (6) To note that the resource requirement within next financial year identified at this stage of £273,000 can be considered and approved as part of the HRA budget setting process.

### **135 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND UPDATE**

Cabinet considered the report of the Assistant Director, Climate & Growth which provided an update on the use of UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) to support various projects in Castle Point. The report also sought approval for the reassignment of some funding between interventions to ensure expenditure by the deadline of 31 March 2025. Any uncommitted funds were noted as needing to be returned to the Government.

The Council was allocated £1 million, to be disbursed over three years up to March 2025. A report to Cabinet in January 2023 detailed a high-level funding plan and profile: 8% in 2022/23, 16% in 2023/24 and 76% in 2024/25.

Projects supported by the funding had already delivered significant improvements. At Rectory Road Car Park, a scheme to improve the entranceway had been procured, with work set to commence soon. At Thorney Bay Park, funding facilitated a major upgrade to the play area and additional tree planting across the wider site. The Council's community citizen space received part funding which had increased public engagement in consultation events.

Support for high streets and markets included enhancements to the "Choose Local" website and improvements at Canvey Market. The Castle Point Business Accelerator provided tailored support to businesses aiming to establish or expand within the Borough. Employment Plus focused on individuals not in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance, while the Retrofit Training initiative prepared participants to make homes eco-friendly. Community grants benefited more than 20 local groups, funding activities related to sports, wellbeing, SEND, arts and local history. All were community-led projects which not only benefited the participating groups but also positively impacted the wider Castle Point community.

To address underspends, overspends and to ensure all funding is utilised effectively, adjustments to project allocations approval was sought.

A significant portion of the funding allocated to E1 (Improvements to town centres and high streets) remained unspent, despite several schemes being considered. Financial rules requiring a minimum expenditure of £10,000 prevented shopfront improvement projects from proceeding. Additionally, larger proposed schemes involved the use of ECC land or utilities which would exceed the funding available.

To ensure the funds were effectively utilised, a reallocation of £210,000 from E1 to E3 (creation of and improvements to local green spaces) was proposed. This reallocation would support open spaces projects, including creating a sensory garden in Benfleet, implementing flood alleviation measures at Woodside Park, upgrading footpaths with solar lighting in Richmond Park and South Benfleet Playing Fields and enhancing playgrounds at South Benfleet Playing Fields and potentially Woodside Park.

Intervention E11 (capacity building and infrastructure support to local groups) required adjustments due to a revenue overspend and a capital underspend. £14,000 of underspent capital to be moved to E3, while £9,200 from E14 (feasibility studies) would be used to cover the revenue overspend E11.

Remaining funds of £35,000 under E14 would be assigned to develop a Tourism and Cultural Strategy, linking to plans for the Estuary Festival 2025 and other cultural initiatives. An underspend of £2,500 in E23 (strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystem), due to a business support contract coming

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in below budget, would be allocated to E16 (markets, town centres, retail and service sector) to enhance the “Choose Local” platform.

Additionally, £35,000 of unspent funds from E39 (Green Skills Courses) would be moved to E34 (New Intervention) to provide training in functional skills, including English, maths and basic construction. This initiative aimed to equip young people with CSCS cards and prepare them for green construction skills training.

<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Type</b>
E1  (Improvements to town centres and high streets)	E3  (Creation of and improvements to local green spaces)	£210,000	Capital
E11  (Capacity building and infrastructure support to local groups)	E3  (Creation of and improvements to local green spaces)	£14,000	Capital
E14  (Feasibility Studies)	E11  (Capacity building and infrastructure support to local groups)	£9,200	Revenue
E23  (Strengthening local entrepreneurial ecosystems)	E16  (Markets, town centres, retail and service sector)	£2,500	Revenue
E39  (Green Skills Courses)	E34  (New Intervention)	£35,000	Revenue

The Leader of the Council praised the team for their hard work and the tangible improvements delivered across the Borough. Members acknowledged the significant progress in supporting community initiatives, enhancing skills for young people and investing in residents and businesses.

The Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth & Climate Action highlighted the success of the Castle Point Business Accelerator in fostering local business growth and market developments, particularly the creation of a vision for Hadleigh Market. Cabinet Members expressed their enthusiasm for the positive impact of the funding and commended the team's dedication in delivering these outcomes.

A motion moved by Cllr D Blackwell and seconded by Cllr W Gibson that recommendations set out at paragraph 3.1 of the report be approved was agreed unanimously on a show of hands.

### **Resolved**

- (1) To note the projects that have been delivered to date, as set out in section 5 of this report.
- (2) To approve the reallocation of funds between UKSPF interventions as set out in Table 4 of this report and recommended as option 3, to ensure the full expenditure of the grant by 31 March 2025.
- (3) To approve the use of the remaining funding available for feasibility work under intervention E14 to deliver a Tourism and Culture Strategy.

## **136 CASTLE POINT PLAN BOARD UPDATE**

Cabinet considered the report of the Assistant Director, Climate & Growth which provided an update on the work of the Castle Point Plan Board and progress on the Castle Point Plan, which established a cross-party board to oversee this work. Initially, this board included representatives from three parties, though since the May election, it now comprised two.

Since November 2022, the Board had met 37 times, addressing issues such as engagement questions, activities, specifications for evidence-based work, outcomes of evidence-based work and policy content and wording. The Board was heavily involved in reviewing and finalising the Issues and Options consultation document, which was published for engagement in July 2024 in accordance with Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Plan) Regulations.

Where meetings have sought direction from the Board, notes have been taken and are available to view on the Council's website; however, not all meetings are noted, as some sessions serve only as briefings.

From July 2024, the Board shifted focus to policy direction and alternatives for various thematic component, including economic development, town centres & retail, strategic policies, and housing (excluding allocations). Early consultation outcomes were integrated into these discussions, enabling Officers to begin drafting sections of the Plan for board review. Analysis of the consultation feedback, involving input from residents and stakeholders such as the Environment Agency, Historical Society and Essex County Council,



was progressing. This analysis was expected to guide decisions on site allocations later in the year.

The Board remained on track to draft the Castle Point Plan by the end of 2024, ensuing timely decisions to support related work such as the Sustainability Appraisal, Transport Assessment and Infrastructure Delivery Plan. It was emphasised that the Local Plan had not reached Regulation 19 stage, contrary to misinformation on social media and reports in the *Evening Echo*. The current focus was on analysing consultation feedback before determining site inclusions.

Members reflected on the Council's motion two years previously, which led to the withdrawal of the previous local plan due to concerns over green belt development. The Board reaffirmed its commitment to protecting green belt land, reducing housing targets to align with local needs and prioritising brownfield development. A report seeking Council approval for the draft Castle Point Plan's publication and submission under Regulation 19 was expected early in 2025.

### **Resolved**

To note the progress that is being made on the Castle Point Plan, as detailed in this report.

## **137 CORPORATE SCORECARD Q2 2024/25**

Cabinet considered the report of the Assistant Director, Performance Policy & Customer setting out the performance figures for the Corporate Performance Scorecard for Quarter 2 2024/2025. Members expressed their gratitude to Officers for their hard work and efforts in enhancing the frequency and presentation of the scorecard. They particularly appreciated the inclusion of a new performance summary format.

Out of 28 indicators reviewed:

- 21 met or exceeded their target.
- 6 were below target.
- 1 was still awaiting data.

Key points included:

### **Major Planning Applications**

For the first time since Quarter 4 2022/23, performance was 62% which was above the government minimum standards. This marked significant progress, with the area no longer considered at risk of designation.

### **Leisure Memberships**

Memberships increased by 127, bringing the total to 4,911.

### **Long-Term Sickness**

The average days lost stood at 2.26, outperforming the target of 3.4 days. This represented further improvement from Q1, with the HR team continuing to play a pivotal role in monitoring and supporting service managers.

### **Homelessness Prevention**

Achieving the 65% target remained challenging due to the withdrawal of landlords from the private rental sector with just under 58% threatened with homelessness being supported. This is, however, higher than the national average of 52.8% for the period.

