Minutes of the meeting of the Full Council, held in the Council Chamber at County Hall, Chelmsford on Thursday 13 February 2025.

Present: Chairman: Cllr Jillian Reeves
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Ray Gooding

Cllr Barry Aspinell	Cllr Ivan Henderson	Cllr Chris Pond
Cllr Tony Ball	Cllr Jeff Henry	Cllr Pat Reid
Cllr Lewis Barber	Cllr Michael Hoy	Cllr Stephen Robinson
Cllr Susan Barker	Cllr Andrew Johnson	Cllr Peter Schwier
Cllr Kevin Bentley	Cllr John Jowers	Cllr Lee Scordis
Cllr Lynette Bowers-Flint	Cllr Sam Kane	Cllr Lee Scott
Cllr Malcom Buckley	Cllr David King	Cllr Laureen Shaw
Cllr Simon Crow	Cllr Dan Land	Cllr Andrew Sheldon
Cllr Tom Cunningham	Cllr Sue Lissimore	Cllr Chris Siddall
Cllr Jude Deakin	Cllr Derrick Louis	Cllr Mick Skeels
Cllr Sue Dobson	Cllr Mike Mackrory	Cllr Kerry Smith
Cllr Mark Durham	Cllr Bob Massey	Cllr John Spence
Cllr Beverley Egan	Cllr Aidan McGurran	Cllr Wendy Stamp
Cllr Jane Fleming	Cllr Louise McKinlay	Cllr Mike Steel
Cllr Mike Garnett	Cllr Anthony McQuiggan	Cllr Mike Steptoe
Cllr Alan Goggin	Cllr Dr Richard Moore	Cllr Marshall Vance
Cllr Carlo Guglielmi	Cllr James Newport	Cllr Lesley Wagland
Cllr Dave Harris	Cllr Mark Platt	Cllr Chris Whitbread
Cllr Anthony Hedley	Cllr Ross Playle	Cllr Holly Whitbread

Not present but attended the meeting online (these members did not vote on any items):

Cllr Dave Blackwell Cllr June Lumley

Chairman’s Welcome and Introduction

The Chairman informed those present that the meeting would be broadcast live over the internet by way of the ECC Democracy YouTube Channel.
The opening remarks, together with the broadcast of the entire meeting may be found on the ECC Democracy YouTube Channel.

Prayers

The meeting was preceded by prayers led by Cllr John Spence, a lay Canon in the Church of England.

Councillor Jillian Reeves formally opened the meeting.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Cllr Andy Wiles, Cllr Clive Souter, Cllr Michael Hardware, Cllr Marie Goldman, Cllr Paul Thorogood, Cllr Emma Callaghan, Cllr Mark Cory, Cllr Graham Butland, Cllr Paul Honeywood, Cllr Martin Foley, Cllr Peter May, Cllr Jaymey McIvor and Cllr Mark Stephenson.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members were reminded by the Chairman of the need to declare any interests and to do so immediately or at the start of the consideration of any relevant item of business.

The Chairman also reminded members of the advice they had been given by the Monitoring Officer relating to the budget debate:

‘(a) that any member who may have any arrears of Council Tax outstanding for two months or more must make a declaration of interest and you not entitled to vote on the Annual Budget but are not prevented from taking part in the discussion; and

(b) members must also make declarations of interest relating to the Budget debate in accordance with the detailed advice given’

3. Confirmation of the minutes of the meetings of Council held on 10 December 2024 and 10 January 2025

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 10 December 2024 and 10 January 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Public Speakers

The Chairman noted that there were three members of the public registered to speak. The first was Ms Charlotte Bush, a local resident from Danbury, speaking on behalf of a group of residents in the Danbury Common community, asking a question on the subject of speed management at Danbury Common.

Ms Charlotte Bush, having been invited to speak, said:

‘My name is Charlotte Bush, and I am speaking on behalf of the Danbury Common Residents’ Group, a collective of over 55 local households and The Cricketers public house, united in addressing the urgent need to reduce speed limits in our area. I have also been given Danbury Parish Councils unanimous backing on 29th January 2025.

The Problem

Danbury Common is currently subjected to speed limits of 40mph and 60mph in areas that do not align with Essex County’s Speed Management Strategy. This rural area is home to families, elderly residents, schoolchildren, and recreational users, such as walkers, cyclists, and horse riders. It includes blind bends, feeder roads, roadside parking and narrow stretches with limited visibility.

The increased popularity of our local public house, higher post-COVID recreational use, proposed housing developments and increased usage of silent electric cars have added to the risks. Roads lack pavements, leaving pedestrians vulnerable, especially those crossing to access school buses or bus stops. Despite previous surveys indicating most drivers travel within the legal limit, the issue lies in the limits themselves, which are unsuitable for the road geometry, traffic, and community use.

We fear it’s only a matter of time before a fatality occurs, as seen recently in Cock Clarks and Stock Village. We seek proactive measures to prevent this.

Proposed Solution

We propose reducing the speed limits as follows:

1. Lower the current 40mph limit to 30mph.
2. Reduce the current 60mph limit to 40mph.
3. Introduce clear, visible gateway signage to mark the speed changes, as implemented successfully in nearby villages such as Bicknacre, Rettendon and Howe Green.

These changes would better reflect the alignment to your rural village classification of the area, align with Essex County’s Speed Management Strategy, and enhance safety for all users.

Supporting Evidence

- **Essex Speed Management Strategy:** Our proposal is fully supported by the strategy, which recommends 30mph as the norm for villages with 11+ properties over a 350m stretch. Danbury Common significantly exceeds these thresholds.
- **Community Support:** We have gathered responses from over 55 households supporting the proposal, with specific comments highlighting the dangers they face daily.

Why Act Now?

Reducing the speed limits will save lives, align with council initiatives like Safer, Greener, Healthier and Active Travel, and support the growing number of recreational users. It's a preventive measure that prioritises safety and promotes sustainable community living.

Our question?
My question is whether the Council will now move this proposal forward to ensure the safety of our residents and road users while fostering a safer, more sustainable environment for all?

Thank you for your time and consideration.'

In response Cllr Tom Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport, thanked Ms Bush for the question and said:

'I recognise the importance of the concerns you raised, not only for your community but others around the County. Be assured these are taken serious by myself and the work undertaken by officers.

In 2016 through the LHP we did look at a request for reduced speed limits on Woodhill Road/Bicknacre Road, Danbury with an automatic traffic count. As such there is scope to repeat this to see the change in driver behaviour since that time and what suitable measures can be implemented.

Any new LHP Scheme investigation would have to have the support of your local county Councillor. At this stage of the 2024/25 financial year the limited Chelmsford Local Highway Panel (LHP) Revenue Budget used to fund traffic surveys (such as automatic traffic counts) is fully committed. However, subject to an LHP Scheme Request from them we could look to add additional automatic traffic count (ATC) requests to a list of traffic surveys to be carried out when funding permits.'

