

**EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 11 NOVEMBER 2014 at 7.30pm**

Present: Councillor K Artus – Chairman.
Councillors H Asker, G Barker, S Barker, C Cant, R Chambers, J Cheetham, J Davey, R Eastham, M Foley, E Godwin, S Harris, E Hicks, S Howell, D Jones, A Ketteridge, J Ketteridge, R Lemon, J Loughlin, K Mackman, J Menell, D Morson, E Oliver, E Parr, J Parry, D Perry, V Ranger, H Rolfe, J Rose, J Salmon, A Walters and D Watson.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), R Dobson (Principal Democratic Services Officer), R Harborough (Director of Public Services), M Perry (Assistant Chief Executive – Legal), P Snow (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager) and A Webb (Director of Finance and Corporate Services).

C50 PUBLIC SPEAKING

Councillor A Ketteridge made a statement, a copy of which is appended to these minutes.

C51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dean, Eden, Evans, Felton, Freeman and Redfern.

C52 POLITICAL BALANCE ON THE COUNCIL

Members considered the report of the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager on the political composition of the council. The council was obliged to review its political balance following the increase in the number of political groups from three to four, with the formation of Residents 4 Uttlesford. The report recommended that seats on the main committees be allocated to the four political groups as detailed in the report.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said a review of the Council's political balance was required where there had been a request for a review following a change of membership. He said the allocation of seats on committees had to be made in accordance with the proportion of the members of the political groups to that of the council as a whole. He explained the principles of proportionality.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the Licensing and Environmental Health Committee could not be taken into account for the purposes of the calculation because it was not established under The Local Government Act 1972. However the places on that committee could be

allocated on the same basis of proportionality, therefore the Licensing and Environmental Health Committee was included in the calculation of the number of seats, as it had been included previously.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager explained the situation in relation to the Standards Committee. He said that following changes to the standards regime under the Localism Act 2011, the standards functions were to be performed by the Full Council. However, it was agreed in 2012 that the Council would not be the appropriate forum for dealing with individual allegations of breaches of the code of conduct, and a Standards Committee was appointed to undertake this function. The Standards Committee was subject to the rules of political balance, but as the Council's constitution recognised that a politically balanced Standards Committee would be undesirable, subject to no member present voting against the proposal, each political group on the Council would have at least one member of the Standards Committee and could nominate up to three members. The aim was to achieve an even political balance on the Committee. Ideally there would be two members appointed from each group.

Setting aside the Standards Committee, the Conservative group would lose four members, the Liberal Democrat group would gain one member and Residents 4 Uttlesford would gain five members.

RESOLVED to allocate seats on the Council's committees as detailed below.

Committees	Conservative	Liberal Dem	Residents 4 Uttlesford	Independent
Planning (14)	Cheetham (c) Davey Eastham Eden (vc) Hicks Menell Perry Ranger Salmon Wells	Cant Loughlin	Mackman	Lemon
Licensing and Environmental Health (11)	Davey Freeman Hicks Perry (c) Ranger Salmon (vc) Walters Wells	Loughlin Morson	Asker	
Scrutiny (10)	G Barker Davies Harris	Evans (vc) Morson	Watson	Godwin (c)

Committees	Conservative	Liberal Dem	Residents 4 Uttlesford	Independent
	Howell Oliver Rich			
Performance and Audit (10)	Artus Eden Felton Howell (c) Jones Oliver (vc) Sadler	Dean Foley	Mackman	
Staff Appeals (8)	Artus Eden Hicks Jones Ranger Wells	Cant	Mackman	
Standards (6)	Eden Menell	Cant Loughlin	Parry Watson	Lemon (c) Godwin

C53

POLLING DISTRICTS AND PLACES SCHEME

Councillor Chambers presented a report on final proposals for a revised polling scheme, which set out recommendations from the Electoral Working Group.

Councillor Rolfe proposed an amendment that the designated polling place for Saffron Walden Audley South be the Friends' School in place of the recommendation that it be the Gymnasium at the County High School. Councillor Rolfe said there were two reasons for proposing such an amendment: because the Friends' School had been the polling station for that polling district for a number of years, and because the County High School was opposed to the use of its premises, as it considered it would need to close on polling day due to the potential disruption to the examination period. Councillor Rolfe said the Friends' School was happy for its premises to be used, and the Assembly Room could be used for the purpose of polling.

The amendment was seconded. The Chairman invited the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager to comment as to whether this proposal was acceptable.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said criteria at each of these two locations had been assessed very carefully. Officers had put forward two options to the Electoral Working Group, which had reached the conclusion that on balance the County High School was the preferred option. The reason that the County High School was preferred was first, because designation of the County High School was less risky than designation of the

Friends' School, and secondly, due to the fact that there had been difficulties on three out of the four previous occasions at the Friends' School.

Councillor Watson said he endorsed Councillor Rolfe's amendment. He was a member for Audley Ward. The location of the current polling place was more central and there was more parking. He appreciated that the Assembly Hall might not always be available but it would be for the 2015 elections.

Councillor Chambers said, if it was the wish of the Council, he would put forward that amendment, specifying the Assembly Hall as the polling place.

Councillor Loughlin asked whether the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager could explain what the past difficulties with the Friends' School site had been.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said the optimum number of electors for a single polling station was considered to be no more than 1,500 electors. Therefore in order to deal satisfactorily with the number of electors on the register at Audley South, a room of sufficient size was required to provide for two polling stations. The Assembly Hall was the only part of the Friends' School that would be satisfactory for polling. On two occasions a mobile unit had had to be installed as a polling station, and on one occasion, at quite late notice, the Music Room had been used. Provided the Assembly Hall was available, then the location at the Friends' School was suitable. However, the Council had no absolute statutory right to use the Friends' School.

Councillor Loughlin asked whether the Council could be more certain of the availability of the Assembly Hall.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager said assurance had been given by the Friends' School that the Assembly Hall would be available for polling use in 2015 but beyond that it was not known.

RESOLVED to adopt a revised scheme of polling arrangements as set out in the appendix to the report subject to the designation of the Assembly Hall at the Friends' School as the polling place for Saffron Walden Audley South.

The meeting ended at 7.50pm.

Public Statement

Councillor A Ketteridge

"I am speaking as member of the public. My actions as a private individual have opened the door to questions about the integrity of senior officers and members of the council. I understand officers have been told it would be a criminal offence to advise me. This matter relates to the pruning of a tree in my garden which was made the subject of a Tree Protection Order in 2012.

In 2013 I clipped some low-hanging branches, only to the extent of one garden rubbish bag, due to a genuine oversight as the tree was the subject of a Tree Protection Order. I was told a member of the public had reported me, following which an enforcement officer attended my property. Councillor Perry telephoned my father, then Leader of the Council, and told him that I was “cutting down” the tree, despite the fact that I was obviously available to speak to directly.

My action was due to an oversight which I recognise and for which I apologise. I subsequently received a local authority caution from Michael Perry in consequence of the County Council arboriculturalist’s findings. I understand that a record of a caution is held at the council should I ever repeat the action. As a result of public comments I have had to take legal advice regarding libellous statements.

I wish to state that at no time did anyone interfere with due process. There have been accusations of nepotism: there is none. Matt North requested there should be an independent inquiry which would have had serious consequences, not for me but for another party. I put in a planning application relating to the tree, following which there were local press headlines; Councillor Dean put a question to Council and Councillor Mackman made a public remark – never before has an application to prune a tree been in the headlines. I feel I have to speak at this forum to preserve the confidence of the public in the council, as it is a very good council, and I should add that the tree is still there.”