

**COUNCIL MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 27 FEBRUARY 2014 at 7.30pm**

Present: Councillor E Hicks – Chairman.  
Councillors H Asker, G Barker, S Barker, C Cant, R Chambers, J Cheetham, J Davey, P Davies, R Eastham, K Eden, I Evans, M Felton, M Foley, S Howell, A Ketteridge, J Ketteridge, R Lemon, K Mackman, E Oliver, E Parr, D Perry, V Ranger, J Redfern, H Rolfe, J Rose, D Sadler, J Salmon, L Smith, A Walters, D Watson and L Wells.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), R Auty (Assistant Director Corporate Services), M Cox (Democratic Services Officer), A Knight (Accountancy Manager), R Millership (Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services), M Perry (Assistant Chief Executive – Legal), R Harborough (Director of Public Services), S Joyce (Assistant Chief Executive – Finance), M Tokley (Principal Accountant) and A Webb (Director of Corporate Services).

**C52 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors K Artus, A Dean, J Freeman, E Godwin, S Harris, D Jones, T Knight, J Loughlin, J Menell, D Morson, J Parry, and J Rich.

*Councillors Barker declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Member of Essex County Council.*

**C53 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2013 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**C54 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman reminded Members of upcoming events in aid of the Chairman's Charity.

- Bridge End Gardens tour and lunch – 2 April 2014.
- Civic Dinner – Horham Hall, Thaxted – 9 May 2014.

**C55 REPORTS FROM THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

The Leader asked that the Council record its condolences to both Councillors Loughlin and Menell on their recent close family bereavements.

The Leader said this was the annual budget meeting and he pointed out that the budget proposals had already received extensive discussion through the council's working groups, committees and cabinet.

He was pleased to report that the new Dunmow bypass would be opening on Friday 14 March.

Councillor Redfern reported that earlier in the day she had attended the breaking ground ceremony at Mead Court, Stansted. This development would deliver 30 council owned homes. Councillor Redfern said the housing department was looking at council assets across the district, assessing potential sites to provide further council properties. She assured members that they would be informed of any proposals in their area and asked members to inform housing officers of other possible sites in their ward.

She also said that the housing strategic team was keen to pursue exception sites with parish councils and she was happy to attend parish meetings with the Housing Enabling Officer to encourage engagement with this process.

Councillor Barker reported that ticketless parking in Uttlesford had been introduced and it was now possible to pay using a mobile phone as well as with cash. The NEPP had launched a 'camera car' which would visit schools in the district where there was a problem with inappropriate parking. She asked members to email details of locations where there was a particular problem with school parking so that these sites could be programmed into the visiting schedule.

C56

#### **MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN**

Councillor Eastham said although he was pleased that the Tour de France would be coming through the district, he was concerned at the recently published information that the roads in Saffron Walden would be closed on the day from 7.30am to 4.30pm. He asked how residents and visitors were going to park and move around, as the town would effectively be closed for the day.

Councillor Rolfe replied that the tour authority had prescribed the times for the closures. The event had huge public safety and security implications and the organisers had to be guided by the Police. However dialogue would continue and the detailed implications would be clearer nearer the time.

Other members said this was an enormous event that involved not just the tour riders but a huge cavalcade. It was likely that those who intended to visit the event would be parked well before the proposed closure was in place. Councillor Lemon, the chairman of the working group said that members should bring any real concerns to his attention so that the working group could take these into account.

The Chief Executive hoped that residents would try and work around any difficulties for this one day. The Tour de France was of international significance

and would bring a large number of people into the district, it was a once in a lifetime event which should be celebrated.

Councillor Parr asked a question on behalf of Councillor Morson. Why was the council pursuing in the local plan, the option of 2100 houses at the site at Elsenham when the Planning Committee had recently rejected an application for 800 houses in the same vicinity? Councillor Ketteridge replied that the consultation on the additional sites had recently closed and the responses were being evaluated. The next stage would be the publication of the plan and the pre-submission consultation. It was hoped that the plan would be submitted to the Inspector by the end of the year.

Councillor Rose thanked the emergency planning team for their assistance during the recent flooding in the Newport area. He said the notice on Facebook had been particularly successful in reaching a large number of people quickly. As a result he thought the council should be looking to use social media to disseminate information at this seemed an effective way of communicating with residents.

He understood that the council was promoting economic growth on the north side of the airport, so was disappointed that Airways House had been demolished as this would restrict access of small and medium sized businesses to the airport. Councillor Rolfe said the new local plan provided a 25% increase in employment sites, but acknowledged that the concept of affordable economic development was an interesting one which he would take on board.

C57

#### **CORPORATE PLAN 2014-19 AND CORPORATE RISK REGISTER 2014/15**

The Leader proposed acceptance of the Corporate Plan and the Corporate Risk register. The corporate plan was updated annually. The key themes were the same this year and Leader explained the minor changes that had been made.

RESOLVED to approve the Corporate Plan 2014-19 and the Corporate Risk Register.

C58

#### **BUDGET 2014/15**

Councillor Chambers made a short statement to introduce the budget items to be considered at this meeting.

He said this was a good news budget. Uttlesford was in the top 5 places to live in the country and due to prudent financial management the council had the lowest council tax increase in the county. It aimed to be a low cost council providing high quality services. He outlined the key areas for investment, but stressed the council would continue to be prudent with its finances.

He thanked Mr Joyce and his team for the excellent work they had undertaken in the preparation of the budget. Members of the Finance Team attended the meeting and Councillor Chambers introduced them to the Council.

C59

## **HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT 2014/15 AND FIVE YEAR BUDGET STRATEGY**

Councillor Chambers proposed acceptance of the Housing Revenue Account for 2014/15. This covered the council's housing services and reflected the 3<sup>rd</sup> year under self-financing. The average rent increase proposed was 5.05% in line with the Government formula rent. A total of £6.5m investment was proposed for repairs and improvement to existing stock and for future housing provision. Councillor Chambers said that from 2018, the council would start repaying the HRA loan but it was expected that substantial investment would still continue.

In relation to capital repairs maintenance, Councillor Evans asked for details of schedule of works and the priority areas for investment. She was advised that a list of the projects for 2014/15 was contained in the HRA business plan, but officers could provide more detailed information about projects in her ward.

RESOLVED to approve the 2014/15 HRA revenue budget and 5 year financial strategy, and changes to rents and service charges as set out in the report.

C60

## **TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY, STRATEGY AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS**

Councillor Chambers proposed adoption of the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy, which gave details of the management of the council's investments, borrowing, cash flow, banking and market transactions.

It was confirmed that no external borrowing was planned for the next 5 years. The council would continue to take a prudent approach to investments and increase diversity in order to reduce risk. The counterparty list would be expanded to include other local authorities and building societies and including, locally, the Saffron Building Society.

RESOLVED that the following be approved:

- 1 The Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Appendix A
- 2 Prudential Indicators as set out in Appendix A1
- 3 The Minimum Revenue Provision statement as set out in appendix 2
- 4 The Council's counterparty list as set out in Appendix A3.

C61

## **CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2014/15 TO 2018/19**

Councillor Chambers proposed adoption of the Capital Programme as set out in the report. The programme committed a total of £9.6 million. General fund projects included a contribution to the Museum storage facility, Saffron Walden castle renovation, CCTV in Thaxted and an increase in capital grants for community projects. The HRA schemes made a substantial investment in council

housing. He said the programme benefited service users and council tenants over the whole district.

RESOLVED to approve the Capital Programme and associated financing as set out in the attached report.

## C62 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

Councillor Chambers proposed adoption of the Medium Term Financial Strategy as presented. He said the council was in a stable financial position with a budget surplus over the next 3 years. The council had received a good NHB settlement but the future of this funding was uncertain.

The key objective over the next 3 years was to reduce the revenue budget funding from NHB. The council would still make meaningful investments in services but without affecting the bottom line. It would maintain financial discipline, look at new ways of providing services at low cost and grow income from other sources.

RESOLVED that the Medium Term Financial Strategy be approved.

## C63 **ROBUSTNESS OF ESTIMATES AND ADEQUACY OF RESERVES**

Councillor Chambers proposed acceptance of the report setting out the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of reserves as part of the budget setting process.

He highlighted that there were no significant new risks. Existing risks in the highest category included the volatility of cost and income in the council's waste and recycling service and the difficulty in forecasting income under the localisation of business rates. These risks would continue to be monitored.

The council's working balance was £1.2m and it was recommended that it should be maintained at this level.

RESOLVED that the Council:

- 1 Takes account of the advice in the report when determining the 2014/15 General Fund budget and Council Tax.
- 2 Approve the risk assessment relating to the robustness of estimates as detailed in the report.
- 3 Set the minimum safe contingency level for 2014/15 at £1.2m.
- 4 Agree that no transfers to or from the Working Balance should be built into the 2014/15 budget.

**GENERAL FUND AND COUNCIL TAX 2014/15**

Councillor Chambers proposed approval of the General Fund Budget and Council Tax requirement for 2014/15.

He said the budget had been prepared in line with the council's strategic priorities and taking account of the priorities raised in the consultation responses. Key areas of investment included economic development, local infrastructure projects, the homelessness services, waste management and continuing with the ward member budget scheme. This was a budget that helped most people, a 2% cut in council tax across the district and a generous Council Tax Support Scheme.

Councillor Cant said she rarely spoke at the council meeting but felt compelled to speak today. She supported all other aspects of the budget proposals as sensible, prudent and reasonable, but could not support the decision to increase the contribution under the Local Council Tax Support scheme from 8.5% - 12.5%. This substantial increase was iniquitous. The 2% cut in council tax gave £96k to the general public but the change in contribution meant that £62k was taken from the 1321 most vulnerable tax paying residents.

She said it might be good politically to have the lowest council tax, but this would have a limited effect on the general public. Whereas, the new contribution rate under the LCTS would increase the Council tax for the poorest residents by a substantial amount. This was deeply unfair when the council was in a strong financial position. She suggested two alternatives, either to maintain the 8.5% contribution or to fund the £62k from this year's New Homes Bonus.

Councillor Ketteridge replied that the Uttlesford's scheme was the most generous in the county, adjacent authorities had agreed a contribution of 25-30%. This was Government legislation, but the council had decided to implement the changes in stages. However, in the longer term the council could not grow its revenue costs.

The Assistant Chief Executive – Finance said that the LCTS scheme had been decided by Full Council in December. This was a binding decision, which could not be changed until April 2015. He confirmed that in the current year the council had budgeted to subsidise the scheme by £212k.

Councillor Rose pointed out that even a small reduction in the precept would benefit many residents and struggling businesses in the district.

Councillor Mackman said that he was not concerned about the position of other local authorities. UDC was in a good financial position and should therefore be able to offer greater support.

Councillor Howell said he respected Councillor Cant's viewpoint. There was a difficult balance, how to categorise the most vulnerable and who needed the most support. He agreed that the increase in the contribution would have a dramatic effect on those residents, but was aware that it was also difficult for some lower income residents to manage when paying full council tax. The

changes were difficult but the UDC scheme was more compassionate than other authorities.

Councillor Chambers said it was better to have a phased approach than to maintain the contribution at its current level and risk a dramatic rise in future years.

In relation to other aspects of the budget Councillor Watson asked for 2 items to be kept under review, the introduction of charges for pest control, and the future of the Saffron Walden Museum.

Councillor Ketteridge said the 2% cut in Council Tax would help those residents who were on the cusp of receiving benefits by give additional money to spend. He concluded that this was a budget envied by other councils and thanked the Council's Management Team and all staff who had together contributed to this financial position.

Councillor Chambers asked for a recorded vote on this item

RESOLVED that the Council:

- 1 Approve the 2014/15 General Fund Budget and Council Tax requirement of £4,695,046, as summarised in paragraph 23 of the report and detailed in Appendices A to C
- 2 Approve the schedule of fees and charges at Appendix E
- 3 Approve the Council Tax resolution as set out in Appendix F

The votes were as follows.

**For the motion**

Councillors Asker, G Barker, S Barker, R Chambers, J Cheetham, J Davey, P Davies, R Eastham, K Eden, M Felton, E Hicks, S Howell, A Ketteridge, J Ketteridge, M Lemon, K Mackman, E Oliver, D Perry, V Ranger, J Redfern, H Rolfe, J Rose, D Sadler, J Salmon, L Smith, A Walters, D Watson, L Wells.

**Against the motion**

C Cant, I Evans, M Foley, E Parr

C65

**PAY POLICY**

The Leader moved acceptance of the annual pay policy required by the Localism Act 2011. There were minor changes this year to reflect the national pay award and the cleaning contract, which was now back in house.

RESOLVED to approve the Pay Policy as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

C66

## **BUSINESS RATE RELIEF**

The Council was asked to approve the implementation of the Retail Rate Relief scheme in accordance with the announcement in the Government's Autumn statement, as follows.

- Rate relief for all retail properties with a rateable value of £50k or less, relief of £10000 for the 2014/15 and 2015/16 financial years.
- A 50% discount for 18 months for businesses if they move into a retail premises that has been empty for a year or more (between 1 April 2014 – 31 March 2016)

Following a recent Government announcement, an additional report was circulated concerning new provisions in relation to flooding

- local authorities were able to grant council tax discounts to residents who had to be temporarily moved out of their properties because of flooding.

Members welcomed the additional proposals in relation to flooding and asked how residents and business would be informed of the availability of this discount.

The Assistant Chief Executive – Finance said contact would be made with residents who had been forced to leave their properties through information from the Emergency Planning Officer. There would also be a press release and as the council tax and business rate bills were due to be issued shortly, information would be included in the circulation. He encouraged councillors to inform him of any residents in their areas who had been affected by flooding.

### **RESOLVED**

- 1 to agree the new Rate Relief Policy as set out in Appendix A to this report.
- 2 Authorise the Assistant Chief Executive – Finance to implement and administer the policy
- 3 to agree the principle of providing council tax discounts to flooded properties, and to authorise the Assistant Chief Executive – Finance to determine the arrangements for claiming the discount and to administer the scheme.

C67

## **AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION**

It was reported that the Government had passed legislation requiring all local authorities to amend their standing orders to ensure that votes taken with regard to certain budgetary issues were formally recorded.



In accordance with Procedure Rule 20.2 any motion to amend standing order should stand adjourned without discussion to the next ordinary meeting of the Council.

RESOLVED that the item be considered at the meeting of the Council on 8 April 2014.

C68

**TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2014/15**

The Leader proposed acceptance of the proposed timetable of meetings for 2014/15, with an amendment to the date of the north forum in June.

RESOLVED to adopt the timetable of meetings for 2014/15

The meeting ended at 9.30pm.