The second speaker was Sir Bob Russell, a resident of Colchester, asking a question on the subject of Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation.

Sir Bob Russell, having been invited to speak, said:

'I am one of the few survivors involved the last time we had Local Government Re-organisation more than 50 years ago!
Following the 1970 General Election, in its first year – as is happening in the first year of the current Government – 55 years ago proposals to re-organise local government were started.
Elections were not cancelled!
People who believe in democracy do not cancel elections!

Elections were still held in 1971 – when I was first elected to Colchester Borough Council – and again in 1972, even though the period of office for those Councillors would be less than two years.
Elections to the new councils were held in June 1973 – with the existing councils continuing to operate with the new “shadow” councils preparing to take over on 1st April 1974…… when the 1972 Local Government Act took effect.
Based on what happened half-a-century ago there is no justification for this May’s Elections to be cancelled.
At the last County Elections the people of Essex elected Councillors to serve until this May – when that mandate expires.
For Councillors to remain beyond May means they stay in power but without the legitimacy of the ballot box.
It is unknown how long this anti-democratic scenario will continue.
The Labour Party Manifesto for last year’s General Election did not mention “local government re-organisation” – nor was there any mention of existing councils merging nor the creation of unitary councils…….and certainly no mention of cancelling elections!
The Manifesto said: Labour will transfer power out of Westminster, and into our communities.
A good idea......but proposals set out in the “English Devolution White Paper” do the opposite! They suck up existing powers from local district, borough and city councils to large unitary councils with populations bigger than some nation states!
Where I live in Essex, I am told the merger will be of Tendring, Colchester and Braintree whose combined population is 511,162.
Labour's Manifesto also stated: We will encourage local authorities to come together and take on new powers.
I say this could be done by councils retaining their established local identities....... an example is where currently several councils in Essex - including the County Council - have a combined Parking Authority.
Councils collaborating is one thing. Abolishing lower tier councils is contrary to what “local government” should be about. It would result in more power in fewer hands – and of even greater delegation to officers.
Democratic accountability and decision-making by Councillors - the people's elected representatives - would be reduced even more from what it is now.
The only example given in the White Paper would see a reduction of two-thirds in the number of Councillors!
The White Paper runs to 116 pages. The word “democracy” does not appear once!
The suggested North Essex Unitary Council would stretch 40 miles from Jaywick to Wethersfield. How can that be "local government"?
What happens to the city status of Chelmsford, Southend and Colchester?
The Bill to change local government has yet to start its Parliamentary journey.
Therefore there is no justification to cancel this May’s Elections.

In view of his reported enthusiasm for the Government's "English Devolution White Paper" - which would lead to the abolition of Essex County Council - will the Leader of the Council explain why he feels the proposals will be of benefit to the people of Essex?'

In response, the Leader, Cllr Kevin Bentley thanked Sir Russell for his question and said:

'Madam Chairman thank you very much indeed, Sir Bob it's very good to see you in this chamber.

I think there are several questions not just one you posed I'll try and answer the way the best way I can, the first thing is I've been a great believer as I believe you have as well is transferring power away from Westminster to local democracy, and this does this. I believe you also believe there should be unitary councils, I think I've heard you say that before and I certainly believe that is correct as well. Why do I believe that, certainly on the first case with the mayor of Essex will have great powers to be able to bring in investment not just from the government from elsewhere in the country. Already we've seen the deputy leader here in Essex County Council talking at the American Embassy with American companies and organisations, and dealing with an International Bank as well. These are sort of things that we can't physically do as County councils, although the deputy leader has done that, what we need is a mayor that can actually attract people in. So, I think that's hugely important as well.

That will then link to jobs, skills, the transfer of power from Whitehall to make real local decisions here. Yes, it's invested in one person, but the difference is every single person in this County that's eligible to vote gets to vote for that mayor. No one votes for me as the leader of the County Council, no one votes indeed for the prime minister to come to that, but we can do it here in Essex through a mayor that will bring great power.

Under unitary status, well for me the two-tier system while it has worked, it is becoming very clunky I'll be very honest about that. People get confused is it the district council? the city or the borough council? is it the County Council? is it the parish council? who is responsible? there can be a great shifting around trying to find out who's responsible for what that gets rid of that in the unitary status. It also reduces duplication, reduces cost and to me this is hugely important because we then bring better services at better value for the public. Then when we come on to identity, I'm amazed that so many people are just leaping to conclusions that we're just bunching together existing District councils and they're becoming unitary. Who knows? this is our chance now to rewrite the political map of Essex, which wasn't done in 1972, that was fusing together rural District councils which is probably why they didn't cancel the elections. This is

> so different because I look at the Kings, Saxon Kings of Essex in this chamber, when these Kings were talking about local democracy as it was then and power, when they created the Wickins in the hundreds that's the last time we really did proper local government reorganisation and now we're doing it again somewhat thousand years later. This is the difference when we can start creating proper communities fitting towns and Villages and cities into local areas, not lumping together as they were done in 1972, and who knows what that looks like yet, that's the work we're going to do and that leads me on to the third part about the postponement of Elections not the cancellation of Elections and that's very important.
>
> We hear this why well the government has decided, and I support the government's views on this, but the timetable is very ambitious. That is the issue we have here, it is very ambitious. Had they decided to do this after the May elections, we'd have had those elections we could have held them. By doing it in December it was their choice and it's their parliamentary timetable, but by doing it then at the very time that we need to consult with people on this we will be in the pre-election period when we can't consult with anyone, so that is why the postponement takes place. Also if you were to hold that kind of conversation while trying to hold elections well you can't do the two things together, officer time and member time as well involved in those elections we all know is huge, you will know more than anybody else Sir Bob. The amount of time is huge and you can't do the job properly so I think we're going back to bring greater democracy to the people of Essex and if that means postponing elections for 12 months, I think that's a price worth paying because the long-term vision for this county is bright and the long-term vision for this County with a mayor and new unitaries will be even better for the generations to come.'

The third speaker was Parish Councillor Peter Irvine, Chair of Little Baddow Parish Council, speaking on behalf of a working group of Parish Councils, asking a question on the impact of a proposed housing development in Little Baddow.

Cllr Irvine, having been invited to speak, said:

> 'I am asking the following question of Essex County Council as I am not sure of your position regarding Chelmsford City Council's proposal for 1 million sq. ft of employment space and some 3000 houses at Hammonds Farm, just east of the A12.
>
> I am speaking to you today as Chair of a Working Group formed by 4 Parish Councils that are adversely affected. We are concerned that your Council may not be fully aware of the permanent harm that this will cause to the County.

We are puzzled. At Chelmsford's last Local Plan review, strong arguments were made against such a huge development in a deeply rural part of the County, close by nationally managed ancient woodlands and SSSIs, a Conservation valley, and one of the County's principal waterways.

