

COUNCIL held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2017 at 7.30 pm

Present: Councillor G Sell (Chairman)
Councillors K Artus, H Asker, G Barker, S Barker, R Chambers, J Davey, P Davies, A Dean, P Fairhurst, T Farthing, M Felton, J Freeman, A Gerard, T Goddard, J Gordon, N Hargreaves, S Harris, E Hicks, S Howell, D Jones, G LeCount, P Lees, M Lemon, J Lodge, J Loughlin, A Mills, S Morris, E Oliver, V Ranger, J Redfern, H Rolfe and L Wells

Officers in attendance: R Dobson (Principal Democratic Services Officer), D French (Chief Executive), R Harborough (Director - Public Services), S Pugh (Interim Head of Legal Services), P Snow (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager) and A Webb (Director - Corporate and Financial Services)

C47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Anjum, Foley, R Freeman, Light and Ryles.

Councillor S Barker declared a personal interest as a member of Essex County Council.

The Head of Legal Services advised members who were also members of town or parish councils to declare a personal non-prejudicial interest in the item relating to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

The following members were duly recorded as having declared an interest in this item: *Councillors Artus, Asker, Davey, Fairhurst, Gerard, Harris, LeCount, Lemon, Morris, Ranger, Redfern and Sell.*

In welcoming members to the meeting, the Chairman remarked on the recent change to Modern.gov for accessing and viewing council and committee agenda papers. Ricky Clarke and Craig Rogerson from the company had been present for an earlier training session for members into the use of the Modern.gov app and this had been a valuable introduction to the new system.

C48 MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 10 OCTOBER 2017

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2017 were received, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

C49 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reported on his attendance at numerous civic events since the last meeting. He was continuing to find the chairmanship an interesting role often requiring skills of diplomacy. He was frequently required to identify the location of Uttlesford and had been mistaken for Mr Rolfe on more than one occasion!

He thanked Melanie Maguire and Sue Kempster for the excellent support they had provided in organising this year's carol service which had raised in excess of £400 for his chosen charities. He announced the results of the Christmas card and poetry competitions won respectively this year by Isabel Wigley of Thomas More School in Saffron Walden and Charlie Stevens from Radwinter School.

In the light of national celebrations of the 70th wedding anniversary of Her Majesty The Queen and Prince Philip, the Chairman had instigated a search of the district to find any couple married for the same length of time. One couple, the Hollingworths of Duddenhoe End had been found and he would mark this achievement with a visit.

Together with the Chief Executive and Councillor Ranger, and with the Minister of State, Claire Perry MP in attendance, he had been to the Radison Hotel to recognise the start of the construction phase of the new Stansted Airport Technical College. The college was intended to help bridge the skills gap in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) and he hoped it would bring forward opportunities for apprenticeships relevant to Stansted Airport and beyond.

C50

REPORTS FROM THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Leader said he was sure members would wish to join him in passing on condolences to the family and friends of the Council's former housing officer Mary Roe, and of Alan Johnson, who had been the neighbourhood watch co-ordinator for very many years, both of whom had sadly passed away in recent weeks.

He referred to a booklet produced by the Essex Police Rural Crime Strategy publicising the role of Essex Police in combating rural crime, copies of which were available at the meeting.

With the Chief Executive he had attended the Essex leaders and chief executives meeting to receive an update from Dr Andrew Sentence in his role as advisor to the Essex Economic Commission on the theme of "Enterprising Essex, Meeting the Challenge". Dr Sentence had reported that the skills base for promoting business growth in Essex was not good and this had a negative impact on GDP. Pro-rata to the size of its economy, Essex had below the expected level of medium size businesses in the county. He highlighted the challenges this presented and the factors needed to boost skill levels and economic growth. These included improved further education provision to help promote the skills needed, the availability of work space and improved connectivity. A further challenge involved the Essex coastal communities.

The Government had launched a consultation under the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017 on the principles of establishing locally led development corporations. If enacted, there would be a power available to establish development corporations. The consultation ended on 2 January 2018.

He drew attention to the availability of planning delivery grants to assist with the delivery of garden communities. The three themes were joint working, design quality and innovations. Expressions of interest were invited by 11 January and he intended the Council would be submitting bids.

As the executive member for housing, Councillor Redfern outlined the main achievements of the housing development programme both for last year (149 affordable units) and the coming year (increasing the total to 170 affordable units). New or replacement affordable houses had been, or were being, built at a number of locations in the district including:

- Rural exception sites at Newport and Little Hallingbury
- Reynolds Court – 1st phase and 2nd phase
- Hatherley remodelling first phase early 2018, 2nd phase to follow
- Walden Place – examining options
- Sheds Lane garage replacements under construction, one unit adapted for a severely disabled child
- Newton Grove, Great Dunmow starting next year
- Frambury Lane, Newport
- The Moors, Little Dunmow replacement units at the planning stage
- Walden Road, Radwinter

She also reported that a further refugee family had been allocated Council accommodation and would be taking up occupation before Christmas.

