

COUNCIL MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 13 OCTOBER 2015 at 7.30pm

Present: Councillor S Harris – Chairman
Councillors A Anjum, K Artus, H Asker, G Barker, S Barker, R Chambers, P Davies, P Fairhurst, T Farthing, M Felton, R Freeman, R Gleeson, T Goddard, N Hargreaves, E Hicks, S Howell, D Jones, T Knight, M Lemon, B Light, J Loughlin, A Mills, S Morris, E Parr, J Parry, V Ranger, J Redfern, H Rolfe, H Ryles and L Wells.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), R Dobson (Principal Democratic and Electoral Services Officer), M Perry (Assistant Chief Executive – Legal), A Taylor (Assistant Director Planning and Building Control) and A Webb (Director of Finance and Corporate Services).

C36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Dean, M Foley, J Gordon, J Lodge, E Oliver and G Sell.

C37 PRESENTATION ON LOCAL PLAN

Members received a presentation on the Local Plan. The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said the presentation would make clear the process, which would enable meaningful engagement for members with their respective parish and town councils, and with ward constituents. The focus was on strategic issues at present, and sites were subject interim assessment at this stage.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control asked that members publicise the forthcoming consultation.

C38 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the meetings held on 28 July and 16 September 2015 were received and signed as a correct record.

C39 MATTERS ARISING

(i) Minute C21 Petition regarding Reeve Road, Stansted Mountfitchet

Councillor S Barker said she had attended a meeting with some of the interested parties, to consider a compromise agreement whereby some of the play equipment should be reinstated. Some of the parties had elected

not to take part in those discussions. Discussions were continuing with officers.

C40 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman invited Councillor Artus to speak.

Councillor Artus said he had emailed all members regarding development of sports facilities at Carver Barracks. During his year as Chairman, he and Councillor Knight had championed a sports field at the Barracks to provide more opportunities for community use. Planning permission was however necessary, and with the enthusiastic support of the Lead Member for Sport, members had been asked to donate £100 each from their New Homes Bonus Ward allocation. Goodwill had been unanimous, and the Leader had offered to cover the full cost of the initial stage. This was a success story across party lines, and he thanked all members. In his capacity as last year's Chairman, he had today handed over two cheques raised for his chosen charities, to the British Heart Foundation and to Help for Heroes. He thanked all those who had supported these causes.

C41 REPORTS FROM THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Councillor Rolfe said there were implications for the Council from the Chancellor's announcement regarding the retention by local councils of business rates income. He said the Council collected £41 million of business rates, and received a business rates support grant of £1.6 million. The Council would not be able to retain the full £41 million, but more details would be available in the Autumn statement on 25 November. In summary, this provision would enable the Council to work closely with businesses in the district, but would not necessarily mean the Council was better off.

The Council's income currently came from four sources: council tax, business rates, the new homes bonus and the use of its assets. The use of assets was an area which was being looked into more closely and a report would be brought to Council on that subject.

Councillor Rolfe said he had spoken to the housing minister regarding the implications of the Housing Bill, as this too had implications for Uttlesford regarding the duty to sell council housing stock, the right to buy and council rents reduction. He had received the clear impression that the government would proceed with the sale of housing association homes. The implication for the Council would be a reduction in its Housing Revenue Account, so funding for new council housing would be reduced. The provisions would affect this district disproportionately to other areas because of the high-value homes. However it was hoped that the discussions with the Housing Minister, Brandon Lewis MP, would mitigate the situation.

Councillor Rolfe congratulated officers on their handling of the recent encampment for six days of gypsies at Swan Meadow car park. This event highlighted the fact that there was no transition facility in Essex for gypsies.

Councillor Rolfe said he was saddened that the Chairman's quiz night had had to be cancelled due to insufficient take-up. He urged members to support a second event, a music evening, which was to take place at the weekend.

Finally, Councillor Rolfe urged members to attend the next members' briefing sessions.

Councillor Howell said he was pleased to submit a finance report, which had been circulated to all members before the meeting. Uttlesford had for the seventh consecutive year achieved an unqualified audit opinion for the 2014/15 accounts; an area identified for attention by the external auditors was the reliance placed by the Council on funding from the new homes bonus, but about which the auditors had been satisfied; the report referred also to the Autumn Statement to be announced on 25 November which was anticipated to be challenging for local authorities; and it referred to the announcement that authorities would keep 100% of business rate income by 2020.

Councillor Howell said he would work closely with officers to keep members informed of the implications from forthcoming announcements.

Councillor Redfern reported on the newly formed Refugees Working Group which despite very little information being available to date, had held a constructive meeting on 25 September. A database for offers of help had been set up, and a request for properties which might be available would be raised at the Landlords' Forum.

Councillor Redfern said the Housing Board would report to members on implications of the Housing Bill, once more detail was available. The second phase of the development at Mead Court was now under way, and it was hoped it would be completed next year. Finally, the housing conference was due to take place tomorrow. All members had been invited and it was important that as many as possible should attend.

C42 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE AND CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES

Councillor Knight said with regard to the housing conference it was not easy for members to attend events taking place in the day, as many members worked.

Councillor Redfern said she appreciated this point, although such events involved not only members of the council but also representatives from housing associations and other organisations. The housing conference would also be broadcast.

Councillor Loughlin referred to the changes in housing. She asked for assurance that the most vulnerable tenants would be protected.

Councillor Redfern said it was her aim to do so, and that if someone was already

in accommodation and did not wish to exercise a right to buy, they would be protected.

Councillor Loughlin said the number of new houses would be fewer, which would affect the most vulnerable people in the community. She would like to ensure that anyone in this district would have a home if they needed it.