All of the strategic housing development was previously proposed elsewhere, including importantly North Chelmsford a Plan has been developed that shifts the bulk of the additional housing need to Little Baddow.

Importantly for you and for the County as a whole there is the question of the impact on highways. You know that already the A12 blocks northbound with tailbacks from the Boreham offslip. Under the proposed plan the southbound A12 is bound to suffer the same fate with tailbacks from the A414 offslip. In parallel, capacity at Boreham Interchange will soon be exceeded if you factor in 3000 houses nearby, perhaps 700 vehicles daily accessing the new commercial area by the 414, and vehicles from the extensive development that is already underway at Maldon.

Chelmsford's Local Plan proposals talk about essential improvements to J18 of the A12, and to Boreham Interchange, with no plans as to how these will be funded and whether adjacent land is even available to make mitigation.

And all of this harm is unnecessary. All the City Council needs to do to solve the problems is to reinstate its prior Plan to site more strategic housing development to the North.

This is not a NIMBY issue. I ask you to request that your Highways people look again to assess whether at County level you should seek to head off this harmful and avoidable Plan. Please intervene, in the County's interests.'

In response, Cllr Lee Scott, Cabinet Member for Housing, Planning and Regeneration thanked Cllr Irvine for his question and said:

'For context, ECC supported the adopted Chelmsford Local Plan and its spatial strategy which focussed development at sustainable locations in north Chelmsford, including the new Chelmsford Garden Community. This location is well-connected to the existing urban area with direct access to key services and facilities via walking, cycling and bus-based rapid transit. It also takes advantage of existing and planned infrastructure improvements including the Chelmsford North East Bypass, Beaulieu Park Station, widening of the A12, and new schools.

The Chelmsford Local Plan Review carries forward these proposals into the new Local Plan and is supported.

However, further expansion of Chelmsford Garden Community beyond that allocated in the new Local Plan is constrained by permitted mineral extraction (sand and gravel), including the existing processing plant, which is required to be operational beyond the plan period of 2041.

In addition to the above, the City Council, has decided not to pursue focussing additional growth to the North due to:

- the remoteness of potential new sites from the strategic road network;
- limited opportunities to maximise active and sustainable movements resulting in high reliance on the car;
- need to prevent the coalescence of villages;
- capacity limits of wastewater recycling facilities;
- lack of existing primary school capacity; and
- landscape capacity and sensitivity issues.

In terms of highway impacts arising from the new Local Plan and development, ECC has undertaken the strategic highway assessment to inform all stages of the Local Plan Review with regular meetings with National Highways (NH) regarding the impact and necessary mitigation along the A12 corridor. ECC is satisfied that the impact on the strategic highway network should not be considered “severe” which is the test in national policy which the plan will be assessed against.

The latest modelling report has shown that cumulatively, Chelmsford Garden Community and the proposed new East Chelmsford Garden Community (Hammonds Farm) and the employment site at Land Adjacent to A12 Junction 18, have a direct impact on the capacity of A12 junctions 18 and 19. But, the developers of these sites will be required to identify and deliver the necessary junction capacity improvements alongside provision of sustainable and active mode infrastructure and services. This is and will be further modelled and mitigation identified and confirmed as part of the Transport Assessment to support the planning application process to which ECC, as Highway and Transportation Authority, and NH, are statutory consultees.

Hammonds Farm will take its main access from the A414 Maldon Road with landholding enabling direct connection to an additional access from Junction 19 Boreham Interchange. The developer will be required to take into account the proposed upgrades to this junction as part of the A12 widening scheme. ECC, CCC, Transport East and other directly related local planning authorities continue to lobby Government to ensure the A12 widening scheme receives funding.

The Chelmsford Pre-Submission Local Plan is presently on consultation until the 18th March. ECC will be responding to this consultation within the allocated time with any detailed points we wish to raise.'

5. Chairman's Announcements and Communications

University of Essex Students

The Chairman welcomed a number of students from the University of Essex to the meeting, who had come along to observe the Council meeting as part of their course. The Chairman expressed her hope that they would find the meeting interesting and informative.

New Year's Honours

The Chairman informed Members that 30 Essex people had been awarded honours in the King's New Year honours list.

The honours included services to Fire and Rescue, Law and Order, Charity, young people including those with serious illness, local communities, tackling homelessness, heritage and sport.

The Chairman extended congratulations on behalf of the council, to all those in Essex who had received an award.

Death of former County Councillor Geoffrey Waterer, MBE, DL

The Chairman informed Members that former County Councillor Geoffrey Waterer, MBE, DL, had passed away in December at the age of 97.

Geoffrey was a County Councillor from 1961 to 2000, representing the division of Hedingham. During his time at Essex County Council, Geoffrey was a member of many committees and served as Chairman of the Council from 1973-1977. He was also an Honorary Alderman and Deputy Lieutenant of Essex.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Peter Schwier paid tribute to Cllr Waterer.

Death of former County Councillor Robert Chambers

The Chairman informed Members that former County Councillor Robert Chambers had passed away in January.

Robert was a County Councillor from 1997 to 2013 representing the division of Saffron Walden. During his time at Essex County Council Robert was a member of various committees and the Police Authority where he was Chairman for a number of years.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Susan Barker paid tribute to Cllr Chambers.

Members stood in silent remembrance.

Road Fatalities

The Chairman made reference to the recent fatalities on Essex roads and expressed on thoughts and sympathy to the families and friends of those who had passed away.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Lee Scott, as Chairman of the Safer Essex Roads Partnership, provided an update.

6. Petitions

The Chairman informed Members that there had been two notifications of petitions in advance.

The Chairman invited Cllr Lee Scordis to present a petition concerning the resurfacing of Barn Hall Avenue in Colchester. Cllr Tom Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport responded to accept the petition.

At the invitation of the Chairman Cllr Malcolm Buckley presented a petition concerning 20mph speed limits in Beauchamps Drive. Cllr Tom Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Highways, Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport responded to accept the petition.

7. Return of Members Elected and Proportionality

The Chief Executive presented a report confirming the result of the by election for the Stock division which was held on 12 December 2024. Cllr Sue Dobson was elected and had joined the Conservative Group.

It was confirmed that the effect of the by election meant that the composition of the Council was:

The Conservative Group:	50
The Non-Aligned Group:	10
The Liberal Democrat Group:	8
The Labour Group:	6
No group:	1
	Total: 75

Following a review of committee seat allocations in accordance with the statutory rules of political balance, there were no changes to committee seat allocations as the political balance had remained the same.

It having been proposed by Cllr Kevin Bentley and seconded by Cllr Louise McKinlay it was

Resolved:

That there be no change to the allocation of committee seat places which remain as determined by the Council at its meeting in July 2024.

8. Appointment of Head of Paid Service

The Leader of the Council presented a report concerning the appointment of the Head of Paid Service and reported that the recommended candidate was Nicole Wood. Nicole was the Executive Director for Corporate Services and the Council's section 151 Officer.

