

COUNCIL MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 23 FEBRUARY 2012 at 7.30pm

Present: Councillor D Jones – Chairman.
Councillors K Artus, H Asker, G Barker, S Barker, C Cant, R Chambers, J Cheetham, J Davey, P Davies, R Eastham, I Evans, S Favell, M Foley, J Freeman, E Godwin, E Hicks, S Howell, J Ketteridge, T Knight, M Lemon, J Loughlin, K Mackman, J Menell, D Morson, E Oliver, E Parr, D Perry, V Ranger, J Redfern, J Rich, H Rolfe, J Rose, D Sadler, J Salmon, L Smith, A Walters, D Watson, L Wells and P Wilcock.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), S Chapman (Accountant), M Donaldson (Accountancy Manager), E Fellows (Accountant), R Harbourough (Director of Public Services), S Joyce (Assistant Chief Executive – Finance), R Millership (Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services), M Perry (Assistant Chief Executive – Legal), P Snow (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), M Tokley (Principal Accountant – Budgets) and A Webb (Director of Corporate Services).

Also present: David Blake of Arlingclose and David Barron, David Murtagh and John Nowell of the Independent Remuneration Panel.

C44

PUBLIC SPEAKING

At the commencement of the meeting Mr G N Smith of Great Dunmow made a public statement expressing strong concerns about the operation of a care home closely adjoining his home in Maple Way. A copy of his statement is set out in full in the appendix to these minutes.

In response, Councillor Cheetham said that she had spoken to officers today and obtained full details of the Council's involvement in the use of 81 Woodlands Park Drive as a care home by Sure Care. She said that the need for planning permission depended on a matter of "fact and degree", primarily whether the activities on site were materially different to the use of the property as a six bedroom house and other uses in the same class.

The Council's Anti Social Behaviour Officer, Fiona Gardiner, had also been involved in response to allegations of anti social activities at the house. Mrs Gardiner, together with Nigel Brown the Council's Development Manager, had met with the Sure Care team at Saffron Walden Police Station on 16 February and a further meeting had been planned for that evening at Great Dunmow Police Station.

In summary Councillor Cheetham said that the use of this property fell within the same definition as a dwelling house in the relevant Town and Country Planning Use Classes Order. Complaints about alleged anti social behaviour would continue to be investigated and residents kept informed.

Mr Smith then made a further point about the parking of eight to ten cars outside the property at any one time and the Chairman said that officers would continue to keep him informed about actions being taken.

C45 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Crome, Dean, Eden and A Ketteridge.

Councillors S Barker and Chambers declared their interest as Members of Essex County Council and of Essex Fire Authority.

C46 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2011 were received, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

C47 **BUSINESS ARISING**

(i) **C39 – Members' Questions**

Councillor Wilcock said that there had been legal challenges to the withdrawal of the scheme for Photovoltaic cells and asked Councillor Redfern to comment on whether it was possible to enter into discussions with other potential providers.

Councillor Redfern said that there were presently no plans to revisit this particular scheme. There was scope, however, for energy efficiency measures under the new housing self financing reforms and she would continue to explore potential improvements for tenants.

C48 **REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR 2012/13**

The Chairman invited David Barron as Chairman of the Panel to present the Remuneration Panel's recommendations for changes to the members' allowances scheme in 2012/13.

Mr Barron said that a copy of the Panel's report had been included in full in the agenda pack for this meeting. The Panel had agreed a number of principles as encapsulated in the report. The principal conclusion was that current economic pressures indicated that any changes in the scheme should be cost neutral.

The change to an executive management system was still bedding in and for this reason the Panel felt that this should be an interim report. A more detailed analysis of the changes made would be conducted later this year. This would probably involve a further survey to capture the effect of the changes on members.

In the light of the discontinuation of the LGA's daily rate, the Panel had decided to use the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings survey (ASHE) obtained from ONS data as a reputable alternative indicator.

