

**CABINET MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN on 10 DECEMBER 2015 at 7.00pm**

Present: Councillor H Rolfe (Leader)
Councillor S Barker (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environmental Services)
Councillor S Howell (Cabinet Member for Finance and Administration)
Councillor J Redfern (Cabinet Member for Housing and Economic Development)

Also present: Councillors A Dean (Liberal Democrat Group Leader and Chair of Scrutiny Committee), J Lodge (Residents for Uttlesford Group Leader) and Councillor G Sell.

Officers in attendance: R Harborough (Director of Public Services and Interim Head of Paid Service) M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), A Knight (Assistant Director – Finance), M Perry (Assistant Chief Executive – Legal) and A Webb (Director of Finance and Corporate Services).

CA52 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Wells.

Councillor S Barker declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 11, Local Council Tax support scheme, as a member of Essex County Council.

CA53 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2015 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

CA54 QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS FROM NON- EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor Sell said he would speak to the car parking report when the item was discussed later in the meeting.

CA55 REPORTS FROM PERFORMANCE AND AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Councillor Dean said he was considering whether to add a review of the Cabinet system to the Scrutiny Committee's future work programme and was trying to establish whether the actions from the previous review had been completed. The Chairman said he would ask Councillor Ranger, the Chairman of the Constitution Working Group to reply.

CA56 **REFUGEE WORKING GROUP**

Councillor Redfern said that Essex would receive three refugee families before Christmas, who would be housed within the Colchester Borough. There would be a meeting with the organisers early in the New Year to share best practise before the expected arrival of further refugees. She said that UDC currently had two properties available, one council owned and one offered from a private landlord to be let at a social rent.

CA57 **BUDGET MONITORING 2015- 16 QUARTER 2**

Councillor Howell presented a report on the financial performance relating to the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, Capital Programme and Treasury Management from April to October and a predicted forecast for the end of the financial year.

The key points were as follows. The General Fund was forecasting an increased underspend of £1,213,000 due mainly to the Business Rates income which has been realised as part of the Business Rates review of the scheme undertaken by officers. The HRA was forecasting a £598,000 underspend due mainly to the slippage in the Capital Programme and the associated financing and the Capital Programme was predicting a £4,168,000 underspend mainly due to project slippage.

The Cabinet discussed the detail of the report. The Assistant Director Finance answered questions around NNDR income but explained that this was a complex and changing area. Members were pleased with the proposal to transfer the surplus to Strategic Initiatives Fund Reserve to provide future funding opportunities.

RESOLVED to note the report and approve

- i) the transfer of £1.148m from the Business Rates Reserve to the Strategic Initiatives Fund Reserve as set out in point 10.
- ii) Approve the transfer of the General Fund Surplus of £1.213m to the Strategic Initiatives Fund.

CA58 **TREASURY MANAGEMENT BENCHMARKING EXERCISE**

At the last meeting, the Leader asked for a report to compare Uttlesford's treasury management activities with that of other Essex Councils as the Cabinet had noted a low rate of return on investment. It had not been possible to obtain the information for all the Essex authorities, but information was available from the council's treasury consultant, Arlingclose who produced a quarterly benchmarking exercise, comparing average treasury activities of their client councils across the country.

Members considered the report, which covered all investments made for treasury purposes, including external funds, but excluded any investments made for service purposes.

The report concluded that the council's current investment strategy was more risk adverse than the average authority and prevented the council from receiving higher returns. In the light of past events, the council had adopted a cautious approach and invested more in fixed term deposits, whereas the average authority placed more funds with the money markets and call accounts and had a greater number of counterparties.

The Cabinet agreed that there appeared to be scope to increase the rate of return by taking on a modest increase in risk and asked officers to prepare the new Treasury Management policy on this basis. However, Members were clear that they did not wish to increase the risk appetite beyond a moderate level, particularly as the authorities that had adopted a higher risk approach did not necessarily achieved a corresponding level of return.

RESOLVED to prepare the 2016/17 Treasury Management Strategy with the aim of ensuring an improved rate of return is achieved whilst acknowledging the risk appetite of the council.

CA59 **AUTUMN STATEMENT – AN OVERVIEW OF KEY POINTS**

Councillor Howell presented a report, which set out the key points arising from the Autumn Statement announced on 5 November. However, at this stage there was insufficient detail to determine the funding available to the council; this would be announced on 17 December. The main areas of concern were around the cut in Government support, a shift towards funding of social care and upper tier authorities, a reduction in the New Homes Bonus from 2017/18 and to encourage the use of reserves. To counter this district authorities would be able to retain business rate receipts, although there was likely to be levelling across the country and authorities would be required to take on additional responsibilities.