It was proposed that Nicole gave up the role of section 151 officer and that this role be transferred on an interim basis to Stephanie Mitchener, Director Finance with effect from 14 February 25. Stephanie was currently deputy section 151 officer and held the necessary accounting qualification. This interim arrangement would be reviewed once a decision was made on the longer-term future arrangements of the leadership of the Corporate Services function.

Any pay changes would be considered and approved by the Senior Management Employment Committee in the usual way.

Resolved:

(1) Council approved the appointment of Nicole Wood as Chief Executive and head of paid service with effect from 14 February 2025 on the salary set out in paragraph 1.4 of the report.

(2) Council appointed Stephanie Mitchener as section 151 officer (chief finance officer) with effect from 14 February 2025, noting that this appointment was made on an interim basis.

(3) That all delegations held by the Executive Director of Corporate Services with respect to financial arrangements were exercisable by the section 151 officer.

(4) That all references to the Director, Finance in the Constitution and Financial Regulations were replaced with references to 'the person appointed as deputy section 151 officer'.

(5) That the Director, Legal and Assurance be authorised to update the constitution with any necessary changes to the constitution and the financial regulations arising from these changes.

The Chairman took the opportunity to thank the current Chief Executive, Gavin Jones, for his support and contribution to the Council, Essex and the Local Government landscape since he joined Essex in 2016.

At the invitation of the Chairman the leader or representative of each party group spoke, to express their thanks and appreciation to Gavin Jones and to congratulate Nicole Wood on her appointment.

Councillor Kevin Bentley, Leader of the Council, moved a motion for a vote of thanks to Gavin Jones on behalf of the Council. The motion was seconded by Cllr Laureen Shaw. In accordance with Standing Order 16.10.1 (General provisions about voting) the Motion was put to a division by name and **carried** with 55 votes for the motion, no votes against and no abstentions.

Those voting for the Motion were Councillors:

Cllr Barry Aspinell	Cllr Anthony Hedley	Cllr Jillian Reeves
Cllr Tony Ball	Cllr Ivan Henderson	Cllr Stephen Robinson
Cllr Lewis Barber	Cllr Jeff Henry	Cllr Peter Schwier
Cllr Susan Barker	Cllr Michael Hoy	Cllr Lee Scordis
Cllr Kevin Bentley	Cllr Andrew Johnson	Cllr Lee Scott
Cllr Lynette Bowers-Flint	Cllr John Jowers	Cllr Laureen Shaw
Cllr Malcom Buckley	Cllr Sam Kane	Cllr Andrew Sheldon
Cllr Simon Crow	Cllr David King	Cllr Chris Siddall
Cllr Tom Cunningham	Cllr Dan Land	Cllr Mick Skeels
Cllr Jude Deakin	Cllr Sue Lissimore	Cllr John Spence
Cllr Sue Dobson	Cllr Derrick Louis	Cllr Wendy Stamp
Cllr Mark Durham	Cllr Mike Mackrory	Cllr Mike Steel
Cllr Beverley Egan	Cllr Bob Massey	Cllr Mike Steptoe
Cllr Jane Fleming	Cllr Louise McKinlay	Cllr Marshall Vance
Cllr Mike Garnett	Cllr Anthony McQuiggan	Cllr Lesley Wagland
Cllr Alan Goggin	Cllr Dr Richard Moore	Cllr Chris Whitbread
Cllr Ray Gooding	Cllr James Newport	Cllr Holly Whitbread
Cllr Carlo Guglielmi	Cllr Mark Platt	
Cllr Dave Harris	Cllr Ross Playle	

9. Executive Statement on the Budget

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leader of the Council gave a statement titled Essex, Moving Forward.

The broadcast of the meeting may be found on the ECC Democracy YouTube Channel.

10. Everyone's Essex Annual Plan and Budget 2025-26

The Council received the report Everyone's Essex Annual Plan and Budget 2025-26. The report was in two parts, Part 1 being the Section 151 Officer's report and Part 2 being the Budget and Plan.

There were also four appendices:

- Appendix A –Everyone's Essex Annual plan and Budget 2025-2026 Annual Plan 2025-2026
- Appendix B – Equalities Comprehensive Impact Assessment 2025-26
- Appendix C – Pay Policy Statement 2025-26
- Appendix D – Budget Consultation 2025-26

It was noted that there had been an addendum report with replacement budget recommendations, to take account of the final local government settlement and further information received from some of the district councils which had been circulated to members and placed on the council's website.

It was moved by Cllr Ivan Henderson and seconded by Cllr Lee Scordis that the recommended budget be amended as follows:

'That the net effect of the budget resolution be amended for the reasons and purposes set out below:

1. **Highway's Quality Assurance**
   Increase to the 2025/26 Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport revenue budget of **£55,000**, on a one-off basis to support an independent review of the criteria assessment used by Ringway Jacobs. The review will assess the quality criteria applied when approving maintenance and repairs, carried out under the existing Ringway Jacobs contract to quality assure their remedial work.

   This would require an increase in the budget for the Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport portfolio of **£55,000** which will be funded through a withdrawal from the earmarked Ambition Fund reserve.

   Increase to the annual Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport revenue budget for two years, from 2025/26 to 2026/27, of **£47,000** per annum. This is to fund twice yearly, independent inspections of highway repair work carried out under the existing Ringway Jacobs contract, sampling a range of completed repairs across the county. It is important that continuation of these independent reviews is considered as part of the re-procurement of the contract.

This would require an increase in the budget for the Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport portfolio of **£47,000** per annum which will be funded through withdrawals from the Ambition Fund Reserve for 2025/26 and 2026/27, a total reduction to the reserve of **£94,000**.

2. **Youth Service**
   An increase to the Youth Service revenue budget of **£545,000** to enable the setup of a dedicated team to target specific areas of high deprivation and mental health in young people. This will fund one Senior Targeted Youth Advisor, ten Targeted Youth Advisors and ancillary costs.

   This would require an increase to The Arts, Heritage and Culture portfolio budget of **£545,000** per annum and a reduction of the same sum to the budgeted appropriation to the Transformation Reserve.

3. **Locality Fund**
   Increase to the annual Communities, Economic Growth and Prosperity revenue budget for 2025/26 of **£750,000**. This is to continue the historical locality fund, however for 2025/26 the sum of £10,000 will be made available for each member. It is proposed the approach and criteria for spending the money will continue in line with the 2024/25 Locality Fund.

   This reinstatement will be funded through a withdrawal from the earmarked Everyone's Essex reserve. Continuation of the scheme in 2026/27 would be considered following a review of the effectiveness of the 2025/26 scheme.

