

**EXTRAORDINARY MEETING of the COUNCIL held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 12 JUNE 2003**

Present:- Councillor M A Hibbs (Chairman).
Councillors H D Baker, C A Bayley, P Boland, W F Bowker,
C A Cant, J F Cheetham, K J Clarke, D Corke, R J Copping,
A Dean, C M Dean, C D Down, S Flack, M L Foley, M A Gayler,
E J Godwin, D W Gregory, R T Harris, E W Hicks, B M Hughes,
S C Jones, A J Ketteridge, V J T Lelliot, R M Lemon,
J I Loughlin, D J Morson, J P Murphy, V Ollier, A R Row,
M J Savage, S V Schneider, G Sell, E D Tealby-Watson,
A R Thawley, A M Wattebot, P A Wilcock

Officers in attendance:- E Forbes, I Orton, B D Perkins, M J Perry and
M T Purkiss.

C20 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E C Abrahams,
K R Artus, R P Chambers, R F Freeman, A Marchant, J E Menell and
F E Silver.

C21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Cheetham declared interests as a member of NWHEEPA and SSE.
The following Members also declared interests as members of SSE:

Councillors C A Bayley, W F Bowker, C A Cant, J F Cheetham, D Corke,
A Dean, C M Dean, C D Down, S Flack, M L Foley, M A Gayler, E J Godwin,
B M Hughes, J I Loughlin, J P Murphy, V Ollier, A R Row, E D Tealby-
Watson, A R Thawley and A M Wattebot.

C22 FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF AIR TRANSPORT IN THE UK

Members received a comprehensive report on the Government's second
consultation in relation to air development options in the southeast. The only
new feature in this second consultation was the inclusion of runway options at
Gatwick.

The Council had agreed that it should submit a supplementary response
bearing in mind the full response the Council had submitted at the end of
November. It was noted that the report had also been considered by the
Stansted Airport Advisory Panel and the Environment and Transport
Committee.

Councillor Thawley introduced the report and asked Members to support the
recommendations. Councillor Wilcock supported the proposal and urged
Members to complete the Government's questionnaire or write to the
Secretary of State for Transport.

Councillor Cheetham supported the proposals and asked for clarification of parts of the text. Councillor A Dean hoped that this Council would take its submission to the Government on 30 June together with representatives of SSE and other organisations. Councillor Corke supported the recommendations and urged Members not to rest on their laurels. He added that the Directors of BAA had received a substantial pay increase at the same time as shares in the company had fallen by 26%. He said that shareholders of the company should question the wisdom of the Directors' support for the expansion of Stansted. He said that the expansion of Stansted was not sustainable and there needed to be more analysis of high-speed train travel into parts of Europe which was often quicker and cheaper.

It was then

RESOLVED unanimously that the submission as set out at Appendix A to these Minutes be approved as this Council's further response to the Government's Consultation Paper on the Future Development of Air Transport in the UK.

C23

BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN 2003/04

Members noted that this was the fourth Best Value Performance Plan produced by the Council and it was a legal requirement to publish the plan by 30 June 2003.

The Best Value Performance Plan was seen as the key means by which authorities reported performance and priorities for improvement. Whilst the Plan was a public document, its principal audiences were seen as the staff, elected Members of the authority, the regulatory bodies and central government.

The Plan was subject to statutory audit and would feed into the wider assessment of the authority's approach to securing continuous improvement as part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

The Performance Manager said that parts of the document still needed to be refined and more information was to be included about last year's Best Value Reviews and future review programmes. Also, the headlines from the "Quality of Life Plan" would need to be included if that plan was agreed by Members later in the meeting. Officers suggested that a small group of Members should be established to approve the final amendments to the text contained within the plan.

Councillor Gayler said that, once refined, the plan would be a good document to move the Council forward. He said that it contained realistic targets which would help the Council get into the top quartile of local authorities.

Councillor Ketteridge questioned whether the document had become a political instead of a Council document as the introduction had been prepared by the Leader rather than the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive said that it was a Council document and that the advice was that the document should

be signed off by the Leader as he was seen as representing the Members of the Council.

