

**CABINET MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD  
SAFFRON WALDEN on 20 JUNE 2013 at 7.00pm**

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

Also present: Councillors E Godwin, S Howell, M Lemon, E Parr, V Ranger  
and J Salmon.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), R Dobson (Democratic  
Services Officer), M Donaldson (Accountancy Manager), S Ellis  
(Revenues Manager), R Harborough (Director of Public  
Services), S Joyce (Assistant Chief Executive-Finance), R  
Millership (Assistant Director Housing and Environmental  
Services), A Parry Jones (Project Officer), M Perry (Assistant  
Chief Executive – Legal), M Tokley (Principal Accountant –  
Budgets), J Troup (Communications Manager) and A Webb  
(Director of Corporate Services).

**CA1 WELCOME AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Parr to the meeting in her new role as  
Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group.

*Councillor Barker declared her pecuniary interest as a member of Essex  
County Council in relation to any item involving ECC.*

**CA2 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2013 were approved and signed as  
a correct record subject to a correction at CA133 to “Elm House”, and to the  
inclusion of Councillor Ranger in the list of those in attendance.

**CA3 MATTERS ARISING**

**(i) Minute CA134 – Business Rates Write-off**

The Chairman referred to the recommendation that the Portfolio Holder  
for Finance should write to the Minister expressing concern that local  
authorities were likely to be exposed to greater risks under the new  
localised business rates scheme where businesses failed to meet their  
business rates liability. He said today a reply had been received from  
Brandon Lewis MP, which he read out to the meeting. The Minister

had thanked the Council for its comments on the enforcement of the business rates scheme, and said the valuation office was improving its efficiency in progressing appeals. The Government was keen to maintain an efficient business rates regime with the assistance of local authorities.

CA4

#### **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

Councillor Lemon asked a question about the number of children living in poverty in the district, of which there were reported to be 300. He asked whether the Cabinet recognised this figure and whether there was anything it was doing about it.

Councillor Rolfe said he was aware of the numbers of disadvantaged people living in Uttlesford. In general terms, the Council was taking a more generous approach than some other councils in the area with regard to benefit changes. The Local Strategic Partnership had set up a Families and Young Persons sub-group and possible measures to address child poverty had been examined in the meeting of that group which he had attended today.

Councillor Rolfe said that even in an affluent area some families could find themselves in need. A food bank had been set up in Thaxted, and others were planned for Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow. The Council was working with the Salvation Army on this initiative.

Councillor Barker referred to the increase in the age at which children could leave school, coming into force this year. She asked that the Families and Young Persons subgroup also look at the question of helping families in rural areas with costs of transport arising from this change.

The Chairman said there were various charitable bodies in the area which could offer assistance to those in financial difficulties. They relied on referrals from bodies such as the CAB and perhaps they needed greater publicity but they did exist and could help.

Councillor Godwin asked how it would be known whether those applying for help from food banks were from this district. Councillor Rolfe said people were usually referred via the CAB so there were good levels of control. Those attending for help on more than one occasion were also offered advice on their wider needs.

CA5

#### **ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Members considered a report on the Council's asset management plan. The plan was refreshed each year and included the strategy for the forthcoming year.

In reply to a question about the need for refurbishment at the Council offices, the Director of Corporate Services said the carpets in the civic suite were to be replaced over 10 days commencing on 17 August. This floor of the

building was being re-cabled and there were plans to refurbish other areas of the building in due course. Officers were working on arrangements to install wi fi.

Councillor Rolfe said a useful addition to the list of assets would be information on each stating the reason it was held, its condition and any future plans.

RESOLVED to approve the Asset Management Plan.

CA6

## **DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS GUIDANCE**

Members considered a report recommending the adoption of a policy setting out clear guidance on development. Councillor Barker proposed the motion and put forward an amendment to include in the introduction to the document a reference to the Statement of Community Involvement, which referred to the involvement of town and parish councils in the process.

Councillor Redfern said she was pleased to see all planning guidance brought together in one document as it was very helpful to have an explanation of terms such as affordable housing.

Councillor Barker said that the document would be circulated to all members in hard copy and would be placed on the Council's website.

Councillor Redfern asked that the website include a section on 'Frequently Asked Questions'. The Director of Corporate Services said the website already contained the 20 most popular items, but if members wished to notify officers of their FAQs a section could be created.

Councillor Godwin said she was pleased this document clarifying planning terms was available for reference in negotiations with developers.

RESOLVED to adopt the Developer Contributions Guidance as a material planning consideration with the inclusion in the introduction of a reference to the Statement of Community Involvement.

CA7

## **COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNTS AND LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT – CONSULTATION FOR 2014/15 SCHEME**

Councillor Chambers presented a report setting out suggestions for changes to the Council's Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) Scheme and other Council Tax discounts from 2014/15 and asked the Cabinet to approve the instigation of a consultation process.