S151 Officer's Commentary on the Budget amendment Proposal

The proposals have set out clearly the funding sources, which will amend the following tables in the Annual Plan and Budget 2025/26:

Communities, Economic Growth and Prosperity

2023/24 Actuals £000	2024/25 Original Budget £000	2024/25 Latest Budget £000		2025/26 Gross Expenditure £000	2025/26 Income £000	2025/26 Specific Grants £000	2025/26 Total Net Expenditure £000
588		773	**Locality Fund**	750			750

Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport

2023/24 Actuals £000	2024/25 Original Budget £000	2024/25 Latest Budget £000		2025/26 Gross Expenditure £000	2025/26 Income £000	2025/26 Specific Grants £000	2025/26 Total Net Expenditure £000
			Infrastructure				
11,784	15,219	18,180	Roads And Footways	23,153	(123)		23,030

The Arts, Heritage and Culture

2023/24 Actuals £000	2024/25 Original Budget £000	2024/25 Latest Budget £000		2025/26 Gross Expenditure £000	2025/26 Income £000	2025/26 Specific Grants £000	2025/26 Total Net Expenditure £000
3,091	3,581	3,431	**Youth Services**	7,618	(719)	(2,537)	4,363

Other Operating Costs

2023/24 Actuals £000	2024/25 Original Budget £000	2024/25 Latest Budget £000		2025/26 Gross Expenditure £000	2025/26 Income £000	2025/26 Specific Grants £000	2025/26 Total Net Expenditure £000
			Approps To/(From) Reserves and Restricted Use Funds (i)				
(1,110)		(1,372)	Ambition Fund Reserve		(102)		(102)
2,282	13,107	(22,398)	Everyones Essex	14,079	(750)		13,329
2,862	18,820	14,628	Transformation Reserve	14,495			14,495

Reserves

	Balance at 1 April 2024 £000	Balance at 1 April 2025 £000	2025/26 Budgeted (Contributions)/ Withdrawals £000	2025/26 Assumed usage £000	2025/26 Closing balance £000	2026/27 £000	2027/28 £000	2028/29 £000
Reserves earmarked for future use (cont'd)								
Ambition Fund	(9,441)	(3,247)	102	3,098	(47)	-	-	-
Everyones Essex	(47,268)	(10,668)	(13,329)	14,079	(9,919)	(393)	(0)	(0)
Transformation	(61,741)	(55,561)	(14,475)	25,000	(45,036)	(31,311)	(17,586)	(3,861)

- £102,000 withdrawal from the Ambition Fund Reserve in 2025/26, taking the balance on this reserve to £47,000 at the end of 2025/26, with further proposed withdrawal of £47,000 in 2026/27. It is currently assumed that the balance of the reserve is fully drawn down by the end of 2025/26, however it is not fully committed so this does not change our planning assumptions.
- £750,000 withdrawal from the Everyone's Essex Reserve, taking the balance on this reserve to £9.9m at the end of 2025/26. It is currently assumed that the balance of the reserve is fully drawn down by the end of 2027/28, however it is not fully committed so this does not change our planning assumptions.
- £525,000 reduction in the annual budgeted appropriation to the Transformation Reserve across the MTRS. Proposals will reduce the balance of the reserve to £45m at the end of 2025/26. By 2028/29 the balance of the reserve will have reduced to £3.9m (currently assumed as £6m in the Annual Plan).

The reduction in the annual budgeted appropriation to the Transformation Reserve will impact the capacity to invest in change to enable financial sustainability given the £129m gap over the medium term and the ambition of Whole Council Transformation.'

………………………………..

With the agreement of the Chairman, as per paragraph 16.9.7(ii)(b) of the Constitution, the amendment from the Liberal Democrat Group was put forward in a different way, due to an error which had been identified in the original amendment.

It was moved by Cllr David King and seconded by Cllr Mike Mackrory that the recommended budget be amended as follows:

'1.1 That the net effect of the budget resolution be amended as set out for the reasons and purposes set out below:

1.2 The enormous financial pressure on all Councils is unarguable. All bodies representing Local Authorities at all levels have made representations to government for adequate funding. To help them to meet increasing demands and rising costs particularly for social care. Challenges made worse by the government's increases to National Insurance for this Council as an employer, and for our many service suppliers and partners. [£9m in the final settlement against the original provisional of £7m to cover Employers National Insurance].

1.3 The combination of many years of Council Tax increases below the rate of inflation and a cut of over 40% in local government funding in recent years have left our residents frustrated at a number of declining public services. The demand and costs for Adult Social Care, Children's Services including SEND provision, and Home to School Transport continuing to climb exponentially.

1.4 We acknowledged that some 60.5% of the net revenue budget is directed towards these services which reduces the funding available to address other crucial services.

1.5 However this year the Budget proposes only a 1.75% increase in the general Council Tax element. This means a further 1.24% could be added before reaching the referendum cap. This would cost some 36 pence per household a week but raise some £10.668m per year. This sum together with a modest draw of £9m on Unrestricted Reserves, currently at £332m, would release £20m in 2025/26. Less than the £25m forgone in recent years by ECC not raising Council Tax as it could have done prudently at the maximum amount allowed pre referendum. To then address the most pressing of the many concerns of our residents.

1.6 We make no apology for again focussing on what they tell us they most value; including Social Care and Highways, and that they will support raising Council Tax if it helps the most vulnerable, as below:

- Reversing Budget Cuts
- Hardship Support
- Special Educational Needs
- Children and family Mental Health and Resilience
- Climate Change
- ECC Highways Oversight
- Pavement and highway repairs and Local Highways Panels
- Highways Rangers

1.7 Our specific proposals are as detailed below for the 2025/26 baseline budget and for each year that follows. Meeting the additional costs by additional Council Tax and by drawing on Everyone's Essex Reserve, the Transformation Reserve and Adult's Investment Reserve. These are one off calls on reserves, and from 2025/26 onwards further savings or calls on reserves will be required. The following revenue and capital investment proposals are to be funded, and the budget recommendation amended, as detailed in the Section 151 officer's commentary and statement in paragraphs below.

Reversing Budget Cuts

2.1 We support efficiencies and changes that could yet benefit those for whom we offer, as with seeking to place children in care within a family setting in Essex. But not savings measures likely to impact the most vulnerable. Our Budget Amendment:

- Review the impact of past savings measures that aimed to provide more cost effective support to adults with learning difficulties like Meaningful Lives Matter. And the Connect Programme which sought to ensure the most appropriate support is offered to older people going into and leaving hospital. Making better use of technology solutions in provision of care. With a view to reinforcing the help offered, within one off budget for study, procurement, and actions as may be recommended to secure better outcomes for both groups, within an allocation of £1m, split equally between the two.

Hardship Support

2.2 Residents support Council Tax where it helps those in need. But some will struggle. We propose to increase protection for low-income families from the impacts of the increases in Council Tax by enabling an extended Council Tax hardship scheme, making £300,000 available with whatever support is available by partner Councils, to help the most vulnerable.

Special Educational Needs

2.3 ECC performance is improving and proposed additional investment is welcomed. As is that ECC has moved from 1% of EHCPs issued within the statutory 20 weeks to 44% as of October 2024. But there is still much to do, within a very complex process, inclusive of complaints and appeals (which are expensive and heartbreaking for those affected). Given the many pressures on qualified staff and the difficulties of recruitment, we propose a further £2m to help secure, in a very competitive market, additional interim staff to further help reduce the backlog and to improve handling and responses.

Supporting the mental health needs of children and young people

3.1 Mindful of the significant and sustained increase in numbers of young people requiring advice and mental health help to enhance a number of related initiatives, and to package and publicise these to parents and young people.

3.2 **To focus on prevention**, with the NHS and other partners, on the risks of harm and suicide. Working through our local schools, will reduce demand on services in the future, increasing the appropriate budget by £1m.

3.3 **To enhance the Family Innovation Fund**, by £1m, supporting their work with children and young people to achieve stable, resilient and safe family environments, services including coaching, mediation, conflict resolution and counselling through 1:1, group and family/parent/couple work.

3.4 **To help family resilience**, by a further £1m invested in Essex Short Breaks, to help families and carers look after their needs, and mental health. As a service that provides clubs and activities for young people with SEND and which also offers parents and carers a break.

3.5 **To support exercise and activity**, to recognise the link with physical and mental health and wellbeing. Increasing support for Active Essex, by £1m, in extending school and club capacity.

4 **Investing in our response to the climate emergency**

4.1 An investment of **£500,000 into the Essex Forest Initiative** with a priority for greening our towns and cities, to reduce heat island impacts, and to make them better places to live work and visit, through urban tree planting and “tiny forest” initiatives. Recognising the gravity of the Climate Emergency and increasing public engagement and awareness of our work.

4.2 **Enabling community support** for local wildlife and bio-diversity sites by a grant scheme of £500,000 for Parish and Town Councils and charitable organisations seeking to help own, protect or enhance local sites of a recognised status, working with Natural England and other partners.

4.3 **Enhancing flood risk ECC modelling** and ability to fund and support such work with other Essex Councils and partners such as the

Environment Agency, to increase their capacity, on SUDS, capital schemes and flood related work, expanding their team by 50% at some £500,000.

5 **Improving our Highways**

5.1 Welcoming additional investment in our highways but adding to this to further reduce the pothole backlog and to improve ECC's capacity to secure value for money from Ringway Jacobs. And to improve the inheritance of the proposed Unitary Authorities.

5.2 **To double the ECC supervisory, oversight and planning central function** currently just 6 strong, excluding supporting staff at a cost per year of £700,000 to improve their ability to drive and improve the performance and value for money of the near 600 strong Ringway Jacobs team, through whom some £150m a year is disbursed.

5.3 **A one off increase in funding for the Local Highways Panel** with an additional £2m invested to enable delivery of priority highways schemes in local areas.

5.4 **A one off increase of £2m** in the Highways Capital programme provision for Road Maintenance. So doing to reduce the backlog of repairs that can make life intolerable for our residents.

5.5 **A one off increase footway maintenance spend** by £2m as the most neglected and in need of repair area of highways.

5.6 **To help insurers manage and meet pothole and trip hazard related liabilities** by agreement on a much less dismissive refuse regardless approach to injury and damage claims, on a no liability admitted basis, to the value of £1m annually.

Highways Rangers

6.1 To engage with District Councils, to provide a crew for each District, recognising the variables between different areas and the many pressures on Districts, and the value placed by residents on the service, at an annual revenue and capital cost of £2m.

7 **Section 151 Officer's Commentary on Liberal Democrat Budget Amendment**

7.1 It is proposed that the revenue amendments to budget of £12.653m are to be funded from a combination of an increase in the rise of council tax from 3.75% to 4.99% in 2025/26, and from one-off draws on reserves. The increase in council tax is estimated to generate c.£10.7m in additional funding. Table 1 below sets out the revised tax levels by band as a result of the proposed 4.99% increase and the equivalent annual increases:

Table 1 – Proposed Council Tax rates

	Council Tax Rate		
Council Tax Band	**2024/25**	**2025/26 4.99% rise**	**2025/26 Annual Increase**
Band A	£1,015.02	£1,065.66	£50.64
Band B	£1,184.19	£1,243.27	£59.08
Band C	£1,353.36	£1,420.88	£67.52
Band D	**£1,522.53**	**£1,598.49**	**£75.96**
Band E	£1,860.87	£1,953.71	£92.84
Band F	£2,199.21	£2,308.93	£109.72
Band G	£2,537.55	£2,664.15	£126.60
Band H	£3,045.06	£3,196.98	£151.92

7.2 The proposed investments will have an ongoing impact on the Medium Term Resource Strategy (MTRS) from 2025/26 onwards as detailed in the table below:

Table 2 Proposed Investments and their Source of Funding

Investments and source of funding for 2025/26: CT: Council Tax AIR: Adult's Investment Reserve EE: Everyone's Essex TR: Transformation Reserve		2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000
Meaningful Lives Matter Programme (reversal of Budget reduction)	CT	500	500	500	500
Connect Programmes (reversal of Budget reduction)	CT / AIR	168 / 332	500	500	500
Hardship Support (supporting low income families)	CT	300	300	300	300
Special Educational Needs	CT	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Children and Family Mental Health – Prevention	CT	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Family Innovation Fund	CT	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Essex Short Breaks	CT	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Active Essex	CT	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
ECC Highways Oversight	CT	700	700	700	700
Highway Rangers	CT	2,000	2,000	2,000	2,000
Highways Injury and Damage Claims	CT	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
Investment in climate change emergency – Essex Forest Initiative	EE	500	500	500	500
Community Support Biodiversity	EE	500	500	500	500
Flood Risk Modelling Support	EE	500	500	500	500
Additional capital expenditure, interest on borrowing	TR	153	306	306	306
Additional capital expenditure, Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)	TR	0	207	207	207
Total Cost		12,653	13,013	13,013	13,013

7.3 The impact on reserves in 2025/26 is shown in the table below, with the 2025/26 budget increasing by £12.653m. £10.668m of the increase would be met by the proposed increase in Council Tax of 1.24%. The impact on future years is £13.013m.

