

**CABINET MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN on 20 NOVEMBER 2012 at 7.00pm**

Present: Councillor J Ketteridge – Leader (Chairman).
Councillor S Barker – Portfolio Holder for Environment.
Councillor J Cheetham – Deputy Leader.
Councillor R Chambers – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Administration.
Councillor H Rolfe – Portfolio Holder for Community Partnerships and Engagement.
Councillor J Redfern – Portfolio Holder for Housing.
Councillor A Walters – Portfolio Holder for Community Safety.

Also present: Councillors E Godwin, S Howell, M Lemon, D Morson, J Rich, L Wells and V Ranger.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), R Dobson (Democratic Services Officer), R Harborough (Director of Public Services), S Joyce (Assistant Chief Executive – Finance), A Parry-Jones (Project Officer), M Perry (Assistant Chief Executive – Legal), and A Webb (Director of Corporate Services).

CA61 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Barker and Chambers declared their respective interests as members of Essex County Council and Essex Fire Authority in relation to the item on Local Council Tax Support.

CA62 WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed those present and explained that as this meeting was in addition to the published timetable, the agenda did not include consideration of minutes from the previous meeting or the standing items.

CA63 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT – FINAL SCHEME PROPOSALS

Councillor Chambers presented a report asking Cabinet to determine its recommendations to Full Council for the adoption of an Uttlesford Scheme of Local Council Tax Support (LCTS).

The Project Officer tabled supplementary pages to the report, comprising an additional worked example; updated information on other Essex LCTS schemes and a consultation response from the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Councillor Chambers referred to responses to the consultation, which included a number of expressions of concern that cutting support would result in financial hardship. The Secretary of State had a month ago announced an

additional Transition Grant fund of £100 million to be given to those schemes which ensured they did not result in significant hardship. Councillor Chambers said he had therefore concluded it was feasible and affordable to make adjustments in order to claim the grant and more importantly to alleviate the burden on low income households. He outlined the changes which were: to disregard from income assessment £25 of weekly earnings, child benefit and child maintenance income; and to set a cap on Council Tax support to 91.5% of the Council Tax liability. The average impact of £1.49 per week, was much less than the £6.09 which would have arisen under the original proposals. In order to pay for these proposals the Council would need to draw £212,000 against its reserves but this was a one-off. Councillor Chambers said he would review the scheme in 2013/14 and make necessary adjustments in 2014/15 to ensure the scheme was sustainable.

Councillor Chambers said these proposals were due to the Coalition Government's decision to cut benefit funding and get people off benefits and into work, and whilst it was with a heavy heart, he commended the proposals to Cabinet as being as fair as possible, consistent with the consultation responses, and affordable.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Cheetham, who asked whether the police had responded to the consultation; and how Councillor Chambers would deal with cases of exceptional hardship.

Councillor Chambers replied that the police had not responded to the consultation. Officers would deal with cases of exceptional hardship in accordance with principles approved by Council as set out on pages 31 and 32 of the report.

Councillor Barker said this was a very good report, and that this was not an easy subject. She asked about how the proposals would be made known to benefit claimants, and suggested notices be displayed in libraries with a press release to be issued to parish magazines. She asked for clarification of the impact on the parish precept.

The Assistant Chief Executive-Finance said the Government had published its ideas about how every parish council would change its precept but it had then reversed those proposals and said the parishes would not be affected. This decision was however yet to be formally confirmed. He would write to parishes this week to update them on the parish precept situation.

Councillor Morson thanked the Cabinet and officers for the consideration which had been given to the Liberal Democrat proposals. He said it was good to achieve maximum consensus. He commended the report and agreed it would be excellent for the Council to secure the Transition Grant to help those families who were worst off.

However he asked the Cabinet to consider a proposal from the Liberal Democrats, to increase the maximum support for claimants' Council Tax liability to 97.5% in Year 1 and 95% in Year 2 to be funded out of reduced

Council Tax discounts on second and empty homes; and to pay for an additional staffing resource to administer discount reductions concurrently at a cost of £60K to £75K, to be funded from reserves.

The Chairman said a great deal of work had gone into the proposals. Since the announcement of the Transitional Relief funding further extensive work had been carried out in a short space of time. He was very grateful to officers. It was the view of the administration that the Liberal Democrat option could not be pursued for the following reasons: that income from second home discounts and empty homes would be needed in any case as the proposals would require further adjustment in the longer term; and at 91.5% Uttlesford's rate of maximum Council Tax liability restriction was already significantly above that for any other local authority within Essex.

The Assistant Chief Executive-Finance said based on the Administration's proposals he anticipated this Council would be the only Essex authority to obtain Transition Grant funding, although there were many authorities in Essex applying.

The Chairman said he considered the Liberal Democrat suggestions were not very far from those put forward by his group and he thanked Councillor Morson for his initial expressions of support for the LCTS proposals.

Councillor Rolfe said the report's proposals were very fair and constructive. He asked questions about the calculation of estimated costs. The Assistant Chief Executive-Finance gave a brief explanation and said there would be an impact on budgets from bad debt, so the Council would be seeking a contribution towards collection costs from the County Council, Police and Fire authorities.

It was unanimously RESOLVED

1 To recommend that Full Council approve the following at its meeting on 11 December 2012:

- a) the Equalities Impact Assessment at Appendix F
- b) the UDC LCTS Scheme as set out in paragraph 43 of the report, pursuant to section 13A(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended)
- c) confirmation that council tax discounts for Empty Homes and Second Homes will be unchanged for 2013/14, with a view to reviewing the discounts for 2014/15
- d) UDC General Fund base budget funding for additional Recovery team resource of up to £40,000 (less any external contributions received)
- e) UDC General Fund base budget funding for exceptional hardship relief of up to £10,000 (less any external contributions received)
- f) Authority for the Assistant Chief Executive-Finance to submit a claim to DCLG for Transition Grant funding.

