

CABINET held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 18 APRIL 2024 at 7.00 pm

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

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), B Burton (Interim Director of Property), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager), D Hermitage (Strategic Director of Planning), A Knight (Director of Business Performance and People), V Reed (Climate Change Project Officer), M Watts (Environmental Health Manager - Protection) and A Webb (Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services)

Also present: Councillors N Gregory (Chair of the Scrutiny Committee), J Moran (Conservative Group), R Pavitt (Uttlesford Independents) and G Sell (Liberal Democrat Group); Mr F Martin (Public Speaker).

CAB88 PUBLIC SPEAKING

Mr F Martin addressed Cabinet regarding item 18 and the Procurement of Housing Repairs, Maintenance and Capital Improvements provision from 2025. His statement has been appended to the minutes in full due to the problems experienced with the microphones.

CAB89 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillor Hargreaves.

Councillor Barker, Leader of the Conservative Group, also sent her apologies and Councillor Moran deputised in her place.

Councillor Reeve declared a non-registrable interest in respect of Item 15 as he was personally supporting a Ukrainian family. He recused himself from the meeting for this item.

CAB90 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 March were approved as a correct record.

CAB91 QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS FROM NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)

There were no questions from non-executive members.

CAB92 CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (STANDING ITEM)

Councillor Gregory said the Scrutiny Committee had dealt with a very busy agenda in the past week which covered a number of important issues, such as the Local Plan, procurement relating to housing maintenance and repairs, Climate Change and Operational Resilience. He said that whilst the Committee had received a comprehensive report on the Local Plan, members had been disappointed by the lack of published paperwork with the Local Plan Panel agenda and had requested that this not happen again. In addition, he said the Committee had supported the procurement proposals relating to housing maintenance but had been surprised that additional paperwork relating to the proposal had to be requested. He thanked the Operational Resilience Task and Finish Group for the speed and detail of their comprehensive report, which would be taken to Full Council in the next week. Finally, he thanked officers for the Climate Change Action Plan.

Councillor Gregory left the meeting at 7.21pm.

CAB93 REPORT OF DELEGATED DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET MEMBERS OR COMMITTEES (STANDING ITEM)

The Executive Decision made on 27 March 2024 - Response to ECC consultation: Replacement Essex Minerals Local Plan (Regulation 18) was noted.

CAB94 CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

The Leader moved to item 9 on the agenda for the benefit of officers present.

Councillor Reeve presented the report regarding the Climate Change Action Plan, which highlighted achievements over the past twelve months and presented the updated Climate Change Action Plan for April 2024 to March 2025, including key programme priorities, activities, and measures of success. He thanked officers for producing such a detailed plan and for their success in the past twelve months; he said he was particularly proud of the establishment of the Co-Wheels car club and the DEFRA grant application which led to the award of funding. He proposed approval of the recommendations set out in the report.

In response to a question regarding bike “velo locks”, Councillor Reeve said the matter would be looked into but was not part of the current action plan.

Members discussed the pilot scheme in relation to the pollution awareness project in Saffron Walden, which included 21 businesses, and how feasible it would be for employees to cycle to work.

In response to a comment regarding attendance at the Council's climate change event, Councillor Sell said the next session should not be held during the working day as many councillors had work commitments.

The Leader seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED

- I. To note the achievements and progress made delivering the UDC Climate Change Action Plan in 2023/24 as set out in the report.
- II. To note highlights, arising issues, follow-on actions, and the updated Climate Change Action Plan proposed by the Climate Change, Lead Officer, to be delivered April 2024 to March 25 at Appendix 1.
- III. To approve the updated Climate Change Action Plan.

CAB95 **AMENDMENTS TO THE COUNCILS PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT POLICY**

The Environmental Health Manager (Protection) presented the report regarding amendments to the Environmental Health (Housing) Enforcement Policy. He said Cabinet had approved the original Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy in November 2019 but, since this time, there had been several changes in legislation allowing for civil penalties. He asked members to approve the amended Policy as outlined in the report.