Table 3 Use of Reserves to fund the Investments

Reserves	2025/26		
	Current Estimated Closing Balance £'000	Proposed Additional Usage £'000	Revised Estimate Closing Balance £'000
Transformation Reserve	(45,581)	153	(45,428)
Everyone's Essex	(10,669)	1,500	(9,169)
Adult's Investment Reserve	(22,402)	332	(22,070)
Total Usage		1,985	

7.4 The impact of the proposed amendments to the 2025/26 capital programme is detailed in the table below:

Table 4 Proposed Capital Investments

Capital Investment Description	Current Budget 2025/26 £'000	Proposed Budget 2025/26 £'000	Increase/ (Decrease) £'000
Road maintenance	65,606	67,606	2,000
Footways maintenance	8,000	10,000	2,000
Local Highways Panel	2,000	4,000	2,000
Total cost			6,000

7.5 The estimated revenue borrowing costs for the additional capital expenditure of £6m (in Table 4) have been calculated using the assumption that MRP is charged over 20 years and using the 2025/26 budgeted interest rate of 5.10%. These costs are set out within the revenue investment summary table above (Table 2). There is no assumption as to ongoing revenue commitment for maintenance from the incremental capital spend proposal in 2025/26. As part of the annual budget book, we have to set our Prudential Indicators. These are included as Annex 3A of the Annual Plan and Budget. Increasing the capital programme through borrowing would also have a ripple effect to the following indicators:

- **Authorised limit** – this defines the maximum amount of external debt permitted by the Council, and represents the statutory limit determined under section 3 (1) of the Local Government Act 2003. The total Authorised Limit will need to increase from £1,360m to £1,366m,

- **Operational boundary** – this is an estimate of the probable level of the Council's external debt and provides the means to manage external debt to ensure that the 'authorised limit' is not breached. The total Operational Boundary will need to increase from £1,213m to £1,219m

7.6 The following table summarises and reconciles the proposed budget amendment as set out above across the life of the MTRS;

Table 5 – Summary Financial Impact of Proposals

Budget amendment reconciliation	2025/26 £'000	2026/27 £'000	2027/28 £'000	2028/29 £'000
Budget amendment proposals Revenue investments	12,653	13,013	13,013	13,013
Proposed funding streams				
Council Tax (Additional 1.24% increase)	(10,668)	(10,668)	(10,668)	(10,668)
Draw on Transformation Reserve	(153)			
Draw on Everyone's Essex Reserve	(1,500)			
Draw on Adults Investment Reserve	(332)			
Total remaining funding gap	0	2,345	2,345	2,345

7.7 These amendments will add to the pressures and funding gap from 2026/27 onwards which must be addressed by the County Council, through further savings, additional funding streams and / or calls upon reserves.

…………………………………..

Cllr Ivan Henderson requested that an item be added to the next agenda of the Constitutional Working Group, on the length of speeches allowed in the annual budget debate by Cabinet Members.

The amendment moved by Cllr Ivan Henderson and seconded by Cllr Lee Scordis was put to the vote and was **lost**.

The amendment moved by Cllr David King and seconded by Cllr Mike Mackrory was put to the vote and was **lost**.

In accordance with Standing Order 16.10.2 (Voting on budget decisions) the Motion as shown in the Budget report, the Addendum Report and Replacement Recommendations document was put to a division by name and **carried** by 46 votes for, 6 against and 7 abstentions.

Those voting for the Motion were Councillors:

Cllr Tony Ball	Cllr Carlo Guglielmi	Cllr Jill Reeves
Cllr Lewis Barber	Cllr Anthony Hedley	Cllr Peter Schwier

Cllr Susan Barker	Cllr Jeff Henry	Cllr Lee Scott
Cllr Kevin Bentley	Cllr Andrew Johnson	Cllr Laureen Shaw
Cllr Lynette Bowers-Flint	Cllr John Jowers	Cllr Andrew Sheldon
Cllr Malcolm Buckley	Cllr Sam Kane	Cllr Chris Siddall
Cllr Simon Crow	Cllr Dan Land	Cllr Mick Skeels
Cllr Tom Cunningham	Cllr Sue Lissimore	Cllr John Spence
Cllr Sue Dobson	Cllr Derrick Louis	Cllr Wendy Stamp
Cllr Mark Durham	Cllr Bob Massey	Cllr Mike Steel
Cllr Beverley Egan	Cllr Louise McKinlay	Cllr Mike Steptoe
Cllr Jane Fleming	Cllr Anthony McQuiggan	Cllr Marshall Vance
Cllr Mike Garnett	Cllr Dr Richard Moore	Cllr Lesley Wagland
Cllr Alan Goggin	Cllr Mark Platt	Cllr Chris Whitbread
Cllr Ray Gooding	Cllr Ross Playle	Cllr Holly Whitbread
	Cllr Chris Pond	

Those voting against the Motion were Councillors:

Cllr Dave Harris	Cllr Aidan McGurran	Cllr Lee Scordis
Cllr Ivan Henderson	Cllr Pat Reid	Cllr Kerry Smith

Cllr Barry Aspinell, Cllr Jude Deakin, Cllr Michael Hoy, Cllr David King, Cllr Mike Mackrory, Cllr James Newport, Cllr Stephen Robinson abstained.

Resolved:

Everyone's Essex Annual Plan and Budget 2025/26 – Part 1: Section 151 Officer's Report

1. That Council noted the report before making a decision on the recommendations on the budget and capital programme.

2. That Council noted the 2025/26 revenue budget and medium-term financial outlook assumed an extension of the statutory override for Dedicated Schools Grant high needs deficits. If the statutory override ceased on 31 March 2026, the high needs block deficit at that time would become an immediate revenue budget pressure from financial year 2026/27.

Everyone's Essex Annual Plan and Revenue budget – Part 2: Budget and Plan

1. That the Everyone's Essex Annual Plan and budget be approved in the form appended to this report (Appendix A) subject to the changes set out in paragraph 2.17 below.
2. That the net cost of services to be set at **£1,212.0million (m)** for 2025/26 – Appendix A (page 30).
3. That the net revenue budget requirement be set at **£1,117.3m** (net cost of services less general government grants) for 2025/26 – Appendix A (page 34).
4. That the total council tax funding requirement be set at **£891.6m** for 2025/26 – Appendix A (page 34).
5. That Essex County Council's element of the council tax be increased by 3.75% comprising of a 1.75% increase in general council tax and 2.0% adult social care precept. This would result in the Essex County Council element of the council tax being **£1,579.59** for a Band D property in 2025/26**.** A full list of bands is as follows:

Council Tax Band	2024/25 £	2025/26 £
Band A	1,015.02	1,053.06
Band B	1,184.19	1,228.57
Band C	1,353.36	1,404.08
Band D	**1,522.53**	**1,579.59**
Band E	1,860.87	1,930.61
Band F	2,199.21	2,281.63
Band G	2,537.55	2,632.65
Band H	3,045.06	3,159.18

6. Full Council approve the Essex County Council element of the council tax for each category of dwelling and the precepts on each of the council tax billing authorities for 2025/26, together with the final tax base, as set out in the table below:

Billing Authority	2025/26 Final Tax Base Band D Equivalent	2025/26 Gross precept £
Basildon	61,608	97,315,381
Braintree	58,079	91,741,008
Brentwood	34,511	54,514,020
Castle Point	31,257	49,373,245

Chelmsford	72,078	113,854,462
Colchester	67,201	106,149,870
Epping Forest	55,945	88,370,321
Harlow	29,298	46,278,164
Maldon	26,854	42,418,924
Rochford	33,582	53,045,791
Tendring	53,497	84,503,010
Uttlesford	40,552	64,055,786
Total for ECC	**564,463**	**891,619,982**

7. That the proposed total schools budget be set at **£802.1m** for 2025/26 which will be funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant, Pupil Premium Grant, Universal Free School Meals Grant, PE and Sports Premium Grant, Teachers' Pay Grant, Sixth Form Grant and Wraparound Childcare Grant. The majority of this will be passed through to maintained schools and early years settings.
8. That the underlying balance on the General Balance be set at **£68.1m** as at 1 April 2025 (Appendix A, Annex 1, page 62).
9. That the capital payments guideline be set at **£367.1m** for 2025/26 (Appendix A, page 33)
10. That for the purposes of section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 the Council formally determines that the increase in council tax is not such as to trigger a referendum.