Councillor Flack said that a lot of the terminology in the document needed to be explained to help the general public understand it and she had prepared a sheet setting out some suggested amendments to the text.

Councillor C Dean said that she was concerned about references in the document to financial gains from Best Value Reviews. She said that the Inspectors had made it clear that cost cutting should not be an objective of a Review. The Chief Executive explained that the term "financial gains" from Best Value Reviews had been taken from the wording adopted by the Council in October 2002.

Councillor Corke expressed concern at the use of percentage targets when the sample size was often very small. He said that he would like to see some attention given to this and an explanation of why some targets were so high and others had been reduced substantially. The Performance Manager said that the District Auditor expected the Council to provide figures to two decimal points and he confirmed that appropriate explanations would be included where possible.

Councillor Gayler said that when the Council looked at its budgets it needed to look carefully to ensure that the priorities were reflected and resources directed towards these. He said that it would also be useful to compare our performance with similar local authorities.

Councillor Copping said that it was inappropriate for the Government to require the information needed in the Plan so soon after an election. The Performance Manager added that some of the information from the Audit Commission had only been received in the previous week.

It was then

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Council adopts the Best Value Performance Plan for 2003/04 subject to any changes to the text that may be agreed by the group of Members referred to below.
- 2 the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council, the Chairman of the Resources Committee and the leaders of the Conservative and Independent Groups, or their representatives, be authorised to act as a reference point for any additional changes that might be required to the Best Value Performance Plan.

C24

QUALITY OF LIFE VISION

Councillor A Dean, the Leader of the Council, introduced the Quality of Life Vision 2007 document. He said that many people in Uttlesford feared a deterioration in their quality of life and sought a strong and campaigning Council to counter the external forces that were trying to undermine this. He

said that in a survey in 2001 Uttlesford had been voted the best place to live and work but now Ministers were referring to the area as needing regeneration. He hoped to bring about strong community leadership in Uttlesford and emphasised that change did not necessarily have to mean criticising what had happened in the past and should focus on working together to achieve improvements. He added that there was a need to promote Uttlesford as an area that was important and needed to be protected and cared for. He said that area meetings were being arranged in September to achieve a dialogue with local residents. In conclusion, he said that Uttlesford needed a vision for this area which was well understood.

Councillor Row said that the vision made some interesting points. He said that many of the areas for action had already been put in place by the previous administration. He expressed concern that the vision did not explain how the Council could keep down the spiralling cost of council tax and the impact of this on people with fixed incomes. Councillor Flack also referred to the need to ensure that priorities set out in the vision, those in Uttlesford Futures, the Best Value Performance Plan and consultation exercises with the public were compatible.

Councillor Tealby-Watson said that the Plan would not necessarily increase council tax and was more about working smarter not harder. Councillor Gayler referred to the need to demonstrate value for money and stressed the importance of priority-based budgets. He said that there was a need to evaluate priorities carefully and look at both what the Government wanted the Council to achieve and what local residents wanted the Council to do. He said that he did not wish to see spiralling council tax and was looking for high quality services at a price people could afford. He said that the priorities would be carefully addressed and proposals would be considered during the Autumn cycle of committee meetings.

Councillor Loughlin referred to the budget provision for the prevention of flooding and expressed concern as to whether this would help smaller communities. Councillor Thawley said that the Environment and Transport Committee had recently approved a plan which would help meet the needs of villages and smaller communities in the district.

In response to a question from Councillor Cheetham, Councillor A Dean confirmed that the expression in the document "excessive use of the current runway at Stansted" referred to anything over 25 mppa. In relation to flooding Councillor Cheetham said that, whilst the Council needed to provide assistance, it must ensure that it did not get burdened with costs which were the responsibility of other authorities.

Councillor Sell referred to the section in the document relating to employment exchanges of staff with the airport. He felt that it would be more appropriate to change this to the private sector. He said that, whilst he was in favour of a Council newspaper, this must be of high quality and done with care. He said that he would like to see the Council winning national awards in the future. Councillor Ketteridge said that the document included a number of "soft targets". Also, the Mori Poll undertaken last year illustrated that those residents questioned did not give high priority to a Council newspaper.