There was discussion around the desire not to reduce the council's front line services, the future use of reserves and plans to stimulate income opportunities for the council.

The timing of the Government announcement meant that the preparation of reports for the 2016/17 budget and MTFS would be squeezed into a short period. There would be a workshop for members on 11 January, with an additional afternoon session, if this would be useful for members. There would however still be the opportunity for member to input their views before the budget was approved in February.

The report was noted.

CA60 **2016-17 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME**

Councillor Howell presented the report on the LCTS. The Cabinet had approved the 2016/17 scheme for consultation in June 2015 on the following basis

- 1 The 2016/17 LCTS scheme is set on the same basis as the 2015/16 scheme and therefore the contribution rate is frozen for the second consecutive year.
- 2 Provide discretionary subsidy for town & parish councils for 2016/17 in accordance with the principles set out in paragraph 29.
- 3 The 2016/17 Council Tax discounts are set at the same rate as the 2015/16 discounts as set out in paragraphs 30 – 33.

The consultation replies had been reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee and were broadly in support of the scheme.

Members questioned whether it was common practise for other authority's schemes to include funding for parish councils to ensure there was no effect on the parish council band D calculation. Officers said there was varying practice in this area but this was something that could be considered at the next annual review.

The Cabinet was proud that UDC had continued to support the scheme and still had the lowest contribution of all Essex authorities. However, it recognised the impending financial challenges and the likely need to make difficult decisions in the future.

RESOLVED to approve for recommendation to Full Council, the Local Council Tax Support scheme as recommended in June and set out in the report.

CA61

SPECIAL PURPOSE VEHICLE

The Cabinet was asked to approve in principle the setting up of a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Council. The purpose of the SPV would be to develop a range of commercial opportunities, including property development of council-owned General Fund land. This was an alternative way of generating income in the light of reduced Government funding and had been trialled by a number of other councils. The initial loan to the SPV would be made by way of a new reserve funded from the Strategic Initiatives Fund.

A separate, wholly-owned subsidiary of the Council in the form of a SPV for housing and commercial purposes would enable the Council to engage in direct development of General Fund land it owns and to also transfer assets into the SPV.

Members welcomed the proposal as a positive move although pointed out that the project would require entrepreneurs to drive it forward. It was agreed that future resourcing would need to be addressed, but initially it was important to ensure that legal advice was obtained and to establish the best business model for the success of the scheme.

RESOLVED to

- 1 Approve the principle of establishing a SPV.

- 2 Instruct the Chief Financial Officer to establish a SPV Reserve in readiness to provide a loan to the SPV.
- 3 Require officers to bring an interim report to Cabinet setting out the draft Articles of Association and likely costs and timescales for establishing the SPV.

CA62

USE OF COUNCIL BUILDINGS FOR WEDDINGS

The Cabinet was advised that UDC was aiming to promote the Saffron Walden Council Offices as a wedding venue following ECC's decision to withdraw from the promotion of wedding venues. This was in line with the council's aim to seek maximum income opportunities from its assets, as well as an opportunity to work with the community to promote local businesses.

The aim was to offer a complete wedding service. There would be a new schedule of charges based on the time of the ceremony and the type of room used and there would be a new brochure to promote the service.

There was concern at the £20K allocation for preparing the brochure. However, Members appreciated that the council would be competing with a number of other venues, and an initial investment was required to get the brand right from the outset.

RESOLVED to

- 1 Allocate the sum of £20,000 from the Strategic Initiative Fund to enable the production of a wedding brochure.
- 2 Agree the 2016/17 fees and charges as set out in Appendix One

CA63

TRANSFER OF LAND TO GREAT CHESTERFORD PARISH COUNCIL

The Cabinet was asked to approve the transfer of a piece of land in Great Chesterford to the Parish council. The land had been obtained as a requirement under a section 106 agreement to provide education/community space. The land had been valued at £52,000 but was being transferred at nil value because it would help to secure the promotion of the social and environmental well being of the area.

Councillor Redfern declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Great Chesterford Parish Council and confirmed that the parish council was currently liaising with groups for the provision of a preschool on the site.

RESOLVED to

- 1 Allocate the sum of £20,000 from the Strategic Initiatives Fund to enable the production of a wedding brochure.

- 2 Agree the 2016/17 fees and charges as set out in Appendix One. that the land be transferred land to the east of Great Chesterford recreation ground, for nil value to Great Chesterford Parish Council.