Evidence suggested that, for now, the basic allowance should continue to be based on ten hours per week spent on council business, pending a fuller assessment later this year. In examining the special responsibility allowances to be paid, the Panel had agreed to establish a ranking order or hierarchy for the various eligible positions. This report was the first attempt at producing a rankings assessment.

In recognising that there would be winners in terms of SRA payments, there would inevitably also be some losers. However, the Panel's approach had been to keep changes to a minimum while making some recognition of changing levels of responsibility.

In respect of the basic allowance, Mr Barron said that the Panel had concluded there was no need for an increase. The public service discount should remain at 35%. The allowances scheme should reflect the time commitment of members but this was still in transition and more substantive changes would be likely to follow in 2013 and beyond.

He outlined a minor change to the multiple payment of SRA and of eligibility for members' pensions. In addition the travel and subsistence and carers' allowances had been incorporated into the table.

In conclusion, he thanked John Nowell as a new Panel member for his assistance with this year's review and, especially, David Murtagh for his work over the past four years. He thanked Peter Snow and John Mitchell for managing to keep everything on track. He finally thanked group leaders for their helpful contribution to the Panel's deliberations and said he was pleased to present the Panel's recommendations.

In response, Councillor Rolfe, as the Cabinet member responsible for member services, thanked the Remuneration Panel for the work they had put in to this year's review. The cabinet system was still bedding in and it was therefore difficult to reach long term conclusions. The report contained a number of proposed changes of a sensitive nature. In the circumstances, he believed it would be better for the report to be deferred until the April meeting to allow for a further period of consultation and he proposed accordingly.

Having been seconded and put to the vote, the motion was agreed.

RESOLVED that the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for the members' allowances scheme to be applied in 2012/13 be deferred for consideration at the meeting on 17 April.

The Chairman thanked David Barron, John Nowell, and particularly David Murtagh, for their much valued service.

Councillor Knight referred to the Panel's pension scheme recommendation and asked for an open meeting to be held to resolve the matter of members' pension eligibility.

After seeking clarification of the intention of such a meeting, the Leader agreed that pensions could be considered as part of a planned member workshop to receive a briefing from the Chief Executive. Councillor Knight gave her consent to that proposal.

C49 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman said that he was continuing to find life as the Council's Chairman to be both busy and interesting, especially as it enabled him to make contact with people in other parts of Essex and elsewhere.

He would arrange to circulate details of his activities to all members. He was presently finalising plans to hold a civic dinner on 26 April at the Foakes Hall in Great Dunmow.

C50 **LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Leader proposed a vote of thanks to all members of the Council's staff, and especially the refuse teams, who had maintained services throughout the recent period of adverse weather.

The budget papers prepared for this meeting reflected an excellent story in terms of the stability of the Council's finances. He had attended the Chief Executive's staff briefing earlier today and had suggested it would be a good idea for him to give a similar briefing to members. This could be accommodated as part of the workshop mentioned earlier in the meeting.

He advised members that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England was proposing to conduct a Further Electoral Review (FER) of the district and this would result in a new warding scheme from 2015. He had suggested the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager should be asked to present details of the FER to members at the workshop and, if needed, at group meetings as well. As agreed earlier, application of the pension scheme to members would be discussed at the workshop.

He was pleased to be able to report that the allocation of New Homes Bonus to Uttlesford was the second largest amount awarded in Essex. Arrangements had been made to share NHB with the community and £500k had been put into projects.

Area Forum meetings would be held next week and these would form part of the existing LDF consultation. The consultation was going well but much work remained to be done before the next stage of consultation could be started.

In connection with the LDF consultation process, the Leader referred to the leaflet recently issued by the Fairfield Partnership about development at Elsenham and Henham. The leaflet appeared to have given the impression that it had the support of the Council. As a consequence a statement had been issued disassociating the Council from the Fairfield leaflet.

The Leader drew attention to the Big Lunch following the receipt of a letter from Her Majesty the Queen asking the Council to support the project. A pack was available for anyone wishing to find out further information.

