

COUNCIL MEETING held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 26 APRIL 2005

Present:- Councillor E J Godwin – Chairman
Councillors K R Artus, H D Baker, C A Bayley P Boland, C A Cant, R P Chambers, J F Cheetham, A Dean, S Flack, M L Foley, R F Freeman, M A Gayler, E Gower, D W Gregory, R T Harris, E W Hicks, B M Hughes, S C Jones, A J Ketteridge, V J T Lelliott, R M Lemon, J I Loughlin, A Marchant, J E Menell, D J Morson, J P Murphy, A R Row, M J Savage, G Sell, F E Silver and A M Wattebot

Officers in attendance: - A Bovaird, J Mitchell, P O'Dell, M J Perry, M T Purkiss and T Turner.

C96 WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Councillor J Jesse from Harlow Council who was attending the meeting as an observer.

C97 COUNCILLOR K J CLARKE

The Chairman reminded Members of the recent tragic death of Councillor Keith Clarke who had represented the Great Dunmow South Ward since 2003. She said that whilst he had only been a Councillor for a relatively short time he had made a considerable impact and would be remembered for his panache and for always being available to talk to anyone. She said that he would be a great loss to the Council and all Members stood in silent tribute to his memory.

Councillor Murphy said that Keith Clarke would be remembered as a husband, father, musician, town planner, photographer, Councillor and a great friend. He added that Keith was always generous and possessed eloquence and passion. He was a forward thinker and he hoped that forward planning would be his legacy. He concluded that Keith always fought for what he thought was right. He concluded that he would be sadly missed but would not be forgotten. Councillor Harris said that the funeral would take place at Harlow Crematorium on Friday May 6 at 2.00pm. He said that it would be a family funeral with all Keith's friends welcome. He added that the family had requested that no civic regalia be worn and that those attending should not wear black. It had been requested that there should be family flowers only and donations should be made to Asthma Research.

C98 MEMBERS QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Councillor Cheetham referred to the substantial increase in the number of requests for postal votes and asked whether the Council had allocated sufficient staff to deal with this issue. The Chief Executive said that the number of postal vote applications had increased to 7,500 from 3,500 at the last General Election. He was confident that the staff would be able to deal

with the demand for postal votes and thanked the Electoral Services Officer and the other staff who were dealing with this matter. He also confirmed that, having undertaken preliminary checks, he was satisfied that there was no evidence of fraud taking place in Uttlesford and said that further computer checks would be carried out to ascertain whether high numbers of ballot papers were being sent to specific addresses or particular streets.

Councillor Row asked how the Council would respond to the poor report on planning which had been issued by the Audit Commission. The Executive Manager Development Services said that the report had not been poor. The Council had achieved a "fair" rating with promising prospects of improvement. He added that rapid improvements had been made and targets had been exceeded in the last quarter. He also referred to the substantial Planning Delivery Grant which had been achieved and he said that he was proud of the achievements of the planning officers and the Development Control Committee.

Councillor Silver said that he had recently attended a meeting of the Uttlesford Voluntary Services and they had expressed delight with the accommodation at the Dunmow Offices. However, he referred to the short period of the lease and asked whether the tenants could be given some reassurance. Councillor Gayler said the future needs of the voluntary sector would be guaranteed. However the future of the depot would need to be resolved in the near future and the arrangements at the offices would also be considered at that time.

Councillor Menell asked that reports from Members on outside organisations should be included on the agenda for Committees. It was confirmed that it had previously been agreed that these would be submitted to the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

C99

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Abrahams, Bowker, Corke, C M Dean, Down, Hibbs, Pedder, Schneider, Tealby-Watson, Thawley and Wilcock.

C100

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Chambers declared an interest as Chairman of the Essex Police Authority, Councillor Menell declared an interest as a non-Executive Director of the Uttlesford Primary Care Trust and Councillor Cheetham declared an interest as a member of NWEHPA, Councillor Murphy declared an interest as the Council's representative on the Council's Alcohol and Drug Strategy Group. The following Councillors declared interests as Members of SSE:-

Councillors Bayley, Boland, Cheetham, A Dean, C Dean, Down, Flack, Godwin, Harris, Hughes, Ketteridge, Marchant, Menell, Morson, Murphy, Pedder, Row and Savage.

C101 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the amendment of Minute C72 to clarify that Uttlesford had come within 17p of being within the “worst 25% of district councils nationally”.

C102 **BUSINESS ARISING**

(i) Minute C72 – Members Question and Answer Session

Councillor Morson said that since the last meeting he had met with the new Leisure Centre Manager who had expressed a willingness to cooperate with Connexions on a discount scheme. He had also undertaken to look at time slots which were underused at the Leisure Centres with a view to offering discounted rates at these times.

Councillor Ketteridge referred to his previous question concerning the cost of the collection of waste and said that the table of comparative costs for Essex Authorities provided by the Executive Manager Environment and Cultural Services had provided a figure different to that included on the LGA Website. He would discuss this matter further with the Executive Manager.

(ii) Minute C79 – Annual Audit Inspection Letter

The Chief Executive said that he had received a response from the District Auditor concerning the points raised at the last meeting and he would email this to Members shortly.

(iii) Minute C81 – Revenue Budget 2005/06 – Review of the Budget and Level of Reserves and Balances

The Executive Manager Finance and Asset Strategy confirmed that the information requested by Councillor Flack at the last meeting had been provided to her. He also confirmed that fees and charges would be a separate element of the forthcoming budget. Councillor Flack reiterated the need for consistent figures on fees and charges.

(iv) Minute C82 – District Council Requirement and Council Tax 2005/06

Councillor Menell expressed concern at the condition of the Hill Street public conveniences. Councillor Jones said that complaints had been received and action had been taken to arrange for the conveniences to be cleaned twice each day for six days a week. Councillor Flack said that the Dunmow conveniences were in an even worse condition and the Chief Executive said that this had been due to a severe bout of vandalism and confirmed that security was being improved.

(v) Minutes C86 – Corporate Plan 2005-2008

Councillor Ketteridge referred to his question at the last meeting as to whether the previous Quality of Life Plan would become redundant if the new Corporate Plan were approved. He said that his question had been answered in the Walden Local where it had been stated that the first edition would be “binned”.

(vi) Minute C87 – Draft East of England Plan

In answer to a question from Councillor Cheetham the Executive Manager Development Services said that the Council did not have an automatic right to appear before the panel at the Examination in Public, but he would be disappointed if the Council were not given the opportunity. He suggested that strong representations needed to be made.

C103

CHAIRMAN’S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman expressed her congratulations to Councillor Vanessa Pedder and her husband on the birth of their first child, George Frederick Pedder. She reported that the sponsored weight loss had been very successful and a bottle of champagne would be presented to the winner. She said that she would be abseiling off the water tower at Church Langley Harlow at 4.30pm on Saturday 30 April 2005 in aid of the Crossroads Charity. She added that on 17 May she would be hosting an Italian style lunch at her house and tickets were available from Jane McKie.

C104

LEADER’S COMMUNICATION

The Leader extended his best wishes to all those involved in the forthcoming elections.

C105

ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

i) Resources Committee 31 March 2005 – Treasury Management Strategy

RESOLVED that the Council approve:

- 1 The Annual Investments Strategy 2005/06 including the criteria for determining suitable counter-parties.
- 2 A maximum amount of £12,000,000 for non-specified investments managed internally by the Council.
- 3 A maximum amount of £5,000,000 for non-specified investments managed by Standard Life.

ii) Resources Committee 31 March 2005 – Annual Efficiency Statements

RESOLVED that the key elements of the report to the Resources Committee and the requirements of the Annual Efficiency Statements be noted.

iii) Committee Timetable 2005/06

RESOLVED that the Committee timetable 2005/06 as submitted to the Resources Committee be approved subject to the meeting of the Stansted Airport Advisory Panel on 6 June being amended to 13 June 2005 and to the meeting of Scrutiny Committee 2 on 5 October being moved to 12 October unless a more suitable alternative date could be found.

iv) Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act

It was noted at the last meeting of Scrutiny Committee 2 this matter had been referred to Council for debate. However, Members felt that as it had been debated at the Scrutiny Committee and would be referred to the Environment Committee on 14 June there was no need for it to be discussed at Council. Councillor Flack said that she did not consider that it was acceptable for a small number of Councillors to formulate policy on such wide-ranging issues and hoped that Members would have the opportunity to discuss the issue in a wider forum.

RESOLVED that the matter be referred to the Environment Committee on 14 June 2005

C106

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ACT 2003: PART 8 – THE LAW GOVERNING COMPLAINTS ABOUT HIGH HEDGES

The Executive Manager Development Services introduced a report seeking delegated authority concerning the function of handling complaints about high hedges under Part 8 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 to the Development Control Committee and to further delegate the full function to the Executive Manager of Development Services, other than the setting of fees for the service.

Councillor Sell said that whilst he welcomed the proposals, he felt that it was important that complainants should not be penalised by high fees being levied.

RESOLVED that:

- 1 Responsibility for resolving complaints about high hedges under Part 8 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 (including setting a fee for the service) be delegated to the Development Control Committee and under the scheme of Delegation to Officers be delegated to the Executive Manager Development Services.

- 2 Prosecutions or other legal action under the Act be delegated to the Executive Managers Development Services and Corporate Governance.
- 3 The setting of fees be delegated to the Development Control Committee.

C107

UTTLESFORD LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

The Executive Manager Development Services reported that under the Town and Country Planning (Local Development)(England) Regulations 2004 the Council had to make a resolution in order to bring the Local Development Scheme into effect. Councillor Cheetham asked for a briefing note to be circulated to all Members.

Councillor Dean said that it was still important for the Council to make its consultation and communications service more effective.

RESOLVED that the Council agree that the Local Development Scheme will come into effect from 26 April 2005.

C108

FORWARD PLAN 2005/06

The Executive Manager Strategy and Performance introduced a report setting out a suggested forward plan which captured regular scheduled reports which would be submitted to the Committees and Council together with headline and items anticipated for debate for 2005/06. Members were requested to comment on the forward plan content and layout and report any omissions. The plan would be revised and re-circulated for the Annual Council Meeting on 17 May 2005.

The Leader suggested that the following items needed to be incorporated:

- Steps towards an economic strategy for the Council.
- Mitigation and control parameters relating to the Airport.
- Cycle network to Audley End.
- Constitutional review.
- Member training and development
- The Council's vision

In response to a question from Councillor Ketteridge it was confirmed that Members would have the opportunity to comment on the forward plan in the future and other items could be included. Councillor Savage considered that some Committees were overloaded and asked whether there would be time for the issues to be properly considered.

RESOLVED that the comments on the forward plan be taken into account and Members advise the Executive Manager Strategy and Performance of any further comments.

C109

COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY 2005/08

Members received a comprehensive report giving an overview of the new and updated aims of the Uttlesford Community Safety Strategy 2005-2008.

In relation to the working groups under the CSAT umbrella, Councillor Murphy asked if the minutes could be made available to all Members and the Democratic Services Manager confirmed that these would be included on the intranet. Councillor Murphy also referred to the reporting of domestic violence and said that every effort should be made to encourage the reporting of these incidents. He also referred to the fact that the prescribing of methadone was not included as this would impact on the star rating which surgeries now needed to achieve. He asked that the issue be looked at by the Council's Health and Housing Committee. Councillors A Dean and Silver referred to the concerns about "young people hanging about" and Councillor Silver stressed that these people were very vulnerable and needed to be provided with services which they really wanted such as skateboard parks.

Councillor Sell drew attention to the aims to reduce crime and the fear of crime and said that the effectiveness of previous strategies needed to be reported and examined. Councillor Savage asked how the LSP and the other groups interfaced and stressed the need for elected representatives to have a real say in the work of those bodies. Councillor Gayler asked for a report to be submitted to the Resources Committee setting out how officers were being deployed on the various groups and setting out what impact they were having.

Councillor Gregory said that Uttlesford had been one of the first Councils to embrace the work of the Community Safety Action Team and in response to a question from him the Chief Executive explained that CSAT was a partnership body on which a large number of bodies were represented and Uttlesford remained one of the key contributors. Councillor Flack said that it would be useful for contact names to be included in the strategy and it was noted that Uttlesford Futures had commissioned a mapping exercise which would provide details of all relevant contacts.

Councillor Menell, on behalf of all Members, expressed her thanks to Rachel Hutchinson for the hard work which had gone into community safety generally and in preparing the strategy.

RESOLVED that the comments made at the meeting be taken on board and Council gives its endorsement to the new Community Safety Strategy 2005-08 and to the Uttlesford Community Safety Action Team undertaking the work involved to achieve the aims of the strategy.

C110

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 12 of part 1 of schedule 12 A of the Act.

C111

GUIDANCE TO MEMBERS REGARDING MEMBERSHIP OF SSE

The Chairman agreed to the inclusion of this item as urgent business as legal advice was needed before the next meeting of the Council.

The Executive Manager Corporate Governance presented a detailed report setting out legal advice concerning Councillors' membership of SSE.

Members asked officers to look at the possibility of lobbying the Government to change the relevant law.

Members reiterated their continuing opposition to a second runway at Stansted Airport and suggested that arrangements should be made at the next Council Meeting to sign the pledge against further runways at Stansted.

The meeting ended at 10.20pm