CA64

SALE OF LAND AT WOOD LANE BIRCHANGER

Councillor Redfern said that a request had been received from the residents of 5 and 5a Wood Lane, Birchanger to purchase an area of council owned land in front of their properties. There was no planning potential for this land and it would be transferred subject to a restrictive covenant limiting the use of the site to garden use only. The value of the land would be determined using the Market Value/Fair Value definition.

RESOLVED

- 1 To approve the sale of the land in front of 5 and 5a Wood Lane in Birchanger.
- 2 The land to be sold subject to conditions preventing any development of the land and the purchasers will bear all legal and survey costs of the transaction

CA65

CAR PARKING REVIEW

Councillor Barker presented a report, which set out a number of recommendations and a work programme for improvements to the council owned car parks in Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet. The report brought together areas of work including the scrutiny car park review, the recent review of car parking charges and an external report into car parking across the district.

The recommendation reviewing charging for blue badge holders had been withdrawn in the light of further representation received.

Councillor Sell commented on the proposals for the car parks in Stansted and also presented the parish council's views. He said that whilst he generally welcomed the suggestions, there was a complicated and emerging situation in Stansted and thought given to the effect of implementing the recommendations. He said it was important to review Car Parking charges as soon as possible after the new health centre was open. There was further discussion around ways to address the congestion on Cambridge Road, the availability of car parking at the station and a review of the season ticket charges.

The Cabinet was generally pleased with report so far but asked for the recommendations to be put in place as soon as possible.

RESOLVED

- 1 That the new parking charges (including season ticket prices) and timings as set out in Appendix 2 and paragraph 25 be adopted following formal advertising.
- 2 Discuss with Saffron Walden Town Council (the owners) the future of the Catons Lane car park with the option of either levying a parking charge in line with others in the town or passing the maintenance and running back to the Town Council.
- 3 Allow season ticket parking spaces to be open to all users from 10am in the morning and all day at the weekend.
- 4 Refresh all car park signage to prominently advertise Mipermit.
- 5 In principle agreement to purchase an additional area of land (Appendix 4) adjacent to Lower Street car park, Stansted Mountfitchet to create an extended car park. This would be subject to independent valuation and a future Cabinet report.
- 6 To carry out a review of Lower Street car park, Stansted Mountfitchet post opening of the new Medical Centre to consider any change of usage patterns. This will include a review of the season ticket pricing levels in comparison with the station car park.
- 7 Arrange annually meetings with Chairs of the Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow Town Teams, Chair of the Stansted Economic Development Forum and Chairs of the relevant committees from Saffron Walden and Great Dunmow Town Councils and Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council to discuss the effectiveness of the car parking provision. These meetings to include discussion on the best way of using car park pricing to support the economic vitality of the centres.
- 8 That a “dashboard” of indicators be created and published quarterly to enable monitoring and management of the effectiveness of car parking provision.

CA66

DESIGNATION OF THAXTED NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AREA

Councillor Barker reported that an application had been received from Thaxted Parish council for the designation of a Neighbourhood Development Plan Area. The proposal was for the area to follow the existing parish boundary for the village, which was considered to be appropriate and no comments had been received in response to the public consultation.

RESOLVED to designate the area outlined on the map at Appendix 1 as the Thaxted Neighbourhood Development Plan Area.

CA67

RNP1 TRIAL AT STANSTED AIRPORT

The Cabinet received a report on the results of a trial at Stansted Airport to use modern navigational procedures to improve track keeping of departing aircraft, and whether this should be formally adopted. This had been considered by the recent STAAP meeting, which had concluded that the new track keeping system would enable departing aircraft to fly as close as possible to the centre line, which would reduce the number of people being overflown.

Councillor Barker reported the views of residents from High Easter who felt that the village had experienced an increased number of aircraft overflying the village and had submitted its own responses to the consultation.

RESOLVED

- 1 That taking into account Government policy on noise, the Council should support the airspace change proposal as;
 - i) it would result in fewer people being directly overflown by aircraft, and
 - ii) it would give more certainty about the paths that departing aircraft take
- 2 That the RNP1 procedures be implemented as soon as possible on the remaining four SIDs.

CA68

ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE

The Cabinet considered the recent submission from parish councils to add assets in their area that were considered to be a community asset.

The Chairman of the parish council spoke to the committee about the ownership of the sites in Clavering. The Cabinet considered an objection to the listing of the asset in Manuden, but concluded that it was the only pub in the village and its listing would be consistent with the listing of similar assets elsewhere in the district.

RESOLVED to agree to include the following on the Assets of Community Value list:

- a) Upper Hill Green, Clavering
- b) Fox and Hounds Public House, Clavering
- c) The Yew Tree Public House, Manuden

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm