

**CABINET MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN on 21 JUNE 2012 at 7.00pm**

Present: Councillor J Ketteridge – Leader (Chairman).
Councillor S Barker – Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services.
Councillor R Chambers – Portfolio Holder for Finance and Administration.
Councillor J Redfern – Portfolio Holder for Housing.
Councillor H Rolfe – Portfolio Holder for Community Partnerships and Engagement.

Also present: Councillors H Asker, E Godwin, M Lemon, D Morson, K Mackman, J Salmon and L Wells.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), R Dobson (Democratic Services Officer), M Donaldson (Accountancy Manager), 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).

CA12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cheetham, Favell, Howell and Walters.

Councillors Barker and Chambers declared their respective personal interests as members of Essex County Council and Essex Fire Authority.

Councillor Ketteridge declared a personal interest in item 9, relating to Local Council Tax Support, as one of his relatives received Council Tax Benefit, although as a pensioner was within the protected category.

CA13 MINUTES

Subject to an amendment to the membership of the Uttlesford Transport Forum to change the reference to Councillor S Barker to Councillor A Walters, the minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

CA14 MATTERS ARISING

- (i) **Minute CA6 – Forward Plan**
Councillor Morson asked whether the revenues and benefits partnership would be proceeding. The Chief Executive said the

most recent position was as set out in the last reports to the Joint Partnership Committee and that Harlow Council had only this week had their Cabinet meeting at which their members of the Joint Partnership Committee had been appointed.

CA15

MATTERS REFERRED FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Councillor Barker said she had received a request from Councillor Howell as Chairman of the Performance and Audit Committee asking that steps be taken to improve underperformance against a target for the Key Performance Indicator for missed bins. She had provided Councillor Howell with an explanation, given in the papers for this meeting.

Councillor Barker said the reasons for underperformance were the fact that the target had been set at a time when the service had performed particularly well therefore the target was proving difficult to deliver against; agency drivers had been used to cover sickness absence of regular drivers; and in some instances bins were not placed out early enough. This council was one of only a few collecting such data, but comparable data from Maldon and Rochford councils was being obtained. Councillor Barker suggested the target be reviewed once the new recycling arrangements had come into effect, and that the Waste Strategy Panel be asked to look at this issue.

NOTED that data on missed bins would continue to be collected during the transition to a single pass collection, for a period of up to three months, and that the Waste Strategy Panel would be asked to review the target for missed bins when it considered the introduction of the new recycling arrangements.

CA16

FORWARD PLAN

The Forward Plan for the period July to October 2012 was noted. Councillor Rolfe asked that the Forward Plan include future decisions on the launch of a new scheme to provide support to the voluntary sector; and regarding the Localism Act provisions on community empowerment, due to come into effect in July 2012.

Councillor Morson asked whether the Local Strategic Partnership had been disbanded.

Councillor Rolfe said the LSP was still very much in existence; that the next Board meeting was on 17 July; that it now had four workstreams aligned to Essex County Council's single budget scheme, addressing the areas of health, crime, economic development and 'people'. The working groups would be chaired not by councillors but by experts in those

respective fields, and interviews for these individuals were currently taking place.

CA16

2011/12 OUTTURN

Councillor Chambers presented a report summarising the 2011/12 Outturn position. He said once again the Council had strengthened its financial position in a difficult economic context. It was now necessary to approve the outturn report in order that the Assistant Chief Executive-Finance could certify the draft 2011/12 Statement of Accounts before 30 June. The draft accounts would subsequently be submitted to the Performance and Audit Committee and to external audit, with the final Statement of Accounts being produced in September.

Councillor Chambers drew Members' attention to the outturn summary in the report. The General Fund had a net favourable variance before allowing for planned transfers to earmarked reserves, of £1.237m. This figure was £0.633m above the level forecasted, and had been boosted by three one-off items which arose after the end of the financial year.

The Housing Revenue Account had an in year deficit of £147,000 which was £46,000 higher than the budgeted in year deficit of £101, 000.

The Capital Programme outturn was expenditure of £4.428m which was £0.833m above the revised budget (after slippage requests) of £3.595m; the extra expenditure was due to two externally funded projects (£0.479m) and an overspend on the HRA capital repairs programme (£0.387m).

