

**COUNCIL MEETING held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN on 22 JULY 2008**

Present:- Councillor R M Lemon – Chairman.
Councillors E C Abrahams, S Anjum, K R Artus, S Barker,
E L Bellingham-Smith, C A Cant, R H Chamberlain, R P Chambers,
J F Cheetham, R Clover, J E N Davey, A Dean, C M Dean,
C D Down, E J Godwin, E W Hicks, S J Howell, J E Hudson,
A J Ketteridge, T P Knight, J I Loughlin, J E Menell, D J Morson,
J A Redfern, D J Sadler, J Salmon, S V Schneider, G Sell,
C C Smith, A D Walters, A M Wattebot, L A Wells and P A Wilcock.

Officers in attendance:- J Mitchell (Interim Chief Executive), R Auty
(Head of Community Engagement), D Burridge (Director of
Operations), M Perry (Assistant Chief Executive), P Snow
(Committee and Electoral Services Manager), A Webb (Interim
Director of Central Services), and C Wingfield (Museum Curator).

Also present: Paul King and Ian Davidson (Audit Commission)

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Davey to his first full Council meeting, and welcomed also Paul King and Ian Davidson of the Audit Commission.

C21

MEMBERS' QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Councillor Godwin asked the Interim Chief Executive whether he viewed the timetable for the call in of the G2 (second runway) application as convenient and to clarify the position regarding the meeting of costs associated with the call in process?

The Interim Chief Executive confirmed that a letter from the GO-East office stating the Secretary of State's intention to call in the application had been received early on Monday morning. He considered the stated timetable to be optimistic and the expectations made of the Council wholly unrealistic. Suitable representations would be made to GO-East accordingly.

As for costs, the Council was bound to meet its own expenses although it was hoped that it would be possible in due course to spread the overall cost between the Council and its neighbouring partners.

Councillor Wilcock asked the Leader about local arrangements to mark the handover of the Olympic flag from Beijing to London? The Leader confirmed that arrangements were in hand to accept the version of the flag formed around the Union emblem and Gaynor Bradley was organising the handover.

Councillor A Dean referred the Chairman of the Environment Committee to Minute C33 of the meeting on 31 July 2007. It had been resolved to adopt and sign the Memorandum of Understanding for the West Essex Waste Strategy and to ask Uttlesford's member of the West Essex Area Joint Committee (WEAJC) to write to the Chairman of that Committee in support of the Council's position. He asked that the letter sent to WEAJC be made available.

Councillor Barker said that the letter concerned was not available as yet and she would ensure that a copy was sent to Councillor Dean as soon as possible.

Councillor Dean then drew attention to a County Council consultation last year on the draft waste strategy. He was disappointed that Uttlesford had not responded to this consultation, especially as 60% recycling had been stated as an aspiration rather than a target and Uttlesford had almost achieved this figure.

Councillor Barker said that it was her decision not to respond to the consultation as it was aimed primarily at individuals rather than at public bodies. Some 4,000 individual responses had been received although few statutory bodies had submitted comments. Had money been involved then it was likely she would have taken a different view.

Councillor Morson said that there had been a great deal of cross party agreement in connection with the recent visit by Caroline Flint, Minister for Housing. He said the presentation by Fairfield made an unconvincing case for any housing at Elsenham and he wished to ask Councillor Barker whether she still took the view that Fairfield was the right company to proceed on Option 4?

Councillor Barker said there was no link between Option 4 and the eco-town proposal and there never was. Officers were continuing to evaluate responses to the Core Strategy consultation. Eco-towns was an evolving issue and the reality was that achieving code level 6 for new properties was not affordable for the number of dwelling units proposed.

When Councillor Morson again asked whether Councillor Barker had confidence in Fairfield, she responded that she hoped all councillors would eventually be able to see the presentation made and would be able to judge for themselves.

The Leader referred to the recent visit he had made to the LGA with Mr Mitchell when it had been agreed to seek a legal opinion on the validity of the eco-towns process. He expected a statement to be made about this matter on the following day.

Councillor Sell asked Councillor Chambers to agree that the Council's staff were an important resource and that loose talk about bankruptcy and telling lies would not help to maintain good staff morale.

Councillor Chambers responded that he was a blunt person and felt that staff had the right to know what the true position was. He acknowledged that a local authority could not legally become bankrupt but that it was better to use plain language to explain how close the Council had come to this condition. The Council's financial position had been unsound, with no reserves available and there was still a long way to go to achieve a recovery.

Councillor Knight said she had been contacted by the Daily Mail about the Orwellian decision of the Town Council to curb the behaviour of market traders. She asked that it be made clear that Uttlesford was not involved in this matter.

Councillor Wilcock contrasted the G2 application with the decision of Ryanair to reduce the number of flights. The Council should review the effect of the downturn in the economy, the rise in the price of oil, and the consequent effect on employment in the area.

The Leader thought there was insufficient time to address these matters now but there would be ample opportunity to do so at the inquiry. Recent economic trends would have the benefit of demonstrating that airports were not immune to general economic conditions and that the impact on the area would become magnified the more that the airport expanded.

Councillor Knight said that most of the additional workforce for the airport would come from outside the Council's area. Consequently, she thought that rising unemployment would not impact greatly on the local economy.

C22 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Eden, Foley, Gower, Jones, Mason, Perry, Rolfe and Yarwood.

C23 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Barker declared her interest as a member of the County Council. Councillor Chambers declared an interest as Chairman of the Essex Police Authority and as an Essex County Councillor. Councillors Cant, Cheetham, C Dean, Davey, Godwin and Salmon all declared a personal interest as holders of a bus pass.

C24 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Annual meeting held on 13 May 2008, having been received, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

C25 **BUSINESS ARISING**

(i) Minute C7 – Amendments to the Constitution

Councillor C Dean spoke about the introduction of area forums and said that Councillor Hicks had stated during the debate on this matter that the previous administration had undertaken no consultation before the move to area panels three years ago. Councillor Menell had stated in a letter to the press that Liberal Democrat councillors had been economical with the truth in claiming that consultation had taken place.

Neither statement was true. In October 2005, a report had been submitted to the Council by the former Chief Executive setting out the results of a consultation on the then proposed constitution, that had been commenced after the Council meeting in July of that year. She quoted in detail from the report outlining the

steps taken to make the public aware of the proposed changes. These steps included publishing the draft constitution on the website; writing to all town and parish councils; publishing a letter in the local press; and making a presentation at a meeting of the parish liaison group.

As a result of that consultation, supportive comments were received from seven town or parish councils, and others including one member of the public and four partner organisations. She asked those councillors concerned to acknowledge that they were wrong to say that no consultation had taken place.

Councillor Hicks said there had been no proper consultation as the then administration had simply set out in advance what it had already decided to do.

Councillor Menell said that the consultation undertaken had been on the draft proposed constitution and did not refer specifically to area panels.

Councillor C Dean said these comments amounted to obfuscation. The three month consultation undertaken in 2005 contrasted strongly with the three week consultation carried out earlier this year and the issue of a press release. She acknowledged that there had been consultation with statutory bodies such as Police, Highways and the PCT, but there had been no written report and Uttlesford Futures had been told about the changes only after the Council had made the decision.

Councillor Wattebot said that because there had been no written report, Councillors had been unable to consider the comments made. The Minute was incomplete as there was no mention of the strong objection made by Thaxted Parish Council to being placed in the North Forum area.

In response to these comments, Councillor Cheetham said that the letter from Thaxted Parish Council had stated how much they had enjoyed the initial meeting. Area forums would be reviewed after one year and she urged all Members to move on and to work together for the good of the community.

The Leader said that Thaxted had been placed in the North Forum area because it was in that area for policing purposes and it would be a nonsense were it to be placed in a different area.

Councillor Sell referred to a recent conversation with a local resident who was disillusioned with politics. In order to move on with community engagement, Administration members should accept there had been consultation just as former Councillor Gayler had admitted that mistakes had been made in the past.

In concluding the debate, the Chairman said he was sure that all Members were united in their support for Area Forums.

(ii) Minute C14 – Leader’s Communications

Councillor A Dean referred to the Leader’s statement about the need to take £1 million out of staffing costs. A press statement issued on 23 June had claimed that a forecast overspend of £1.5 million had been reduced to just under £100k

because the authority had avoided spending just over £1.4 million in the last four months of the financial year.

He had attended the Finance and Administration Committee on 26 June and had three times asked the Chairman of that meeting for a breakdown of the expenditure reductions referred to. He had again written to Councillor Chambers and had received no response until a few minutes before the beginning of this meeting.

Accordingly, he had carried out his own analysis of the claims made. More than £350k in income had been received even though it was claimed that it would not be. In addition, half a million pounds of redundancy costs had been paid for from the capital account. He therefore claimed that the 'avoided' expenditure was reduced to a true figure in the region of £500k, representing what he called 'a third of a miracle'.

In conclusion, Councillor Dean called upon Councillor Chambers to look at the figures and, if he disagreed with them, provide his own explanation. He asked the Leader to ensure that future statements contained objective reports free from political spin and management hype. Finally, he asked for an assurance that the Chairman of the Finance and Administration Committee refrain from making accusations of lying about Liberal Democrat members.

[He asked for a copy of his statement to be appended to the Minutes. See statement attached.]

The Leader said he was amazed by the comments made. Councillor Dean's questions had taken a great deal of officer time over a number of weeks. His statement amounted to an attack on officers of the Council whom he appeared to be accusing of deliberately colluding to exaggerate the Council's financial position.

He was suggesting that the pain endured over recent months had been unnecessary and had been brought about by misleading rhetoric. The fact was that the Council had entered into a Voluntary Improvement Board. The notion of exaggerated claims was ridiculous. Staff knew the true position.

Councillor Dean should apologise. There had been serious exaggerations in the Liberal Democrat press statement. Had the Council not taken the actions it had, inspectors would have been called in.

Councillor Chambers said that he agreed with the comments just made. He apologised to Councillor Dean for the delay in replying to his questions but said the information provided was already in the public domain.

C26

CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman asked Members to ensure they used their name labels at Council meetings. He had attended 23 functions since the beginning of June. These included the Queen's garden party, the Royal Anglian Regiment's beating the

retreat, and functions involving Takeley scouts, Newport School, and the Young Theatre Group's performance at Saffron Screen.

He congratulated Councillor Godwin who had undertaken a midnight walk to raise £200 for St Claire Hospice. In conclusion, he advised Members of the 15th Dunmow pro am golf tournament on 24 September which aimed to raise funds for senior citizens. Any Member wishing to participate should contact Councillor Barker for an application form.

C27

LEADER'S COMMUNICATIONS

After referring briefly to the call-in decision on the G2 application which had been discussed already, the Leader spoke about the 3rd meeting of the Uttlesford Improvement Board, the notes for which had been circulated. A bid for funding had been approved to enable a review of document imaging, a review of procurement, and Member training. A sum of £41k had been received for these projects.

The Board was content on progress made with the recovery plan. The Audit Commission would make a presentation at October's Council meeting. Mark Harrison of IDeA expressed satisfaction with the work carried out to reduce overspending but had cautioned that the overall financial position remained precarious. The meetings remained helpful with good progress being made.

Finally, he expressed satisfaction with the content of the Local Government Ombudsman's annual letter for 2007/08. This had been circulated with the Members' bulletin. Of those nine cases referred for investigation, none had been found against the Council and the time taken to respond to requests for information had improved over the previous year to an average 16.7 days. The officers concerned with this improvement deserved congratulation.

C28

MATTERS ARISING FROM COMMITTEES

(i) Standards Committee on 23 June 2008 – Minute S4 – Protocol for the Member use of IT

The Assistant Chief Executive said that since the report had been published it had been suggested that the protocol be referred back to the Standards Committee for reconsideration. In the meantime, he asked Members to send him directly any comments they may have on the operation of the protocol, and these would be taken into account by the Committee.

Councillor Wilcock said he thought the protocol as recommended was draconian and supported the reference back to the Standards Committee. He had circulated a separate paper containing suggestions as to how the policy could be amended. He asked that the paper be circulated to group leaders for comment.

Councillor Cheetham proposed that the recommended protocol be referred back to the Standards Committee.

RESOLVED that the recommendation of the Standards Committee for the adoption of a Protocol on the Use of Council Supplied IT by Members be referred back to that Committee for reconsideration following the collation of comments by Members and group leaders.

C29

ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER 2006/07 - COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO SECTION 11 NOTICE

The Chairman of the Finance and Administration Committee introduced a report summarising a number of statutory recommendations made by the District Auditor under Section 11 of the Audit Commission Act 1998. The report contained an appendix setting out the recommendations in full, together with details of the Council's actions and a formal response to the Audit Commission.

He said that the report was very thorough and reinforced many of the matters highlighted in the report commissioned from Mr Roots, which had been considered in the early part of this year. The Council had not yet fully recovered but was in a better position than expected thanks to the efforts of officers. Great care must continue to be exercised for some time to come before the recovery could be completed.

Councillor Chambers proposed adoption of the report and Councillor Godwin seconded it.

Councillor A Dean said he wished to place on record that the Scrutiny Committee had set up a task group to examine fees and charges.

Councillor Wilcock then proposed the following amendment, as additional wording to the motion under consideration:

'That the Council publish in a local newspaper, a summary of the annual audit letter, as required by legislation, such wording to be agreed with the District Auditor; and that the Voluntary Improvement Board should in future include a representative of each political group.'

In response, Councillor Chambers agreed with the first part of the amendment, as the Council should be as open as possible, but said the second part would have to be referred to the Leader.

Before the Leader could respond, the Chairman advised Members that the Audit Commission representatives had made it clear they could not become involved in a joint press release.

The Leader then asked the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group to state that he accepted that reporting of the Council's financial situation was accurate.

Councillor Wilcock said that he accepted the Council was in a difficult financial situation and hoped it would now be possible to move on.

The Leader said he was not satisfied with this response. Statements had been made by Liberal Democrat Members that the financial position as reported had

been exaggerated and was inaccurate. He asked the Liberal Democrat leader to accept that these statements were wrong and to stop his Members undermining the recovery process.

Councillor Wilcock responded that comments made by his group were correct. He had made it clear that the financial position must be dealt with openly and transparently. It was the case that the accounts for the year ended had not been audited. There had been an over reliance on individuals to produce the statement of accounts.

After further questioning, he said he wished to clarify that at no stage had he said the figures produced were not correct. He reminded Members that there was a statutory requirement under Section 11 to publish a notice.

At this stage the Chairman invited the Assistant Chief Executive to clarify the legal position. Mr Perry said that there was a statutory duty on the Council to publish this information and the Council did not need to resolve to do what it was obliged by law to do.

The Chairman asked Councillor Wilcock to clarify the terms of his amendment. He confirmed that he wished both parts of the amendment to be put to the vote, but as a single amendment.

The amendment was declared lost by 22 votes to 9.

The substantive motion was then put to the vote and declared carried by 28 votes to 1.

In conclusion, the Leader said he would think carefully about what had been said during the debate but he urged Liberal Democrat Members to accept that statements made by Councillors A Dean and Sell about the Council's financial position were incorrect.

RESOLVED that the formal response to the Audit Commission, as contained in full in Appendix A to the report, be approved.

C30 REPORT OF THE RETURNING OFFICER

Members received for information, the report of the Returning Officer on the outcome of the recent by-election in Great Dunmow North Ward, resulting in the election of Councillor Davey.

C31 REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE

The Committee and Electoral Services Manager presented a review of the Council's political balance in response to a request from the Leader of the Conservative Group. Councillor Davey had applied to join the Conservative Group following his election.

Members were reminded that vacancies on the Finance and Administration and Performance Select Committee respectively had been held over to be filled at this meeting. The review indicated that the Conservative Group was entitled to fill both of the vacancies concerned.

The existing allocation of seats did not conform strictly to the political balance requirement as the Independent Group had been granted an additional seat on the Development Control Committee.

RESOLVED (with no Members voting against) that Councillor Davey be appointed to fill the vacancies on the Finance and Administration and Performance Select Committees.

C32

GIFT OF LAND FOR THE HERITAGE QUEST CENTRE

Members received a report dealing with the proposed gift of land at Thaxted Road, Saffron Walden to Saffron Walden Museum Society to facilitate construction of the Heritage Quest Centre.

Councillor Morson said that it gave him great pleasure to propose adoption of the recommendations in the report.

Councillor Artus expressed concerns about the loss of an asset in the unlikely event that the project did not proceed for any reason and said that he was anxious to protect the Council's position. He proposed the following amendment:

'That officers use their best endeavours to secure that the property reverts to the Council in the event that the charity ceases to exist or if the project should prove abortive.'

The Chairman invited Councillor Morson to indicate whether he was prepared to accept the wording in the amendment and he said that he was happy to do so. The original motion, including the wording in the amendment, was then put to the vote and carried, as the substantive motion.

RESOLVED that:

1. gift of the land for the Heritage Quest Centre at Thaxted Road, Saffron Walden be approved to the Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd., as soon as the project was able to formally commence;
2. use of the site to deposit road sweepings was to cease and any sweepings deposited removed by the Council before ownership of the site was transferred to the Museum Society; and
3. careful checks be made as to whether the land could revert to the Council in the event of the charity ceasing to exist or the project being aborted, in accordance with Members' wishes.

NOTICE OF MOTION – MODIFICATION TO THE NATIONAL BUS PASS SCHEME

The following motion was proposed by Councillor C M Dean and seconded by Councillor Cant:

‘Council supports the intention (decision) of the Environment Committee on 17th June to agree to a modification to the national bus pass scheme in Uttlesford to permit bus pass use from 9.00am and to fund this from the committee’s assisted travel budget.

Council notes that the expected additional cost is around £5,000 and only represents about 2% of the relevant assisted travel budget. In view of the uncertainties over the annual cost of the scheme, the Environment Committee is asked to monitor closely and manage this budget item along with the rest of its overall budget of approximately £2,000,000.

Officers are instructed to implement the change promptly in line with the original Environment Committee resolution.’

In speaking to the motion, Councillor C Dean said that some bus users were disadvantaged by the later start to the concessionary scheme. She highlighted the example of bus passengers using services from Stansted and Henham to illustrate her argument.

The Environment Committee had voted in favour of extending the scheme and Members at that meeting had been under the impression that the amended scheme would begin to operate two weeks later. It had then been decided to refer the matter to the Finance and Administration Committee. That Committee had decided to invite the Environment Committee to consider this matter again in September although the additional cost of the proposed variation was very small.

Councillor Dean contrasted the scheme operating in Uttlesford with that in East Hertfordshire where no limitation applied and referred to a small demonstration that had taken place last week representing those people who depended on bus services. Finally she urged Members to support the motion as it would benefit what she acknowledged was a small number of disadvantaged people.

Councillor Chambers urged Members to reject the motion. He reiterated that the Council had to be careful with its expenditure decisions over the next year. The cost of the entire scheme was unknown and it was therefore sensible to wait until the cost commitment was clearer to ensure that the assisted travel scheme operating in Uttlesford was sustainable in the long term.

In the longer term he hoped it would be possible, through negotiations with the County Council, to reach agreement with all bus operators to benefit pensioners across the whole of Essex. In the meantime, he asked Members to support the Finance and Administration Committee’s decision to defer the matter until September.

Councillor Godwin acknowledged that many elderly people were affected by the decision not to extend the scheme and asked how quickly a revised scheme

could begin to operate. Councillor Barker confirmed that two weeks' notice would be needed by bus operators.

Councillor Sell referred to anomalies in the Stansted area caused by the proximity to East Hertfordshire and asked whether it would be possible to introduce an Essex wide approach before September?

Councillor Chambers replied that negotiations were in an advanced state and he hoped it would be possible to report positively to Council in due course.

The Leader said that it was not just a question of the additional half hour as the cost of the entire scheme was an unknown quantity. For this reason it was essential that Members agreed to act prudently.

Other Members supported this approach but Councillor Wilcock asked whether Environment Committee Members knew the facts when they had taken the original decision? Whatever was decided, the matter should now be referred back to the Environment Committee.

The Chairman of the Environment Committee apologised for any confusion. She had thought the Committee could decide the matter but realised there was no remit and it should have been referred to Finance and Administration.

At this point, the Assistant Chief Executive advised Members that if the motion were rejected the Finance and Administration Committee could not resolve to introduce the scheme because of the six month rule. He suggested that an amendment to read 'that the modification of the national bus pass scheme be deferred to the Finance and Administration Committee meeting in September' would achieve the desired result.

Councillor Chambers proposed and Councillor Godwin seconded such an amendment. The amendment was then put to the vote and declared carried. On a further vote, Members voted in favour of the amended substantive motion.

RESOLVED that consideration of the national bus pass scheme be deferred to the meeting of the Finance and Administration Committee in September.

C34

ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS – APPOINTMENT OF PARTNERSHIP GOVERNOR ON PRINCESS ALEXANDRA TRUST

The Chairman agreed to the consideration of this item on the grounds of urgency as the business needed to be transacted before the next meeting of the Council.

The Chairman referred to a letter he had received from the Princess Alexandra Trust asking the Council to appoint a Partnership Governor in support of Foundation Trust status.