Finally, the Leader said that he had written to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government supporting other low tax base authorities and asking him to use his powers to apply a new set of principles to determine when to cap Council Tax and how to define rises as excessive in the future. The letter went on to say that increases should be limited to a fixed cash amount equivalent to a fixed percentage of the national band D precept for each type of authority. Such a rule would limit the extra cost to taxpayers in areas with the same administrative structure to the same cash value.

A reply had been received from Baroness Hanham stating that no change would be made this year but that the option of determining a principle based on cash levels for specific categories of authority was one that remained open to the Secretary of State.

The Leader said that the cost of organising a referendum was considered to be prohibitive. At Uttlesford the likely cost was in the region of £80,000.

C51

MATTERS REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE

(i) Review of Treasury Management

Councillor Chambers drew members' attention to the following recommendation from the Cabinet meeting on 8 December 2011:

'Recommended to Full Council that the Authorised Limit and Operational Boundary be increased by the amount of the HRA Self-Financing payment due on March 2012, as set out in paragraph 16 and Appendix D of the report.'

He proposed that the recommendation be considered as part of agenda item 13ii dealing with Treasury Management policy and this was agreed.

C52

MATTERS REFERRED FROM COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

(i) Constitution Working Group – recommendation to establish a Standards Appointment Task Group

Councillor Morson presented the recommendation of the Constitution Working Group to appoint a Task Group to oversee the selection process for three independent persons to serve as non-voting members of the Standards Committee and to recommend specific appointments to Council.

He said that, in order to maintain high standards of conduct after the Localism Act changes had come into effect, the Working Group had proposed, and the Standards Committee had agreed, that the Council should continue to operate a Standards Committee from July 2012. The Working Group had been invited to consider making changes to the Constitution to reflect those changes and these would be considered at a later meeting.

The proposed committee would have six councillors to be drawn from the political groups as agreed and three independent members. A task group was needed to facilitate the recruitment and selection of the independent persons and he proposed accordingly.

RESOLVED that the recommendation of the Constitution Working Group be approved as follows:

1. a Standards Appointment Task Group be appointed to oversee the recruitment of three independent persons to be non-voting members of the Standards Committee and to make recommendations as to their appointment;
2. Councillors Favell and Knight (Conservative group), Cant (Liberal Democrat group) and Lemon (Independent group) be appointed to serve as members of the task group;
3. the terms of reference be as set out in the appendix to the Working Group's minutes; and
4. that the life of the task group be limited to the date of the recommendation to Council or the period of six months whichever is the earlier.

C53 **TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2012/13**

The Leader proposed adoption of the timetable of meetings for the coming year. It was noted that Cabinet meetings would take place on a six weekly timetable leading to less frequent meetings. He also highlighted the inclusion of scheduled Scrutiny Committee dates allowing for the pre-scrutiny of items referred to the Cabinet and reserved for the call in of decisions taken at Cabinet meetings if needed.

Councillor Wilcock noted that Cabinet meeting dates were set at the Leader's discretion and asked that the dates be fixed as far as possible.

RESOLVED to approve the timetable of meetings for 2012/13.

C54 **CORPORATE PLAN 2012 AND CORPORATE RISK REGISTER**

The Leader presented the Corporate Plan in its new revised and simplified format, as already endorsed by Cabinet. He referred to the excellent budget position and said that much work had been accomplished on the various work-streams identified in the Plan to deliver savings. The intention at present was not to tackle further work-streams.

The intention was to link the Plan with the Medium Term Financial Strategy to form a single concise document. This would reflect the changing face of local government legislation, especially in relation to the Localism Act. The Plan was accompanied as required by the risk register which would continue to be monitored by the Performance and Audit Committee.

In referring to the risk register, Councillor Wilcock asked about the ranking of 2 allocated to affordable homes and said that the ranking should be adjusted to 3.

This was because of the risk that not enough affordable homes would be built within the timescale envisaged.

The Chief Executive responded that the Performance and Audit Committee regularly assessed risk reports and would review this particular ranking if this was needed.

