

UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT BY THE CHAIR OF SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TO THE CABINET ON 1 DECEMBER 2016

The committee most recently met on 22 November 2016. The following summary of the committee's deliberations are provided for the cabinet's consideration.

1. Cabinet Forward Plan

Questions were raised about whether the governance arrangements for Aspire projects would be fit for purpose. It was recognised that they would need to be put in place to suit the projects and investments chosen.

Reference was made to an article by the Public Sector Executive about concerns within local government and by Parliament's Public Accounts Committee about "DCLG accused of 'alarming' lack of understanding of council pressures". The article can be read at <http://bit.ly/2gv6V4s> The essential message is that council need to beware of losing sight of their primary purpose of delivering local services in their search for money-earning investments.

It was noted that there will be a report on devolution at the Council Meeting on December 8th. The committee wanted Council to receive more than a verbal update. They would like to see a detailed paper on the agenda. It was noted that some Essex councils had formally expressed an opinion about elected mayors, whereas it was noted with some dissatisfaction that there had been no formal soundings out of Members' opinion at Uttlesford.

2. Budget Overview

The committee was unable to make much comment on the draft budget owing to the absence of a current MTFs that had been prevented by delayed announcements from central government on its funding stream. However, there was considerable discussion about the value of the public consultation conducted by the council and its ability to add real value to the decision making process. The key question to be answered is what does asking the public to rank services according to their own priorities tell us? Does it tell us how much they like them, how much knowledge respondents have of them or whether replies indicate think that change is necessary? How does that tell us whether more or less investment is necessary? The committee intends to address the topic in more detail in early 2017.

3. Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2017/18

The committee received the results of the public consultation on LCTS. It saw no reason to change its mind to endorse the proposed scheme.

However, it was noted that:

- Many respondents were proud of the council's relatively generous scheme compared with neighbouring authorities, felt that the district as a whole could afford to be generous, with some respondents personally being willing to pay more council tax to support less fortunate members of the community
- There were other respondents who took the opposite view and were against UDC being a "fairy godmother with our money"
- It was noted that there were responses against the negative impact on families with more than two children
- Many respondents did not feel they understood the scheme or were sufficiently well informed to respond; this raises a question mark over the value of the consultation in its present form
- Saffron Walden Town Council had made a strong representation against the transition from the UDC grant scheme to raising their whole precept themselves; they seemed to be the exception to the rule. The committee did not change its view that the transitional proposal should go ahead.

4. North Essex Parking Partnership

The committee agreed to ask Cllr Susan Barker and Gordon Glenday to follow through with NEPP some suggested improvements to the current scheme. These have been communicated directly.

Cllr Alan Dean

Chair of Scrutiny, 27 November 2016