Councillor Coote commended the report and proposed approval.

In response to questions, the Environmental Health Manager (Protection) said officers would receive training on these changes and that he would come back with information relating to how many investigations were conducted each year.

Councillor Sutton seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED to:

- I. Enable officers to discharge its duty and exercise powers under:
 - i. The Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020
 - ii. The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 & The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendment) Regulations 2022
 - iii. The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015 as amended by The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2019

- iv. The Housing and Planning Act 2016 (Banning Order Offences) Regulations 2018
- II. Approve the revised Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy as set out in App

CAB96 EMPTY HOMES POLICY

The Environmental Health Manager (Protection) presented the report regarding the Empty Homes Policy, which stated that making best use of existing homes was a key action in the Council's Housing Strategy 2021 -2026. He said that the proposed Empty Homes Policy brought to Cabinet reflected local and national perspectives and outlined all available options to bring empty homes back into use.

Members discussed the issue of empty homes in their local areas and whether there had been an increase in recent years; the Environmental Health Manager (Protection) said each case was unique and circumstances would always be taken into account.

Councillor Coote proposed approval of the proposal.

This was seconded by Councillor Sutton.

RESOLVED to approve the Empty Homes Policy document.

CAB97 DESIGNATION OF DEBDEN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AREA

Councillor Evans presented the report regarding the Designation of the Debden Neighbourhood Plan Area. In response to a question, he said the council was obliged to designate the area in accordance with The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations (Amended 2015 and 2016) as the application was for the whole of the Debden Parish area. He proposed approval of the recommendation.

Councillor Reeve seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED to:

- I. To designate the Parish of Debden as a Neighbourhood Development Plan Area.
- II. The Plan Area as submitted by Debden Parish Council should be supported and adopted as the Debden Neighbourhood Development Plan Area.

CAB98 CORPORATE CORE INDICATORS - TARGET SETTING 2024/25

The Leader presented the report regarding Corporate Core Indicator targets for 2024/25, which set out targets for all Corporate Core Indicators (CCIs) to be monitored and reported during the 2024/25 performance year. She said the CCIs had been selected to enable the Corporate Management Team and Members to continue to focus on key areas of performance across the council.

In response to a question regarding recycling targets, Councillor Reeve said the current metric was realistic and in line with other local authorities. However, the target would be reviewed following a campaign to increase recycling rates.

Councillor Coote seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED to approve the Corporate Core Indicator targets for 2024/25 as set out in the body of the report and Appendix A.

CAB99 **BLUEPRINT UTTLESFORD AUDIT**

Councillor Pavitt left the meeting at 8.48pm.

The Leader presented the report, which provided an update on the progress of the Council's organisational change programme, Blueprint Uttlesford. She said that in year one nine service reviews were completed and provided a net budget saving of £1,214,000. Furthermore, an Internal Audit had been carried out on the programme and it had received a 'Moderate' opinion. She asked Members to note the report.

In response to a question regarding UDC's Highways contribution, the Chief Executive said the decision to end the Highways Ranger scheme had been taken by Essex County Council but this had led to a saving of £86,000 for UDC. In regards to Blueprint Uttlesford more generally, he said two member workshops had been scheduled and he would welcome questions from Members in advance to ensure detailed answers could be prepared.

Members discussed preferences for training and briefing sessions, and it was acknowledged that there was a split between daytime and evening slots, principally between those who worked full-time and those who did not.

The report was noted.

CAB100 **CAR PARK UPDATE**

The Leader presented the report regarding the Car Park Update. She said the report had been brought to members as the owners of the Rose and Crown car park had requested an end to the current management arrangement and that Waitrose had requested changes to the flat rate Sunday tariff at Fairycroft car park. She proposed approval of the recommendations set out in the report.