Councillor Ranger reported on his attendance at a health issues conference at Genome on 21 November entitled “prevention is better than cure”. This had reported on digital progress and the co-ordination of actions across the services. The reported obesity rates for over 65s were truly alarming.

He reported that the communities team at Uttlesford was an internal consultee on planning applications for over 25 dwellings. Consultation already took place on environmental issues and it seemed proper that this process should be extended to incorporate community and social concerns.

The Health and Wellbeing Board had now published its delivery plan for 2017/18 listing and tracking projects across the district. This would help to advance the Council’s five core principles of health and wellbeing.

A review of funding streams for voluntary organisations was under way. Finally, he reminded members of the urgent need to ensure their ward member allowances were allocated for use.

On behalf of Councillor Ryles who was not present, Councillor S Barker read a position statement relating to the superfast Essex broadband rollout in Uttlesford. Essex County Council had signed a contract with Gigaclear to rollout ultrafast

fibre broadband to 4,600 homes and businesses in the district by December 2019 as one of three lots procured under phase 3 of the programme. The technology provided by Gigaclear meant that fibre would run directly to each property to provide faster speeds as part of an entirely new underground fibre network. This would provide protection from the elements with no wires or masts above ground. Information would be shared with parishes and local communities and would be added to the website.

C51 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN (UP TO 15 MINUTES)

In referring to the review of Council spending, Councillor Hargreaves asked for details of the cost of this exercise.

Councillor Howell said he did not have the figures available and would respond to Councillor Hargreaves after the meeting.

Councillor Hargreaves said he was puzzled by the inclusion in the survey of a question about the Local Council Tax Support scheme as to whether or not parish councils should be supported. He said the Council's position was there was no legal responsibility to do so and no funds held for the purpose and asked why, in that case, the Council had included that question in the survey.

Councillor Howell referred Councillor Hargreaves to the discussion of item 7 on the agenda.

C52 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME AND CONSULTATION 2018/19

In introducing this item, the Chairman drew members' attention to the letter of representation received from Saffron Walden Town Council.

Councillor Howell then presented the Cabinet recommendation to approve the 2018/19 Local Council Tax Support Scheme as set out in the report. He said that the Council was required to consult on the scheme and vote annually even if no changes were planned. The period of consultation had been extended and the Cabinet had received helpful feedback from the Scrutiny Committee on 30 November.

The consultation outcome was an indication of strong public engagement and demonstrated how much people cared about the district.

Paragraphs 4 and 5 of the report set out the basis of the scheme. This provided for protection for pensioners on low income, disabled people and carers. He drew Councillor Hargreaves' attention to item g) stating that a discretionary subsidy grant had been provided to town and parish councils to neutralise the loss of the tax base caused by the way the LCTS operated. The question of continued financial support for town and parish councils had been included in the survey because it was intended to change the policy.

He noted that, if approved, the scheme would be in its fifth consecutive year of maintaining the lowest liability cap in Essex at 12.5% and said the Council should be proud of that achievement.

The effect of the LCTS scheme had been to reduce the taxbase, thus affecting council tax calculations. The Government had put in place transitional funding arrangements in 2013/14 and the Council had decided to pass on the benefits of this funding to town and parish councils to ensure they were not disadvantaged by the taxbase adjustments.

The transitional arrangements had now ended as the source of core funding through the Revenue Support Grant would no longer be available. As a result of this change other Essex councils had decided to decrease or discontinue the parish subsidy grant. The grant was reduced to 50% in 2016/17 to reflect changes in the RSG and it was proposed next year to reduce the subsidy payment to zero.

In commenting on the outcome of the public consultation, Councillor Howell said this was not a referendum and the Council was not required to act on the outcome but it was pleasing to note there was broad support for maintaining the 12.5% contribution rate.

Thaxted Parish Council and now Saffron Walden Town Council had written objecting to the withdrawal of the discretionary grant. The letter from Thaxted Parish Council largely reiterated objections made previously and when the grant had been reduced by 50% last year.

The withdrawal of RSG meant there was no additional funding to meet the cost of the LCTS scheme so that the Council would now bear the full burden including the payment of any grant funding made to town and parish councils. With this in mind, the recommendation in the report set out the scheme most appropriate for Uttlesford based on what the Council could afford, while continuing to protect the most vulnerable. It was proposed that the discretionary payment to town and parish councils should be withdrawn.

He proposed the recommendation.