2 To approve alterations to the Executive Scheme of Delegation to add the following to the functions delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive-Finance:

- a) the administration of council tax and business rates
- b) the administration of housing and council tax benefits
- c) the completion of grant claims for housing and council tax benefit and discretionary housing payments
- d) the administration of sundry debtors
- e) the administration of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTS)
- f) the determination of applications for Exceptional Circumstances Hardship Relief under the LCTS.

CA63

BUDGET STRATEGY

Councillor Chambers presented a report summarising the financial outlook for the Council for the year 2013/14 and asking Members to approve a strategy for drawing up the budget for that year. He said due to housing growth the Council's government funding should increase. Combined with fiscal discipline the Council should have a revenue surplus in the next two years. The Administration felt it was possible to go further, and proposed that the District Council's share of Council Tax should be reduced by 1% next year. Taking inflation since 2010 into account this represented a 10% cut in real terms, so this measure would alleviate pressure on household budgets.

Councillor Chambers referred to public consultation carried out for the second year in order to gain public views on priorities for setting the budget. The consultation showed that sound financial management was seen as a priority, with reducing crime and antisocial behaviour in partnership with the police the next priority, and keeping streets and open spaces clean the third highest.

Councillor Chambers highlighted the fact that the Council had implemented the Housing Revenue Account business plan to improve and increase social housing in Uttlesford. He referred Members to the key actions and summary of budget strategy for 2013/14 set out in the report. He proposed the motion which was seconded by Councillor Rolfe.

Councillor Howell endorsed the report. He said this represented much hard work and demonstrated sound financial management over the preceding three years. The freeze of Council Tax over the last two years was good, and he welcomed the proposed reduction.

RESOLVED

To approve the 2013/14 Budget Strategy and key actions as set out in the report.

REDEVELOPMENT OF MEAD COURT, STANSTED

Councillor Redfern presented a report recommending that the Council should proceed with a local authority new build scheme for the redevelopment of Mead Court, Stansted. She said the proposals had been allowed for in budgeting, and had been considered in detail by the Mead Court Task Group and Housing Board. She had invited onto the Task Group Councillor Salmon as he was also a member of Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council so as to ensure balanced interests with the parish council. Drawings had already been obtained and she intended the scheme should proceed as soon as possible. She moved the proposals, which were seconded by Councillor Chambers.

The Chairman said this development represented a milestone for the Council and was a step forward.

Councillor Godwin welcomed the proposal and said she hoped the Council would continue to build more housing in future.

Councillor Lemon said he had visited Mead Court four years ago and had been shocked by what he had seen. He congratulated the housing department on getting this plan going.

Councillor Barker said work would be finished at Holloway Crescent before commencing Mead Court redevelopment and asked that lessons be learned from certain design flaws which in future schemes should be addressed.

Councillor Redfern said Officers and Members were doing their best and had done a good job. They took on board lessons from each project, but looking at the bigger picture Holloway Crescent had benefitted from five fantastic new bungalows and would soon have eight more houses.

Councillor Rich said it was wonderful to see this project on the agenda. Design matters should be considered at an appropriate stage. He welcomed the inclusion of Councillor Salmon in the discussions of the Mead Court Task Group. There was a strong message from the Parish Council that there was much open space around Mead Court at the moment and he asked that consideration be given to how best to utilise it.

In reply to a question regarding the timetable for work to be started, Councillor Redfern said building work itself would start in the year 2013/14, but that there was much to be done before that point.

Councillor Morson congratulated Councillor Redfern on the proposals. He had been asked to mention as a matter of policy that when any development was planned in any members' wards that they should be apprised, as they had been in this case.

Councillor Redfern agreed, with the proviso that it was not possible to involve Members at every detailed stage.

RESOLVED to proceed with a local authority new build scheme for the redevelopment of Mead Court, Stansted.

CA65

OTHER BUSINESS: CAR PARKING FEES CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR 2012/13

Councillor Barker presented a report asking the Cabinet to approve proposals for permitting free parking in certain car parks between Christmas and the New Year. The proposals were brought in order to support the vitality of the district's centres during the coming festive season.

Councillor Barker said the proposals would involve a potential loss of revenue of £2,000 which could be met from the positive variation of car parks income compared to the budget figure for the same period during 2011/12. She explained the proposals had come forward following various suggestions from the Town Councils and Saffron Walden Initiative, including free parking all day on certain days before Christmas, and free parking after 3pm on specific days. However, these suggestions were not feasible as there was no capacity in car parks to accommodate additional demand; and insufficient time to reconfigure ticket machines. A proposal for free parking after 3pm would be considered in determining fees and charges as part of the budget setting process for 2013/14. Councillor Barker proposed the motion which was seconded by Councillor Chambers.

Councillor Ketteridge said figures from the Parking Partnership last year indicated that car parks were full to capacity prior to Christmas but that this trend reduced in the period between Christmas and the New Year. This measure would therefore encourage trade and would benefit local businesses.

Councillor Rolfe asked about publicity for the proposals.

Councillor Barker said a press release would be issued and notices placed on the ticket machines in the car parks, and larger notices within car parks.

RESOLVED that car parking fees for the following car parks not be enforced for the period Monday 24 December to Tuesday 1 January inclusive:

- Angel Lane and Chequers Lane, Great Dunmow
- Lower Street, Stansted Mountfitchet
- Swan Meadow, Saffron Walden

The meeting ended at 7.55pm.