Councillor Chambers said the report's recommendations were to approve the 2011/12 outturn position, the reserve transfers and reserve balances, and the capital programme slippage requests. He added that he now wished to propose an amendment to these recommendations, as follows:

To approve a reduction in the emergency response reserve from £200,000 to £90,000; to establish a hardship fund of £100,000; and to give a one-off grant of £10,000 to the charity Support 4 Sight.

Councillor Chambers expressed his concern at the implications of increasing homelessness in the district. He said he hoped these amendments would enable assistance to be given to people facing difficulties, and to support the role of the voluntary sector. He believed the measures were an appropriate response to the pressures the district's residents were experiencing.

The amendment was seconded and members commented as follows.

Councillor S Barker asked whether the proposed hardship fund would be additional to the contingency fund referred to in the report on the Local Council Tax Support scheme.

Councillor Chambers replied that this would be a separate fund.

Councillor Rolfe said he supported Councillor Chamber's statement; and the outturn position was an excellent outcome. Regarding the hardship fund and support for the voluntary sector, he supported this prudent move in a time of changing scenarios.

Councillor Lemon said he agreed with what Councillor Chambers had said, particularly in relation to homelessness.

Councillor Godwin said in principle what was proposed was a good idea, but she was concerned at how hardship would be defined and how the fund would be administered. She would like to know the criteria under which funds would be given before any money was allocated.

In reply Councillor Chambers said he agreed with the points Councillor Godwin had made in that the detail of how the fund was to be administered would be looked at very carefully.

Councillor Barker said she had chaired the Stansted Airport Community Trust for a number of years. The Trust had over the last seven years given away £100,000 to local voluntary organisations; but it had not once been approached by Support 4 Sight. She suggested that the Portfolio holders for community partnerships and for finance and administration should make it clear to all such organisations that there were other sources of funding available.

Councillor Ketteridge said that Councillor Rolfe was looking actively at the moment how the voluntary sector accessed grants other than directly through the Council.

Councillor Morson asked whether the new hardship fund was intended primarily to address homelessness. He referred to the presentation to the Scrutiny Committee on 12 June by Mrs Snares, the Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager, regarding this important issue.

Councillor Chambers said it was preferable to be able to offer temporary accommodation to those who became homeless within the district rather than outside it, so that people could remain close to their families and communities.

Councillor Barker said she was aware of a workshop to take place on 4 July for members to consider the Council's housing strategy. It could be helpful to include this matter on the agenda for discussion.

The amendment was put to the vote, and duly approved.

RESOLVED

- 1 To approve the 2011/12 outturn position as set out in the report;
- 2 To approve the reserve transfers and reserve balances set out in the report;
 - a) To approve a reduction in the emergency response reserve from £200,000 to £90,000;
 - b) To establish a hardship fund of £100,000;
 - c) To make a one-off grant of £10,000 to Support 4 Sight;
- 3 To approve the capital programme slippage requests.

CA17

LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT

Councillor Chambers presented a report on a draft Local Council Tax Support scheme being prepared by all district and borough councils in Essex as a consequence of the government's decision to replace Council Tax Benefit with a new system of Local Council Tax Support. The scheme aimed to achieve cost neutrality, that is, the cut in government funding was to be offset by making reductions in the amount of support certain households received. Councillor Chambers drew attention to key proposals such as the protection of pensioners and other groups of vulnerable people.

The proposals would reduce the cost of support to £3.5m, however Councillor Chambers said there would be no contingency for extra costs from increased demand, increased council tax bills, or for more debt recovery costs. He urged all Members to contribute to the consultation. He then moved the recommendations, which were duly seconded.

Councillor Ketteridge said this matter had been discussed at a meeting of Essex Leaders and Chief Executives earlier that day. He reiterated this was a county-wide scheme; and that it would affect the funding of not only district councils but also the County Council, Fire Service and the Police. There was no option other than to enter into such a scheme, as it was not possible to absorb the reduction in funding, which at county level was huge.

Councillor Barker asked questions about the implications of the scheme for those on child benefit whose income assessment would be affected by the change. In response the Project Officer provided detailed information, and said the number of households in receipt of Child Benefit which would be directly affected would be 458. Councillor Barker said she was concerned that households would be hit by several changes at once, and that staff would have to deal with an increasing number of difficult and distressing cases.

The Assistant Chief Executive – Finance said the Council would be writing to all Council Tax Benefit recipients in July to make it clear whether or not they would be affected, including pensioners so that they could be reassured they were protected from the changes.

Councillor Morson expressed concern about the difficulties of defining the term “vulnerable” under legislation. The Assistant Chief Executive-Finance said more detailed information on definitions was given in the appendices to the report. Assessments would be in accordance with existing objective measures such as the qualifying conditions already applied by the Department for Work and Pensions.

The Leader said all district and borough councils were co-ordinating their approach through an officers’ working group.

The Project Officer said that at these meetings officers had worked closely on a draft scheme, and that all councils in Essex would adhere to existing disability criteria.

Councillor Lemon said it was clear that difficult and sensitive decisions would have to be made. In the main he was happy with the report, although he was concerned about the impact of the savings limit reduction, which would have an adverse effect on prudent families on a relatively low income.

The Project Officer said the limit of £6,000 was based on the current scheme and that the reduction was a means of tapering support away from those who had savings.

Councillor Ketteridge said the proposals were the first step in the Government’s welfare reforms which would mean less money. He reiterated that fact that this scheme would be implemented by all councils in Essex.

RESOLVED

- 1 To approve, for consultation purposes, elements of the draft Uttlesford Local Council Tax Support Scheme, as set out in the report paragraphs 30 to 33;
- 2 To approve the communication and consultation plan and timetable as set out in the report;
- 3 To authorise the Assistant Chief Executive-Finance, in consultation with the Finance and Administration Portfolio Holder, to initiate the consultation process;
- 4 to note other information in this report, including the estimated effect on Uttlesford households, other benefits reforms in the pipeline and Equalities Impact Assessment.

BRIDGE ACCESS TO AUDLEY END PARK

Councillor S Barker presented a report on a proposal to provide a pedestrian footbridge over the ditch between Swan Meadow Car Park and Audley End Park. The footbridge was intended to meet the needs of local residents who previously parked near the gate to the park on Audley End Road.

Councillor Redfern said she was concerned about the costs of what could potentially be only a temporary measure.

Councillor S Barker replied the rural clearway was the most expeditious means of addressing the problems on that road and that in the longer term parking restrictions would have to be very carefully considered. Discussions with the interested groups would take place.

Councillor Ketteridge said if this route were to be used, then there was no option other than to build a footbridge. From discussions with Audley End Estate he did not see why this could not be a long term solution. The parking problems had affected not only Audley End Road but Abbey Lane too, and the current situation was clearly not sustainable.

Councillor Chambers said that £16,000 was a reasonable sum to pay for the footbridge; there was a serious safety issue to be addressed, and there was currently significant disturbance to residents on Abbey Lane. These issues had to be sorted out, and he hoped they could be resolved in the long term.

Councillor Rolfe referred to the Olympic Torch Relay due to come to Saffron Walden on 7 July. He said it would be crucial to ensure Audley End Road was kept clear of parked cars for this occasion and asked Councillor Barker to request the North Essex Parking Partnership to take appropriate measures.

Councillor Chambers said he hoped the parking arrangements for this event were being well publicised, as parking would be available in Audley End Park.

RESOLVED

- 1 Negotiations be concluded with the Audley End Estate for a temporary easement to allow construction of the bridge and a permissive footpath between the bridge and the right of way network within the park;
- 2 the Director of Public Services be delegated to agree the arrangements on behalf of the Council, in consultation with the Leader, subject to all costs of the project not exceeding £16,000;
- 3 a planning application for construction of the bridge and associated works be submitted;

4 subject to the outcome of the above, provision of the bridge be implemented as soon as possible.

Councillor Ketteridge said that before bringing the meeting to a close, he wished to thank all finance officers for their excellent work in preparing the financial reports for this meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.15pm.