RESOLVED that Councillor J E Menell be appointed to this position.

C35

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 paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of that Act.

At this point the Interim Chief Executive and the Interim Director of Central Services left the meeting.

C36

APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Leader of the Council reported the recommendation of the Appointments Committee to appoint John Mitchell as Chief Executive, Returning Officer, Electoral Registration Officer, and Head of Paid Service. He proposed adoption of the recommendation and the motion was seconded by Councillor Chambers.

The motion was declared carried.

RESOLVED that John Mitchell be appointed Chief Executive, Returning Officer, Electoral Registration Officer, and designated as Head of Paid Service, with immediate effect.

The Chairman thanked those Members involved in the selection process, as well as Colin Rockall, the Interim Change Manager, for the hard work they had put into this exercise. He then invited John Mitchell to return to the meeting and congratulated him on his appointment. He wished Mr Mitchell well and said he was sure Members had made the right choice.

The Leader wished Mr Mitchell well also and invited the meeting to consider the position relating to other key appointments. The recommendation to appoint a Director of Central Services, together with the designation of an appropriate officer as the Council's Section 151 Officer (following the appointment of a Chief Finance Officer) would necessitate an Extraordinary Council meeting in due course. It was likely that meeting would take place in early September.

Members expressed agreement with the arrangements suggested.

RESOLVED that

1. arrangements be made to proceed with a permanent appointment to the post of Director of Central Services following internal advertisement in accordance with the Constitution;
2. notwithstanding the delegation of this function to the Finance and Administration Committee, the Appointments Committee be retained in place, authorised to interview applicants for the post of Director of Central Services, and make a recommendation to Full Council on the appointment;
3. Adrian Webb continue as Interim Director of Central Services until such time as an appointment was made and the permanent postholder took up the appointment.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm. Page 12

STATEMENT BY COUNCILLOR A DEAN

MATTER ARISING MINUTE C14 COUNCIL 13 MAY 2008

Mr Chairman

The Leader referred in minute C14 about the need to bring forward further measures to reduce staffing costs by £1 million.

No one can deny that economies had to be made. The question that cannot yet be answered fully is how great those economies had to be.

On 23 June the Council issued a press release on the year-end accounts for 2007/08. It claimed that a forecast overspend of £1.5 million has been reduced to just under £100,000 and that this was because (to quote) 'this authority has avoided spending just over £1.4 million in the last four months of the financial year'. The acting chief executive made a similar statement to staff on an email three days earlier.

I will confess that at first glance, that claim looked pretty impressive. I felt that it needed to be understood so that we might be able to repeat the feat on another occasion. I have always been a devotee of making expenditure savings.

So I attended the F&A committee of 26 June, when I asked the committee chairman three times for a breakdown of these expenditure reductions. I did not receive an answer. So on 29 June I wrote to Cllr Chambers asking the same question. I asked for financial evidence.

Up to just before the start of this council meeting, over three weeks later, I had not received a written reply. I was handed a white envelope at 7.25 p.m. that I have not had the opportunity to open and read.

I have, therefore, carried out my own simplistic analysis.

Over £350,000 in income was received, some of which was in the original budget; but it was said we wouldn't receive it.

That reduces the 'avoided expenditure' to just over £1 million and makes the financial shortfall that bit smaller.

I wonder whether it was financial prudence or political justification that led to income being underestimated.

Then there was £half-a-million in redundancy and similar costs to pay out the people who left UDC. That expenditure was not avoided. It was simply paid for out of another council pot – the capital account.

That was a large sum of money that I hope all proves to have been justifiable.

It brings the 'avoided expenditure' claim down to around £500,000.

So what looked at first like a miracle of good financial management and cost reduction to the man on the 303 bus is in reality only a third of a miracle; £500,000 instead of £1.4 million.

So my questions to the Leader of the Council are:

1. Will he undertake to look at my figures outside the meeting and, if he disagrees, provide me with his own explanation of the figures?
2. Will he ensure in future that statements to the press and staff contain objective reports of what happens on the finances within UDC, rather wrapping them in party political spin and management hype to match the political rhetoric that we have heard so much of in the past 14 months?
3. Will he caution the chair of the finance and administration committee not to accuse me and my fellow Liberal Democrats of lying when it is in fact he who is often economical with the truth?

I would like my statement appended to the minutes of this meeting.

Cllr Alan Dean