He said the Council's stated intention was to review the scheme during 2013/14 and make changes for 2014/15. The Council aimed to strike the right balance between affordability and the impact on low income households. The aim was to reduce the next cost of the scheme and the UDC subsidy of it,

to reach zero in a few years. It was not proposed to reduce or remove the protection against CT liability which was in place for certain groups. However for other low income households an option for reducing the cost of the scheme would be to require them to pay more Council Tax. For these people the increased council tax liability would be 12.5%. The average additional council tax payable per affected household would be 73 pence per week. The liability cap of 12.5% would still be the lowest in any local authority in Essex. There were further proposals for the removal of discounts on second homes, and empty homes, and for funding for Town and parish councils and for the continuation of the council's discretionary subsidy of major preceptors (County Police and Fire) on a reformed basis. The consultation would take place over the summer, with a report to Cabinet in the Autumn, and the decision to be taken by Council in December.

Regarding the figures on empty homes set out in a table in the report, Councillor Chambers emphasised that the figure of 3,030 empty homes included vacancies for very short periods.

Councillor Barker asked whether there would be flexibility in the new proposals if the funding situation should change.

Councillor Chambers said there was likely to be an announcement shortly on a reduction to local government funding and the scheme would be reviewed as necessary.

The Assistant Chief Executive-Finance said the consultation would relate to the proposals for the year 2014/15, and that the forthcoming announcement on government cuts would affect 2015/16.

Councillor Parr welcomed the discount reduction on empty and second homes. She said she was uncomfortable with increasing the amount paid by those receiving Local Council Tax support. She was also concerned that those affected had to access the information and documents online and asked whether there were paper versions of these documents available.

Councillor Chambers said officers had been putting in a great deal of work to support people affected by the LCTS. In future it was unlikely the Council would be able to keep the liability cap at 12.5%. There was a hardship fund available for exceptional cases and problems had been far fewer than anticipated.

The Assistant Chief Executive-Finance thanked Councillor Parr and said in addition to the survey which would be online, officers would be writing to all non-protected LCT recipients to direct them to the website or to offer them a letter in order to participate. He would also write to all owners of empty homes and second homes who received a discount under the present scheme.

The Chairman said the Council had made it clear in February that the current LCTS was a transitional arrangement, uniquely amongst Essex councils, to

phase in the changes. There are limits to what the Council could do, which is why the provisions regarding second and empty home discounts were being considered.

Councillor Rolfe said he understood the point made by Councillor Parr in the context of child poverty and food banks. He said this was the fairest scheme in Essex.

The Chairman said that the Council had to think ahead 5 years in his view what was being proposed was as good as it could be.

Councillor Lemon said this was a good report and he welcomed the disregarding of Child benefit and child maintenance for the purposes of Council Tax liability, as the proposals showed this was a caring council.

### RESOLVED

That a consultation process be carried out on the following draft proposals:

- a) Implement changes to the LCTS scheme as set out in paragraphs 18 to 20 of the report;
- b) Provide discretionary subsidy for town & parish councils for 2014/15 in accordance with the principles set out in paragraph 30;
- c) Provide discretionary subsidy for major preceptors for 2014/15 in accordance with the principles set out in paragraph 37;
- d) Implement Council Tax Discounts changes with effect from 1 April 2014 as set out in paragraph 44.

CA8

### **2012/13 OUTTURN**

Members considered a report summarising the 2012/13 outturn position, setting out the Council's financial performance for that year and the level of reserves as at 31 March 2013. Councillor Chambers drew to Members' attention the fact that the draft 2012/13 Statement of Accounts would be certified by the Assistant Chief Executive-Finance once the outturn had been approved by Cabinet, in order to be submitted to the Performance and Audit Committee for approval.

Councillor Chambers highlighted the main elements of the report as follows. The General Fund had a net favourable variance, after allowing for planned transfers to earmarked reserves, of £95,000. The Housing Revenue Account had an in year surplus of £3.2 million, of which £3.1 million had been committed for housing improvements under the HRA Business Plan. This left a surplus of £31,000 which was net favourable variance of £17,000 compared with budget. There had been expenditure in the Capital Programme of £9.395 million which was £0.914 million below the budget of £10.309 million, and

there was a net adverse variance of £165,000 after allowing for slippage requests.

Councillor Chambers said the Council's budget had been well managed and the Council was in a stable financial position, and he moved the recommendation to approve the report.

Councillor Parr said she was concerned about an underspend of £26,000 in the ECC budget for disabled facilities funding, and asked whether it was possible for this council to request ECC to reverse this position.