Although Homelessness relief performance was below target, the 39% achievement against the 45% target was above the national average of 29.6% for the period. This reflected ongoing issues exacerbated by a national shortage of suitable accommodation, along with the increase in the number requiring assistance.

### **Reletting Targets**

The target of 20 days to relet was not met, with the current average standing at 30 days. Performance continued to be affected by backlogs from the previous quarter, though further improvements were anticipated.

When considering areas for referral to Overview & Scrutiny Committee, it was suggested that Homelessness Prevention should be prioritised, particularly given its connection to the housing regulator performance.

A motion moved by Cllr D Blackwell and seconded by Cllr Mountford that the report be noted and to refer homelessness prevention performance to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee was agreed unanimously on a show of hands.

### **Resolved**

- (1) To note the report.
- (2) To refer Homelessness prevention performance to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further investigation and review.

### 138 MATTERS REFERRED FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

#### a) Update on the Work of the Tourism Task & Finish Group

Cabinet considered the report of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee which provided an update on the progress of the work of the Tourism Task and Finish Group and its recommendations for developing a Tourism and Culture Strategy for the Borough.

At the meeting held on 6 November, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee discussed work undertaken by the Tourism Task & Finish group. Established in February, the group focused on the guiding question: *What would you do in a day with friends and family visiting Castle Point?*

The group engaged with officers, stakeholders and partners to identify opportunities for enhancing tourism and for growing the tourism economy in Castle Point. While the Castle Point Plan addresses land use, the Task & Finish Group focused on a broader scope of tourism, including events and activities. The task and finish group emphasised the importance of promoting the Borough's local heritage and the development of events and local trails to attract visitors.

The tourism sector within the Borough is experiencing steady growth, particularly within the hospitality and food service sectors. However, the Task & Finish Group highlighted further opportunities for development across other areas of the tourism sector in Castle Point.

Considering these findings, the Committee recommended commissioning a consultant to produce a comprehensive Tourism and Culture Strategy for the Borough. It was further proposed that the work of the Tourism Task and Finish Group be incorporated into the specification for this strategy.

A motion moved by Cllr D Blackwell and seconded by Cllr W Gibson that the recommendations set out at paragraph 2.1 of the report be approved was agreed unanimously on a show of hands.

#### **Resolved**

- (1) That the commissioning of a consultant be approved to produce a Tourism and culture strategy for the Borough.
- (2) That the work of the Task & Finish Group is incorporated into the specification for the Strategy.
- (3) That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be invited to scrutinise and comment on the Strategy as it is developed.

### **b) Biodiversity Net Gain Update**

Cabinet considered the report of the Climate Policy & Scrutiny Sub-Committee which provided an update on biodiversity net gain (BNG) and recommended that Cabinet agree to prepare a biodiversity report incorporating a range of BNG Measures. The Sub-Committee also recommended completing a guidance document for developers to encourage good BNG practices in the interim while the full report was being produced.

It was noted that New Burdens funding could be used to support the development of the biodiversity report and any associated action plan, with cost implications to be reported once the document was drafted.

The Sub-Committee raised several questions during their review, expressing concerns about potential abuses, given the increasing number of smaller self-build projects. These concerns were addressed through reassurances that the Community Infrastructure Levy would provide additional checks and balances.

Further discussions highlighted concerns about the implications of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). However, it was clarified that overlaps and interconnections would exist with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) linking these elements effectively. The Sub-Committee also expressed the desire to promote tree and shrub planting and agreed that an urban greening policy within the Castle Point Plan would be a more appropriate approach.

A motion moved by Cllr D Blackwell and seconded by Cllr Fuller that the recommendations set out at paragraph 2.1 of the report be approved was agreed unanimously on a show of hands.

### **Resolved**

(1) To note the work of the Climate Policy & Scrutiny Sub-Committee in relation to Biodiversity Net Gain.

(2) To agree the preparation of the Biodiversity Report including the guidance for developers as part of the Council's approach to meeting its statutory duties under the environment Act 2021.

The meeting closed at 8.20 pm.

Chair .....

Date .....

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