Councillors Sutton seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED to:

- I. Note the 6 months' notice period submitted by House Group Development Management Limited to end the management agreement for the Rose and Crown Car Park and that the Car Park will no longer be managed by the Council.
- II. Approve the following amended tariffs for Sundays and Bank Holidays in Fairycroft Car Park only:
 - i. 50p for 1 hour
 - ii. £1 for 2 hours
 - iii. £1.50 for 3 hours

CAB101 **STRATEGIC GRANTS - ASYLUM SEEKER AND REFUGEE**

Councillor Sutton presented the report regarding Strategic Grants for Ukrainians and Asylum Seekers, which set out the case to move to strategic grants to support the integration of refugees into Uttlesford's community. She proposed approval of the recommendation.

Members discussed the issue of strategic grants for asylum seekers and refugees and the proposals were commended. There was also praise for the way the community had supported Ukrainian refugees, as demonstrated by officers, volunteers and councillors welcoming people at the airport.

Councillor Reeve seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED:

- I. To launch a strategic grants process for both Ukrainian and Asylum-Seeking cohorts across 3 domains of need.
- II. To extend the individual grants fund to asylum seeking communities from the Asylum Dispersal Grant to support with ad hoc funding requests and support to move into and furnish accommodation for a maximum of £1,500 per family.

CAB102 **HOUSING SUPPORT UNDER THE HOMES FOR UKRAINE SCHEME**

Councillor Reeve declared a non registrable interest in respect of this item as he was supporting a Ukrainian family with their accommodation. He recused himself from the meeting at 9.14pm and left the room.

Councillor Sutton presented the report regarding the Housing Support Offer to Ukrainians, which set out the support on offer for Ukrainian refugees living in Uttlesford. She proposed approval of the recommendation.

Members commended the proposal and there was agreement that the support on offer was required by Ukrainians fleeing their war-torn country.

Councillor Coote seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED:

- I. To launch a rent assist offer (deposit, 6 week's rent in advance and a council guarantee to fund the rent for the duration of the tenancy should the tenant default) to support Ukrainian guests to move into private rental properties.
- II. To use some of the Homes for Ukraine funds to act as a dedicated fund to bridge the gap between local housing allowance and market value rent.

CAB103 CHESTERFORD RESEARCH PARK BUILDING 800 AND SOLAR FARM FUNDING UPDATE - WITHDRAWN

The item had been withdrawn.

CAB104 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

CAB105 PROCUREMENT OF HOUSING REPAIRS, MAINTENANCE AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROVISION FROM 2025

Councillor Reeve returned to the room 9.20pm.

Councillor Coote presented the report regarding the Procurement of Housing Repairs, Maintenance and Capital Improvements provision from 2025, which followed the decision by Cabinet on 9th January 2024 not to continue with the Joint Venture arrangement with Uttlesford Norse Services Ltd (UNSL) from April 2025 and instead put in place a new operating model for the delivery of repairs, maintenance and capital improvements to UDC's council homes. He said the recommended option was to replace the current arrangement with a mixed economy between different providers (Option 11), and he highlighted the report that summarised the 11 options presented to Cabinet on 9th January and to Members on 18th March. He said the rationale for recommending Option 11 was that it would enable UDC to tailor long-term service arrangements per workstream and build relationships with providers, therefore achieving buy-in to social investment and the ability to control costs. He proposed approval of the recommendations set out in the report.

Members discussed the proposal and asked questions.

The Interim Director of Property said he was working to a project plan which was predicated on a collegiate approach with UNSL; it was important that people were kept informed. He said that he expected staff would be disappointed with the mixed economy option but it would not be economical to keep all services in house. He added that most works were already sub-contracted.

In response to a question regarding governance, the Interim Director of Property said governance arrangements would be built into the process. The Chief Executive added that further decisions would be brought before members and there would be further updates on stakeholder engagement. For instance, a “meet the supplier” day would be scheduled in future and a timetable on the process would be brought to members in June.