Strategic Performance Measures

11. That the strategic performance measures as set out in Annex 2 (Appendix A) be approved.

Capital Strategy

12. That the 2025/26 to 2028/29 Prudential Indicators and limits, together with updated limits for 2024/25 as set out in Annexes 3A and 3B of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, pages 110-114), be approved. This includes an authorised limit for external debt of £1,360m for the 2025/26 financial year, which defines the maximum amount of external borrowing by the Council, and represents the statutory limit determined under section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 2003.

13. That the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26 be approved, comprising:
    a. Borrowing strategy, as set out in Annex 3 of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 92).
    b. Treasury management investments strategy, as set out in Annex 3 and Annex 3D of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 101).
    c. Indicative strategy for commercial investment activities, as set out in Annex 3 of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 105).

14. That the policy for making a prudent level of revenue provision for the repayment of debt, (the Minimum Revenue Provision policy) as set out in Annex 3C of the Capital Strategy (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 115), be approved.

15. That the revised Treasury Management Policy Statement (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 126) and Treasury Management Practices (Appendix A, Annex 3, page 127), which set out the policies, objectives, and approach to treasury management, are adopted.

Pay Policy Statement

16. That the Council adopts the Pay Policy Statement for 2025/26 as set out in Appendix C.

Changes to annual plan and budget

17. That the following figures be amended to the Annual Plan which forms Appendix A to the report (which starts at page 59 of the published agenda pack) as shown on the replacement pages annexed to the addendum report.

    (a) Where the Adult Social Care and Health element of the Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Public Health and Integration portfolio shows **£968.531m** total gross expenditure budget and **£244.581m** specific grants budget (page 94 of the agenda pack), these figures are amended to **£972.280m** and **£248.331m** respectively. There is no change to the total net expenditure budget.

    (b) That pages 88, 90 94 and 95 of the agenda pack be replaced with those appended to the addendum report circulated at the meeting.

18. That the Section 151 Officer be authorised to amend other figures in the Annual Plan which need to change as a result of the mathematical changes of the above consequence.

11. Adjournment

With the agreement of Council, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 1:15pm. The meeting reconvened at 2:00pm.

12. Council Issues

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Kevin Bentley presented the report and it having been moved by Cllr Kevin Bentley and seconded by Cllr Louise McKinlay it was

Resolved:

Part 1: Interim changes to constitution following appointment of Chief Executive

1. Make the following amendments to the constitution:

   a. Amend reference to Executive Director, Corporate Services in paragraph 4.4 with 'Director, Finance (Interim s151 officer)'
   b. Delete 4.3.3 and renumber
   c. Move 15.3.1 (vi) to 15.3.8 (Director, Legal and Assurance) and renumber
   d. Amend the title of 15.3.6 to 'Director, Finance'
   e. Move paragraphs 15.3.6 (vi) to (viii) and (x) to 15.3.1 (Chief Executive)
   f. Move 15.3.6 (xi) and (xii) to 15.3.8 and renumber
   g. Delete current 15.3.6(xiii) which duplicates 15.3.6.(v).

2. Make the changes to the financial regulations as set out in the Appendix 1

Part 2: Minor changes to the Terms of Refence for the Pension Strategy Board and the Pension Fund Advisory Board.

1. Replace the terms of reference of the PSB and PAB, currently set out in paragraphs 8.1.4 and 8.1.6 of the Constitution, with those set out Appendix 2 and appendix 3 of this report.

2. Amend the references to the 'Executive Director for Corporate Services' to the 'Chief Executive'.

13. Cabinet Issues

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Kevin Bentley presented the report and it having been moved by Cllr Kevin Bentley and seconded by Cllr Louise McKinlay it was

Resolved:

That Council received the list of urgent decisions taken and the minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 17 December 2024 and 21 January 2025.

14. ACCESS Pension Fund Pool: Permission to Register a Company

At the invitation of the Chairman, Cllr Susan Barker presented the report and it having been moved by Cllr Susan Barker and seconded by Cllr Mark Platt it was

Resolved:

1. Agreed that the Council should register a company to be called Access IM Limited.

2. Agreed that the initial directors would be Kevin McDonald and Alistair Coyle who were both ECC employees who worked in the ACCESS Support Unit.

3. Agreed that the initial memorandum and articles of association would be as approved by the monitoring officer.

4. Agreed that the Director, ACCESS Support Unit may take steps to have the Company authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority to be a regulated Investment Management Company.

5. Agreed that the company may be dissolved if the Investment Steering Committee determined that it was no longer required.

6. Noted that a further decision would be required should ECC decide to place any assets into the company.

7. Agreed that the Investment Steering Committee may take any decision which the Council has power to make with respect to the Council's role in the company.

15. Oral Questions of the Leader, Cabinet Member, Chairman of a committee or the representative of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel

The oral questions and answers as part of the broadcast of the meeting may be found on the ECC Democracy YouTube Channel.

The questions asked were:

Question asked by:	Question asked to:	Subject of the question:
Cllr Mike Mackrory	Cabinet Member for Education Excellence, Life Long Learning and Employability	Availability of School Places in the vicinity of Beaulieu Park
Cllr Mike Mackrory	Climate Czar and Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling	Emissions trading scheme and increasing recycling rates
Cllr Derrick Louis	Cabinet Member for the Arts, Heritage and Culture	Antisocial behaviour at Witham Library

Question asked by:	Question asked to:	Subject of the question:
Cllr Ivan Henderson	Leader	Member conduct
Cllr Ivan Henderson	Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Public Health and Integration	Reduction in NHS waiting lists
Cllr Wendy Stamp	Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport	B1010 Althorne Road on the Dengie peninsula
Cllr Wendy Stamp	Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport	Accessibility of bus stops by disabled people
Cllr Chris Pond	Climate Czar and Cabinet Member for Environment, Waste Reduction and Recycling	Residual waste sampling
Cllr Chris Pond	Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport	Safer Schools Streets
Cllr Dave Harris	Cabinet Member for Highways Infrastructure and Sustainable Transport	Member led pothole scheme and bollards on verges
Cllr Jane Fleming	Children's Services, Adult Social Care, Public Health and Integration	Local Government Ombudsman Report

16. Closure of Meeting

The meeting closed at 2.25pm

Chairman