RESOLVED to adopt the Corporate Plan 2012-2017 and the Corporate Risk Register

C55

BUDGET 2012/13

Councillor Chambers presented the budget proposals for 2012/13. These were included in six separate reports as already approved by the Cabinet and recommended for approval by the Scrutiny Committee.

He said that this had been a difficult year because of changes to financing arrangements but that the firm foundations laid would provide a solid base to ensure that the Council would be in a strong position to meet future problems. He thanked all members and officers for their help and hard work in preparing the budget. This applied especially to Mr Joyce and his finance team.

The budget as presented ensured the maintenance of all services and provided for help to the voluntary sector and an enhanced provision for economic development. This had been achieved with no Council Tax increase. He then introduced the separate elements of the budget in conjunction with the Corporate Plan and equalities impact assessment. This showed that there would be no adverse impact on any individual group.

(i) Housing Revenue Account 2012/13 Budget and 30 Year Business Plan

Councillor Chambers proposed adoption of the HRA budget and Business Plan. He said that the reform of housing finance signalled the most profound change in a generation. The housing subsidy system would be abolished enabling councils to buy themselves out of the negative housing subsidy system by making one substantial payment funded by borrowing. In Uttlesford's case this amounted to a sum of £88.4m to be paid back over a period of thirty years.

Advice about meeting this substantial debt had been received from the Assistant Chief Executive Finance and from Mr David Blake of Arlingclose, employed in the role of the Council's treasury management adviser. Both Mr Joyce and Mr Blake were in attendance to answer any technical questions.

The outcome of the housing subsidy change had been to make available a sum of £16m to spend on housing projects. This was a major gain for Uttlesford and would enable the funding of new build projects with a particular emphasis on the provision of affordable homes.

He then invited Councillor Redfern to comment on the HRA budget as portfolio holder for housing.

Councillor Redfern said that the housing finance reforms presented a significant opportunity to make a substantial investment both in the existing stock and in new housing provision. It would enable the Council to review its assets and look at its housing responsibilities with fresh eyes. There was now the potential to look at new build schemes as well as developing garden and garage sites. The Council should also examine how it could maximise energy efficiency. The opportunity had been provided to make a real difference and she hoped that members would support this new direction.

In response to a question from Councillor S Barker about loan arrangements, David Blake confirmed there was a set formula for the early repayment of the loan but this would depend on market conditions at the time and could vary from zero to several million pounds.

Councillor Chambers said that he had discussed this possibility with Mr Joyce and Mr Blake. It was a fact that taking on such a substantial loan was a calculated risk as market conditions could not be predicted. He had concluded that the proposal represented the most prudent way forward with the least possible risk attached.

Councillor Mackman said that the risk scores on option 3 in the report did not add up to the sum total and this was noted.

Councillor Lemon thanked Mr Joyce and Mrs Millership and their respective teams for the excellent work they had put into completion of the Business Plan.

The motion was then put to the vote and approved.

RESOLVED that the following items be approved:

- a) The Self Financing Funding Strategy as set out in paragraphs 13-19 of the report;
- b) The HRA Business Plan as summarised in paragraphs 20-29 and attached to the report;
- c) The HRA budget for 2012/13 as set out in paragraphs 30-32 and appendix A;
- d) Increases in rents and service charges for 2012/13 as set out in paragraphs 33-40; and
- e) With effect from 1 April 2012, the ring-fencing of HRA capital receipts (such as Right to Buy receipts) for use by the HRA Business Plan

(ii) Treasury Management Policy, Strategy and Prudential Indicators

Councillor Chambers presented a report setting out how the Council would manage its cash flows, strategies for the temporary investment of funds until they were required, and borrowing funds to meet any short or long term need. He said that a great deal of money flowed through the Council's coffers and sound policies were needed to safeguard the funds placed on deposit.

Only suitably rated investment accounts were used within the United Kingdom and no other external borrowing was required. The only exception might be if an evaluation of the cost of replacing the refuse vehicle fleet concluded that borrowing was a more cost effective option than leasing.

He said that Prudential Indicators had been confirmed as sound. All of these matters were monitored on a daily basis by the s151 officer and he was confident all efforts were made to minimise risk.