Councillor Chambers seconded the motion. He said he agreed with Councillor Howell's comments as the Council was doing what it could to support the most vulnerable.

Councillor Dean summarised the views of the Scrutiny Committee. They had concluded the consultation should be simplified and this might have some impact on the cost of the exercise. In commenting on the withdrawal of the subsidy grant to parishes, he said there was no logical reason why the loss of the taxbase could not be replaced by raising extra revenue through the parish precept.

Councillor Lodge proposed an amendment to part iii of the motion. The proposed amendment would replace the word "withdrawn" with the words "maintained at current 2017/18 levels". The full amendment would then read:

“The discretionary subsidy grant for town and parish councils is maintained at current 2017/18 levels.”

Councillor Lodge read part of the letter from Saffron Walden Town Council quoting comments made by Sajid Javid MP, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, in support of his amendment. He said the Secretary of State’s comments broadly stated that principal authorities should not be using parish precepts as a means of avoiding their own cap on council tax increases. Uttlesford was heading towards a £1.5m surplus and should not be putting punitive increases at town and parish council level. The Council was well able to afford to maintain the subsidy grant and should do so.

Councillor Gerard seconded the amendment.

Councillor Dean spoke against the amendment. He said the Minister’s speech had been misinterpreted. The Council was not delegating responsibilities to towns and parishes in this case.

Councillor Howell made clear he was not prepared to support the amendment. The Council had adopted the appropriate structure to support local communities where the need was greatest. It was more important to retain the 12.5% contribution cap than to maintain the Town Council’s taxbase. The Town Council had received £48k in grants from Uttlesford last year and there were additional grants allocated for local use to Saffron Walden ward councillors. He had been very clear to his own parish council about the impact on the local taxbase but town and parish councils all had the opportunity to adjust their budgets accordingly. Councillor Dean had been entirely correct to say that the Secretary of State’s speech had been referring to devolved responsibilities. The Council was not withholding funds from towns and parishes as the additional funding from Government had ceased some time ago. The Council’s LCTS policy was appropriate and would stand the test of time.

Councillor Lodge asked for a recorded vote on the amendment.

The Chairman put the amendment to the vote and the voting was as follows:

For the amendment: Councillors Asker, Fairhurst, Gerard, Hargreaves, LeCount, Lees, Lodge and Morris

Against the amendment: Councillors Artus, G Barker, S Barker, Chambers, Davey, Davies, Dean, Farthing, Felton, J Freeman, Goddard, Gordon, Harris, Hicks, Howell, Jones, Lemon, Loughlin, Mills, Oliver, Ranger, Redfern, Rolfe, Sell and Wells

The amendment was lost by 25 votes against to 8 votes in favour.

Following further comments from Councillor Howell, the substantive motion was then put to the meeting and carried.

RESOLVED to approve the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2018/19 as follows:

- i. The 2018/19 LCTS scheme is set on the same basis as in 2017/18 therefore freezing the contribution rate for the fifth consecutive year.
- ii. The Council continues to protect vulnerable and disabled residents and carers on a low income.
- iii. The discretionary subsidy grant for town and parish councils is withdrawn.

C53 **PARLIAMENTARY BOUNDARY REVIEW 2018**

Councillor Oliver presented the recommendation of the Governance, Audit and Performance Committee to support the revised proposals of the Boundary Commission for England for the Saffron Walden Constituency. He noted that the proposed new constituency included the whole of Uttlesford together with four wards of Braintree District in exchange for four wards of Chelmsford City area in the existing constituency.

The view of members was that the proposal fitted better with the rural nature of Uttlesford, was a more sensible arrangement than the existing boundary, and should be supported.

RESOLVED to submit a formal representation to the BCE in support of the revised proposals for the Saffron Walden constituency.

C54 **THE FUTURE OF ESSEX**

The Leader presented a report summarising the contents of a document entitled “The Future of Essex” setting out the following shared ambitions to guide the county’s evolution to 2035:

- Unite behind a sense of identity
- Enjoy life long into old age
- Provide an equal foundation for every child
- Strengthen communities through participation
- Develop our county sustainably
- Connect us to each other and the world
- Share prosperity with everyone

A short video clip was shown to members as seen at the Essex Assembly.

During the short debate, members indicated their support for the principles set out in the report advocating a collaborative approach to channel change in a sustainable direction. This was seen as being consistent with the Council’s vision of working together for the well-being of the community while protecting the character of the district.

RESOLVED to support the principles contained in “The Future of Essex”.

C55

FURTHER CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Before concluding the meeting, the Chairman invited Councillor Redfern to encourage members' participation in the apprentice dragons' challenge taking place on 18 January 2018 and featuring a screening of The Great Gatsby.

The Chairman wished all present a happy Christmas and a prosperous and healthy New Year.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm.