

**EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES  
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 11 JUNE 2012 at 7.30pm**

Present: Councillor C Cant – Chairman.  
Councillors K Artus, H Asker, G Barker, S Barker, R Chambers, J Davey, P Davies, A Dean, K Eden, J Freeman, E Godwin, E Hicks, A Ketteridge, J Ketteridge, M Lemon, K Mackman, D Morson, E Oliver, D Perry, V Ranger, H Rolfe, J Rose, J Salmon, L Smith, A Walters, D Watson, L Wells and P Wilcock.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), M Perry (Assistant Chief Executive – Legal) and P Snow (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager).

**C18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Cheetham, D Crome, R Eastham, I Evans, S Favell, M Foley, S Howell, D Jones, T Knight, J Loughlin, J Menell, E Parr, J Redfern, J Rich and D Sadler.

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

**C19 FURTHER ELECTORAL REVIEW OF UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL –**

The purpose of the meeting was for the Council to determine the preferred council size together with a supporting case, to submit to the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBCE) by no later than 15 June 2012 as part of the Electoral Review of Uttlesford District Council.

The Chief Executive gave a presentation explaining the background to this issue. The LGBCE had identified the Council as meeting the criteria for triggering a Further Electoral Review (FER). The first part of the process was to determine the council size and the Council was required to make a submission based on the management of the Council's business, the way overview and scrutiny was conducted, and the representation of electors both on the Council and in the community.

Once submitted the case would be tested by the Commission on whether it met the business and representation needs and was required to be based on sound evidence. Only when the council size was determined would the Council look at the organisation of its wards and boundaries.

The report before members set out the Council's submission and contained a case for reducing the number of councillors from 44 to 38, 39 or 40, based on business and other needs of the Council for the next 10 to 15 years. The report included the supporting documents including council governance information, electorate figures for June 2012 and forecast electorate for July

2018, elector/council ratios in Essex and nationally and the results of the Citizens E-Panel. It also included the key lines of enquiry document which asked for responses pertinent to the review and had been informed by the Member workshop on 14th May.

Officers had advised that the optimum council size, based purely on considerations of conducting council business and undertaking overview and scrutiny functions, was in the region of 34 to 36. This took no account of representational needs in the district and members would have to form a judgement balancing these factors.

It was emphasised that this was a significant decision for the Council, workshops had been held and there had been sessions with the boundary commission for all Councillors. The Chief Executive said it would be preferable for the Council to agree on a number, but if this was not possible the Council could make a majority decision and individual groups could make their own submissions.

Councillor Ketteridge said he recognised the general trend to reduce council size and that other districts had taken or were proposing to take this step. However, Uttlesford was unique in its rural nature and with the electorate more dispersed this put pressure on the ward member role. This was only likely to increase with Localism requiring a more hands-on constituency role.

He proposed a preferred council size of between 38 - 40. This he believed would allow the flexibility to provide a best fit in terms of the governance needs of the Council and of community identities within Uttlesford, and would move the Council nearer to the average elector/councillor ratio in other districts.

Councillor Morson proposed an amendment 'for a preferred council size of 35'. He said that the number had been based on robust evidence. The group had taken as its base the 34 - 36 councillors required to undertake the work of a councillor and worked up a model with an equitable number of councillors to electors and evened up the relationships between the ward member, local communities and other elected bodies. Whilst he understood that proposals for new ward boundaries were not required at this stage he felt it was difficult to come up with a number without it being judged against the possible ward boundaries.

He added that the decision on council size should have been member led and conducted through the Electoral Working Group, which hadn't met to discuss this issue even though a meeting had been promised.

Councillor Lemon said that the Independent group had looked at what it felt was the best number for Uttlesford and had suggested a figure of between 36 – 38 councillors.

Councillor Ketteridge spoke to the amendment. He said the suggested number of 35 had not been based on evidence, rather the model had been drawn up to fit this figure and the scheme did not retain community identity. He was disappointed that there had been a press release attacking the Administration on this issue.

Councillor Wilcock commented that that the proposed submission concentrated on the structure of the Council and said little about the councillors' role in the community. The Citizen's Panel had shown that 34% of the respondents had contacted their councillor, a high percentage to be born in mind when considering the final figure. He asked whether the boundary commission would prefer the Council to put forward a single figure or a range. The Chief Executive replied that the boundary commission had a strong preference for a single figure. In any event it would build in a leeway of +1 or -1 in either direction to provide for flexibility in the final scheme.

Members commented on the next stage of the process, suggesting that when considering the warding arrangements, if possible villages should not be grouped with larger settlements and parishes should not be split in the final scheme.

Councillor Dean questioned whether there had been due process in arriving at tonight's decision. The rationale in the Council report could fit any of the numbers suggested by the various political groups. The work to arrive at an appropriate figure should have been undertaken by the Electoral Working Group a few months ago.

In summing up Councillor Morson said that it was clear that the Boundary Commission was looking for a reduction in numbers and the amendment of 35 was a reasoned number resulting in about 1800 electorate per councillor. The Council could have arrived at a consensus figure, if all members had been willing to discuss this issue at an earlier stage.

The amendment was then put to the vote and lost.

Councillor Ketteridge spoke to the substantive motion. He dismissed the contention that the figures put forward by the Conservative Group had not followed due process. The group had spent a considerable amount of time discussing this issue, with different views being expressed before arriving at the final figures.

Cllr Rolfe said that the word 'evidence' was being banded about but the rationale for the proposal was quite clear. There was a national movement to decrease the number of members but there were no consistent figures. The council had a starting point of 44 councillors and it had been estimated that 34- 36 were required to carry out the Council's functions. However, this figure did not take account of the members' constituency role. The move toward local democracy would enhance this role and together with the predicted increase in electorate, 36 – 38 would be too low a number and could jeopardise a member's work in rural areas. He concluded that the report before members was comprehensive and provided good evidence for the decision taken. 38 - 40 was an appropriate number and a proper process had been gone through to reach this decision.

RESOLVED with 3 councillors voting against, that the Council agrees to propose a council size of between 38 and 40.

C20            **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 and 2 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

C21            **APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS TO THE STANDARDS BOARD**

At the meeting on 23 February the Council had appointed a task group 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. Members were advised of the work of the Task Group and the recommended appointments.

RESOLVED that Mr Allen Brobyn, Mr Victor Lelliott and Mrs Georgina Tindell be appointed as independent non-voting members of the Standards Committee with effect from 1 July 2012.

The meeting ended at 8.20pm