In reply to a question from Councillor Mackman, the Assistant Chief Executive Finance said that the present debt cap was set at £89.5m and this allowed headroom of just over £1m on present figures.

RESOLVED to approve the following:

- a) The Treasury Management Policy as set out in Appendix A of the report;
- b) The Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Appendix B; and
- c) Prudential Indicators as set out in Appendix B

(iii) Capital Programme 2012/13 to 2016/17

Councillor Chambers presented the Capital Programme for 2012/13 to 2016/17. It detailed planned capital expenditure on the Council's buildings, vehicles and ICT assets, together with capital grants to other organisations and individuals.

The total budgeted capital spending for next year was £10.6m, of which £4.6m was allocated for housing purposes. This was in line with the HRA Business Plan. As part of this expenditure, it was expected that the Holloway Crescent project would finally be brought to completion. There was provision for new build projects and the potential to add further expenditure later in the year.

The programme would be financed from various sources including external partnership funding and revenue contributions. As already stated, it was possible that further borrowing may be required if it was decided that borrowing was a more cost effective option than leasing to fund a replacement refuse collection fleet.

In addition to the Stansted Area Housing Partnership Fund, Councillor S Barker asked whether it would be possible to list together all of the financial contributions secured through s106 agreements that the Council currently held. Councillor Chambers said that he would be pleased to supply a complete list at a future Cabinet meeting. The Assistant Chief Executive Finance confirmed that could be done but drew attention to the Statement of Accounts which included this information in full.

In response to a question from Councillor Wilcock, Councillor Redfern confirmed that Stansted Area Housing Partnership funding could be utilised across the district as a whole.

RESOLVED to approve the Capital Programme and associated financing set out in Appendices A and B of the report.

(iv) Medium Term Financial Strategy

Councillor Chambers presented the MTFS covering the Corporate Plan period on a rolling five year basis. It provided an estimate of the Council's spending and savings over that period.

There were presently major uncertainties arising from the Government's intention to carry out a root and branch reform expected to result in the disappearance of the Formula Grant system, its replacement by New Homes Bonus and retention by councils of a share of business rates.

There was no reliable information to estimate funding levels from 2013 when these changes were expected to begin. The MTFS anticipated that a prudent level of reserves would be maintained.

In referring to the precarious national economic situation, Councillor Chambers signalled the possibility that further grant reductions would be implemented by the Government, beyond the 28% applicable in the first two years of the Spending Review, and said that it was sensible to plan for further funding reductions. The MTFS therefore anticipated a further reduction in Formula Grant and New Homes Bonus of 10% per year from 2013/14 to 2014/15.

By 2016/17, there would be a funding gap of £900k which would have to be met by savings. The strategic solutions programme was expected to realise further savings of £1m within that period leaving a small amount of head room. The MTFS was as sound as it could be and he proposed its adoption.

The Leader added that, although the strategic solutions team had estimated that a further £1m of savings could be delivered, the process of finding efficiency savings was a constant process and would be continued.

RESOLVED that the Medium Term Financial Strategy be approved as set out in the report.

(v) Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves

Councillor Chambers proposed approval of the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves. The report set out the formal advice of the s151 officer and members were required to take this advice into account when setting the budget. The s151 officer's advice was that an increase in the Working Balance of £33k was required and this sum had been incorporated into the General Fund budget.

Councillor Chambers drew attention to three identified areas of high risk listed in the report.

RESOLVED to:

- a) Take account of the advice in the report when determining the 2012/13 General Fund budget and Council Tax;
- b) Approve the risk assessment relating to the robustness of estimates as detailed in the report;
- c) Set the minimum safe contingency level for 2012/13 at £1,214,000; and
- d) Agree that the 2012/13 General Fund budget should include provision to increase the Working Balance up to the minimum safe level (an increase of £33,000)

(vi) General Fund and Council Tax 2012/13

Councillor Chambers proposed adoption of the General Fund budget and Council Tax requirement of £4,972,771 for 2012/13. He said that the Council's budget had been subject to severe financial pressures and a reduction in Formula Grant of 13.8%.

Other changes made had alleviated these pressures including a second year's award of New Homes Bonus of £1.25m. Of this sum, £708k would be made available for new projects. This allocation would include provision for a new Jubilee Fund to benefit parishes and local projects and an award of £2k to each district councillor. The strategic solutions programme had continued to deliver savings.

Money had also been allocated for the use of voluntary bodies, Olympic events, economic development and community safety.

One of the guiding principles at Uttlesford was that that services should be run for the benefit of the local taxpayer. There was no culture of saving jobs at all costs and the Council was fortunate to have officers supporting this ethos.

He was pleased to be able to report that it was possible to freeze Council Tax for the second successive year enabling the Council to maintain the lowest rate in Essex. The budget being presented had delivered efficiency savings, no cuts in services, further investment, new projects funded by New Homes Bonus, and a Council Tax freeze.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Eastham.

Councillor S Barker asked about the availability of discounts on planning fees and Councillor Chambers said that he would ask for the wording to be amended to clarify the extent of any discounts offered.

Councillor Wilcock said that he supported a zero increase for Council Tax but that the retention of 43% of New Homes Bonus monies in reserves was excessive. He therefore proposed an amendment to the motion that £114,000 be taken out of the £753,927 balance of uncommitted New Homes Bonus monies proposed to be held as a contingency reserve, and that this sum be allocated to holding car parking charges for 2012/13 at present levels to help local communities.

The Assistant Chief Executive Legal said that the amendment was not competent because car parking was a Cabinet function and the Council could not therefore alter parking charges.

After considering this advice, the Chairman ruled that the amendment was not competent business and could not therefore be put to the vote.

The motion was then put to the vote and carried.

RESOLVED to:

- a) Approve the 2012/13 General Fund Budget and Council Tax requirement of £4,972,771, as summarised in paragraph 23 of the report and detailed in Appendices A to C;
- b) Approve the schedule of fees and charges at Appendix E;
- c) Approve proposals for use of New Homes Bonus as set out in Appendix F; and
- d) Approve the Council Tax Resolution as set out in Appendix G.

At the conclusion of the budget items, the Chairman said that he was sure all members would wish to join with him in echoing the remarks made earlier thanking the finance team for the excellent way in which the budget documents had been prepared.

C56

PAY POLICY

The Chief Executive reported there was an obligation under the Localism Act to publish a pay policy. The proposed policy presented to this meeting had been put together by the strategic solutions team working under Mr Webb's direction. It was effectively a document consolidating existing policy in a single document.

The Leader proposed acceptance of the pay policy as submitted.

RESOLVED that the Pay Policy be approved as set out in the Appendix to the report

C57

NEW HOMES BONUS

Councillor Chambers submitted a progress report on the allocation and use of New Homes Bonus funding. He said that a number of members had so far not spent any of their allocation of £1,000 in their wards and he urged all members to do so as a matter of urgency. He said that he had already written to all members reminding them of their responsibilities in this respect and he would arrange do so again.

Councillor Knight asked whether a time limit applied to the use of funds and whether they could be reallocated if not spent.

In response, Councillor Redfern agreed there had been some confusion over this process. She said that parish councils could carry over projects to next year but that some penalty might apply in the case of unspent funds.

Councillor Chambers confirmed that no penalty would apply as long as the parish concerned had indicated how the money would be spent. The Leader asked members to bear in mind that the outcome of a bid from a parish next year might be affected adversely by how much of this year's money it had not committed.

It was further clarified that the allocation of funds to individual ward members was separate to the NHB funding to parishes and it was for members to decide how this money should be spent on individual projects in their wards. The allocation to members was £1,000 in the current year and £2,000 in 2012/13.

Members noted the report.

C58

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Councillor Rolfe presented a report outlining the creation of a new two year post of Economic Development Officer. The post was complementary to other initiatives being undertaken such as reviewing the development plan to support business growth.