Councillor Sutton seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED to:

- I. Cabinet approve the mixed economy operating model (Option 11).
- II. Cabinet give delegated authority to the Interim Strategic Director, Housing, Health and Communities, the Chief Executive, the Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services, and the interim Director of Property in consultation with the Cabinet Members of Housing and Finance, to develop the detailed service specifications/contracts in advance of the procurement process, to be brought back to Cabinet on 13 June 2024.
- III. Cabinet give delegated authority to the interim Director of Property to manage the procurement process, in consultation with the Chief Executive, Interim Strategic Director of Housing, Health and Communities, Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services, the Council’s Procurement Service and external advisors as required.
- IV. Cabinet note the ‘step-in’ arrangements put in place by UDC (as delegated by Cabinet on 9th January) and the recommendation by officers that it is not appropriate to pursue a legal remedy against UNSL at this stage for service failure.
- V. Cabinet note the ‘next steps’ for the procurement process.
- VI. Cabinet delegate to the Interim Strategic Director, Housing, Health and Communities, the Chief Executive and the interim Director of Property in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing the formal consultation process and ongoing engagement arrangements with tenants and leaseholders.

The Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Financial Services presented the report for information regarding a debt refinancing opportunity. He said the decision in question was within his delegated powers but he had brought the report to members for information and comment.

Members discussed the report.

Councillor Reeve said the report had been the focus of discussion at the Investment Board. He said there had been a consensus at the Investment Board that the decision to refinance was a “no brainer” and a good deal for the Council.

The report was noted.

The meeting was closed at 9.50pm.

Public Statement: Mr Martin 18 April 2024

Good evening,

My name is Frank Martin, and I have worked for both UDC and Uttlesford Norse for 14 years as a multi skilled operative. I work alongside colleagues who have been here even longer. We have invested a good part of our lives in a job we enjoy and take pride in. We believe we do more than just provide a service for the council, some of us have even attended resident's funerals.

Having asked colleagues, approx 80 percent feel that returning back to UDC for an in-house service would be best for them. The remaining staff members are undecided due to little, or no information provided about the upcoming proposals.

Many are questioning the need to end the Joint Venture. We feel that taking the service in house would improve some employee's terms and conditions as I currently work alongside colleagues who have been employed by Uttlesford Norse on worse terms and conditions than those of us who were TUPED over. We also feel that we can provide a better service.

The Joint Venture didn't get off to a great start with the complexities COVID brought. However, I believe the fault for its apparent failure needs be shared between UDC and Norse. Contracts weren't robust and were up for interpretation, as well as not having the right managers to deliver a co-owned service. Any new arrangements need to be carefully managed.

Even coming back in-house we know things need to change. Any contract needs to be managed, council management will need to develop policies which support consistency across the UDC housing team and the repairs teams, so staff and tenants know what standards they can expect, and every resident receives the same standard of service. This has not always happened in the past, with seemingly some tenants receiving more favourable treatment from UDC at a detriment to budgets.

We believe that by having the service in house, and working for one employer, we will have a better working relationship with our housing colleagues. Whether or not a decision is made to keep all staff in house, and I hope it will, this is still something that needs a great deal of attention.

Any potential external contractor would likely have to make substantial profits to make it worth their while. We feel that this could mean a less flexible approach, lower the quality of repairs and customer satisfaction, giving less value for money for UDC. We know that public sector providers are in a better position to deliver quality services as we are not in it for the money, we care about the people we serve. More local authorities are taking the repairs service in house, by doing so UDC has more control, especially over asset management and investment decisions and would be able to utilise the current infrastructure.

Newport Depot staff want to work with councillors and senior management to ensure the best option is chosen for our tenants. Several of my colleagues, live in the district and want to see a model which works, one we can take pride in. We feel for the for the past year and a half, under the management of, and working with, Simon Baker, there have been great improvements to the service and how it is delivered, however though there is still always more to do. Please work with staff to carry on making those improvements.

The question is if the Council couldn't make a contract which it owned 50% of work, why would another partnership or splitting contracts be any better?

Thank you for your time.