Councillor Barker said the question of disabled facilities had been considered at Housing Board last week and the Council was looking to provide occupational therapy services if Essex County Council withdrew such services.

Councillor Redfern said the Council would commission occupational therapy services, and she would be happy to provide Councillor Parr with details.

The Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services said she had identified some money in the Change Management Reserve in the Housing Revenue Account so the Council could commission services locally as a pilot for 6 months.

Councillor Redfern referred to the outturn report and said she was pleased to report that the HRA was only £17,000 off its budget and that planning permission had been granted for Mead Court to be developed.

The Chairman said he was pleased that the outturn for the Council showed a favourable variance for the sixth year in a row.

RESOLVED to:

- 1 Approve the 2012/13 outturn position as set out in this report
- 2 Approve the reserve transfers and reserve balances set out in the report
- 3 Approve the Capital Programme slippage requests.

CA9

## **MUSEUM MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP**

Councillor Rolfe presented a report informing Members that the Museum was currently undergoing an accreditation process, which required it to adopt revised policies. The policies had been considered by the Museum Management Working Group, which did not have decision-making powers, and Cabinet was therefore invited to approve a forward plan, a collections development policy and amended terms of reference for the working group.

Councillor Cheetham asked a question about the policy regarding items which were never displayed in the collection.

Councillor Rolfe said a storage area was being built to provide easier access so that more items could ultimately be displayed, and that renovations would be carried out at the Museum to enable more to be displayed including some of the larger exhibits. There would be a rotation policy, and it was the intention to display some items in other public buildings such as at these offices and those of the Town Council.

The Director of Corporate Services said items were routinely lent to other museums but that 90% were stored rather than on display. There were some issues regarding disposal, for example items which were gifted could not be sold but only gifted to another museum.

Councillor Cheetham said there had been many items dug up at the time the new Terminal at Stansted Airport was built, and the Airport owners might be amenable to displaying some of the artefacts. The Director of Corporate Services said this was a valid suggestion and MAG would be approached on this possibility.

The Chairman said the Forward Plan in the report was included in the Council's budget.

Councillor Rolfe said the collections policy would enable the Museum to focus on north west Essex, and that the policy was one which was standard to Museums.

#### RESOLVED

- 1 To Approve the Museum Service Forward Plan 2013-18
- 2 To approve the Collections Development Policy
- 3 To adopt the amended terms of reference for the Museum Management Working Group

CA10

### **MUSEUM STORE**

Members considered a report informing them of the location of, planning permission for, and funding for a new site for a Museum store at Shire Hill Waste Depot.

Cabinet approval was sought in order to commence building the store. Councillor Rolfe drew attention to the two funding sources. A capital sum of £73,000 had been made available by the Council, plus staff time in connection with the work involved in the tender process; and the remaining costs which would be the majority of the tender cost, would be provided by Saffron Walden Museum Society.

Councillor Barker said she assumed the planning permission was granted for an area of 17 x 17 metres, as the 17m<sup>2</sup> referred to in the report did not seem correct.

Officers confirmed that this was the case.

RESOLVED to

- 1 Agree the principle of building the new store on the Shire Hill depot site.
- 2 Authorise the Director of Corporate Services to issue the design and build tender for the new storage unit at Shire Hill on behalf of the Saffron Walden Museum Society (SWMS)
- 3 Delegate to the Assistant Chief Executive – Legal, Director of Corporate Services and the Executive Member for Communities and Partnerships authority to agree a 999 year lease, with financial contribution, with the SWMS
- 4 Request the Director of Corporate Services to explore options, as part of the asset management action plan, for the Thaxted Road site that was originally designated as suitable for a Museum Heritage Quest Centre.

CA11 **APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO JOINT COMMITTEES**

RESOLVED

- 1 To appoint Councillor S Barker to the Joint Parking Partnership
- 2 to appoint Councillor Rolfe to the West Essex Wellbeing Joint Committee

CA12 **APPOINTMENT OF CABINET WORKING GROUPS**

Members considered a schedule of recommended appointments of members to working groups. The Chairman proposed the recommendations as set out, with the amendment that Councillor Dean would take the place of Councillor Morson on the Housing Board.

RESOLVED to appoint Members to the working groups listed in the report subject to the amendment that Councillor Dean be appointed a member of the Housing Board in place of Councillor Morson.

CA13 **APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES**

Members considered a schedule of recommended appointments to outside bodies.

RESOLVED to appoint Members to be the Council's representatives on the bodies listed in the report.

CA14 **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that, under section 100I of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following item of business on the



grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 5 part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

CA15

**LOCAL LAND CHARGES LITIGATION**

Members were informed of the progress of litigation by search agents to recover local search and other fees and of the provision being made in respect of such claims.

RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

The meeting ended at 8.05pm.