This was a good news story and would help to establish an economic development focus within the district that would link in with the Local Economic Partnerships. The recruitment process would begin shortly to enable the work of stimulating economic development to press ahead.

In response to a question, Councillor Rolfe confirmed that some grant monies would be available to support local businesses but this was unlikely to amount to dispensing free advice.

Members noted the update report.

C59

APPOINTMENT AND OPERATION OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

The Chief Executive reported that the terms and conditions of the Independent Remuneration Panel had last been considered in 2004. One of the Panel members was due to step down this year and a second member following the next review. Now was considered to be a suitable time to review the terms of appointment and eligibility for membership and no changes were being proposed.

RESOLVED that:

- a) Members of the Independent Remuneration Panel should continue to serve for a term of four years;
- b) The Panel should continue to consist of three members;

- c) The criteria for membership should be as set out in appendix A to the report;
- d) The allowance paid to Panel members should continue to be £500 per annum and this amount should be reviewed every four years;
- e) Delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive to appoint new members of the Panel by whatever means he considers necessary, and to extend the appointment of individual panel members by a maximum of one year in exceptional circumstances, subject to a report to Council; and
- f) The actions of the Chief Executive in extending the terms of office of two Panel members by one year in each case be ratified

The meeting ended at 9.15pm.

81 Woodlands Park Drive (A care home for teenagers with emotional and behavioural difficulties operated by SureCare)

Background. In September 2011 a Mr & Mrs White bought 81 Woodlands Park Drive (a residential property), but never moved in. In July 2011 SureCare ascertained from Uttlesford District Council (UDC) that planning permission was not required for change of use into a care home. There was no communication or consultation with surrounding residents, from either SureCare or UDC. We have still had no direct communication from the UDC. However some two or three weeks after the home opened, in January 2012, we had a letter from SureCare (which we think was prompted by UDC), which did little to assuage our fears. UDC confirmed last week, after a surreptitious meeting with SureCare, that planning permission was not required for change of use. Again there was no consultation with local residents. SureCare, supported by UDC, claims that the house is now a family residence and no professional visits take place. This is nonsense, most days, there are up to 8 Cars around with visitors to the house complete with clipboards or brief cases. SureCare, who after all are in this for profit, are operating a business from No 81.

Finance. SureCare get their teenagers from all over the country. Few if any are from Uttlesford or even Essex. Other local authorities or private individuals pay SureCare for their services. The UDC (or Council Tax Payers) picks up the additional costs (Social Services, Health Care, Police and Education). Is this fair and reasonable in these times of shrinking budgets and over stretched resources? Why is it being allowed to happen?

The Problems

1. **Anti Social behaviour in Dunmow.** Garden Noise (sometimes in the middle of the night), swearing (some surrounding gardens are no go areas for young children), breaking X boxes in the garden, suspected drug taking, Carers threatened with broom handles, and a Carer physically assaulted. Police have visited 7 times during these opening weeks. Occupancy is scheduled to increase from the current 2 to 5- we fear the consequences.
2. **SureCare Track Record.** They have had a similar home in Braintree for 3 years. Neighbours claim their lives have been made a living hell, particularly in the summer months, as a result of the anti-social behaviour from the SureCare home. Late night noise, litter, suspected drug taking, damage to property and cars, and even sexual activities in the bushes, all feature in their comments. Carers seem to have little or no control.
3. **Danger to Children.** Our part of Woodlands Park is within range of two Primary and one Secondary School. Numerous pupils walk past No 81 every day. Cat-calling, harassment and conflict are likely from the teenage residents in No 81 especially in summer months. The area could become a no go area for the Estate's children.

Course of Action We aim to convince UDC that SureCare are operating a business from No 81 and hence planning permission is required for change of use. When successful we will campaign against any planning permission being granted. We are also in contact with Wickford to ascertain why Restrictive Covenants (which Mr and Mrs White signed as accepting on purchase) are being allowed to be openly flouted.

GNSmith, 48 Maple Way, Dunmow. CM6 1WZ tel: 01371859785 E Mail: nevillesmith@talktalk.net