Councillor Schneider referred to the section on the youth service and said that many areas were the statutory responsibility of Essex County Council. She added that the Council needed to ensure that it did not spend local tax-payers' money on other authorities' obligations. Councillor A Dean concurred but said that it was necessary to work with other partners on youth issues. He concluded that the Council had to improve its communications with residents if it was to understand their requirements. He said that there were a number of examples where good communication had helped turn around poor performing local authorities. He said that Uttlesford would operate in an open and fair way and look forward and not back.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Council adopt the priorities in the Plan for development by October 2003 into a four year phased and resourced plan.
- 2 the Council approves the priorities for 2003/04 in place of the priorities approved by the Council in October 2002.
- 3 the Council approves the early win initiatives for implementation by the dates set out in the Plan.
- 4 these priorities form the basis for State of the District Debate to be pursued through the area meetings to be held in September.
- 5 officers, leading Members and committees assess the implications of the Plan and produce a work programme for inclusion in budget and service planning processes and approval by the Council in February 2004.
- 6 the priorities be incorporated in summary in the Best Value Performance Plan to be published by 30 June 2003.

C25

NOTICE OF MOTION

Members considered the following Notice of Motion which had been proposed by Councillors A J Ketteridge and J F Cheetham:

"The Government has refused to consult the British people on proposals for a European constitution that has significant implications for the United Kingdom.

Uttlesford District Council therefore believes that it is in the interests of its residents to call upon the British Government to hold a referendum to enable the British people to have an opportunity to express a view on the implications of constitutional changes on the governance of our country and this district."

Councillor Ketteridge said that he had brought the Notice of Motion to the Council as it affected every resident of the district. He said that it was reasonable to ask the Government for a referendum as it had previously carried out referendums on 34 other issues of lesser importance. He said that there was also a need for much greater information and ordinary people must be able to have a say on this issue. He moved that the Notice of Motion be

amended by reference to monetary union and this amendment was accepted by the seconder.

Councillor Tealby-Watson then moved the following amendment which was duly seconded:

“The Government has failed the British people by not leading the debate on Britain’s future in Europe.

Recognising this and its potential impact on the governance of this district, Uttlesford District Council therefore believes that it is in the interests of its residents for the Government to:

- 1 hold an early referendum on Britain’s entry to the Euro
- 2 hold a referendum, when appropriate, to enable the British people to express their views on any significant constitutional changes in the European Union”.

There was extensive discussion about the issues arising from the possible European constitution and the Government’s handling of the matter.

The amendment was then put to the vote and was carried. On being put as a substantive motion the amendment was approved.

C26

QUESTION UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 8.2

Members noted that the following question had been submitted by Councillor S Flack to the Chairman of the Health and Housing Committee.

“The Government stated in May that it is unacceptable for homeless families to be accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation for a period of more than six weeks due to the detrimental effects on children’s health and development.

Could the Chairman of Health and Housing tell me how many families in Uttlesford were accommodated last year for over six weeks in bed and breakfast accommodation and what actions this Council is taking to ensure that this situation is remedied?

Councillor Bayley read the following reply:

“In the year 2002/03 a total of nine families with children spent longer than six weeks in bed and breakfast accommodation until they were moved on to more suitable homes.

Officers are currently working on a homeless strategy in accordance with the Homelessness Act 2002. This would outline ways in which the Council can address this important issue.

It was agreed at the Health and Housing Committee meeting held on 5 June that the draft document will be considered in the first instance by the Housing

Strategy Working Party. It will then report back, with a proposed strategy, to the October meeting of the Committee.”

C27

ELIZABETH FORBES

The Chairman informed Members that this would be the last Council Meeting that Elizabeth Forbes would attend before taking up her new post with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. He thanked her for her loyal service and wished her well for the future. Councillor Ketteridge, on behalf of the Conservative group, also extended his best wishes to Elizabeth Forbes.

Elizabeth Forbes thanked Members and wished the Council well for the future. She reminded Members that a reception would be held on 25 June at 3.30 pm to which they were all invited.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.