Councillor Redfern said all members on the Housing Board felt passionately the need to do all they could to look after the most vulnerable people in the community. She assured Councillor Loughlin she would continue to do so and said there were some positives which could be explored.

Councillor Rolfe said there were concerns regarding possible unforeseen consequences of the policy, and he would be asking the Assistant Director Housing and Environmental Services to bring a report to members. He trusted the Minister would be receptive to the concerns which he would raise.

Councillor Asker asked a question regarding the absence of any information on the Council's website about travellers, and what to do or who to contact if travellers arrived on a site near residents.

Councillor Rolfe said communication with the public was updated on the website, and via social media.

C43

MATTERS RECEIVED FROM COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS – HONORARY ALDERMEN

Members considered a report recommending the adoption of an additional article in the constitution for the appointment of honorary aldermen.

Councillor Ranger proposed the motion, which had been proposed and seconded at the meeting on 28 July and deferred to the next meeting for adoption.

Councillor Jones said the current proposal only allowed nominations once every four years. It would be preferable to permit them to be made at any appropriate time for reasons such as onset of a terminal illness.

Councillor Redfern proposed an amendment to proposed article 18.1.2, that any person nominated for such title should normally have served for 20 years as a member of the Council, to amend this to "at least 30 years" with provision for exceptions in extraordinary circumstances.

Councillor S Barker supported this amendment.

Councillor Knight said 30 years was too long a time, and there were some people who had given exceptional service in less time than 20 years. She seconded the amendment proposed by Councillor Jones. This was an honour and would not be awarded lightly, and she would support an annual submission of nominations.

Councillor Chambers seconded Councillor Redfern's amendment.

Councillor Loughlin questioned who determined whether service was “exceptional”. To reduce the length of service from 20 years detracted from the awards already given.

Councillor Light spoke in support of Councillor Knight’s suggestion.

Councillor Rolfe supported Councillor Redfern’s amendment, as he said to be awarded the title of Honorary Alderman was very special. To serve 20 years however was quite a common occurrence.

Councillor Goddard said as the term of office was four years, this did not fit with the term of 30 years which had been proposed.

The Assistant Chief Executive Legal said the substantive motion had been proposed and seconded at the last meeting. There was an amendment to the wording of proposed article 18.1.2 to substitute “30” for “20” years, which had been proposed by Councillor Redfern and seconded by Councillor Chambers, on which a vote would be taken.

The amendment was defeated by 21 against, 8 in favour.

A second amendment had been proposed by Councillor Jones and seconded by Councillor Knight. This would be to remove from proposed article 18.1.3 the words “following an ordinary election of councillors”.

Councillor Rolfe said this wording would change the motion substantially.

Councillor S Barker proposed adding the words “or in exceptional circumstances before any annual meeting of the Council.”

Councillor Howell seconded this amendment, which was voted on and approved unanimously. This amendment now having become the substantive motion, the motion was voted upon and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to adopt as an additional article to the Constitution the following:

18.1.1 The Council may confer the title of Honorary Alderman or Honorary Alderwoman upon persons who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent services to the Council as past members of that Council, but who are not then members of the Council.

18.1.2 Any person nominated for such title shall normally have served for 20 years as a member of the Council.

18.1.3 Nominations for the title may be made in writing by any existing Member of the Council and shall be made before the annual meeting of the Council following an ordinary election of councillors or in exceptional circumstances before any annual meeting of the Council.

18.1.4 Any nominations received shall be referred to the Chairman of the Council who shall consult with the group leaders and the Chief Executive before deciding whether to put the nomination to Full Council.

18.1.5 In the event that the nominations do go forward to Full Council a majority of 2/3rds of the members voting thereon is required before the title of Honorary Alderman or Honorary Alderwoman can be conferred.

18.1.6 A certificate shall be presented to each Honorary Alderman or Honorary Alderwoman acknowledging their appointment with an appropriate citation.

18.1.7 Honorary Aldermen or Honorary Alderwomen may attend and take part in such civic ceremonies as the council may from time to time decide.

18.1.8 Honorary Aldermen or Honorary Alderwomen shall not be entitled to be addressed as Alderman or Alderwoman and may not take part in any civic ceremonies in that capacity at any time while they are serving as a member of the Council

C44 LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The Chief Executive said the Local Strategic Partnership was a statutory function of the Council, and an update on its activity would from now on be a new standing item for the Council agenda. This first report would be on the Community Safety Partnership.

The Chief Executive explained the remit of the Community Safety Partnership, the lead member for which was Councillor Gordon. The chairmanship of the CSP rotated annually, last year having been fulfilled by the Fire Service, and next year to be taken by the Police. The CSP met quarterly. It addressed causes as well as symptoms of criminal behaviour, so had a preventive role. Its aim was to reduce crime and disorder, and to address the consequent effects on health.

The CSP achieved a great deal on a small resource. Its activities included Motorwise, Crucial Crew, Reality Roadshow, Community Speedwatch, CCTV, the Quality Taxi Partnership, the Prevent agenda, Safer Living initiatives, the Community hub and Keepsafe. The CSP was about to undertake a homicide review, and had appointed consultants to do this. There were some major issues ahead, including organised crime, gangs and drugs coming into this district from London. There were issues with cuts to Police funding, and the Police would continue to look to the CSP to help. In conclusion, the Chief Executive said members were welcome to attend the meetings of this group.

C45 LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION

Councillor S Barker presented a report seeking the agreement of Council to undertake the first of three public consultations on the emerging Local Plan. She thanked officers for the enormous amount of work they had done, particularly the

Assistant Director Planning and Building Control, the Planning Policy Team Leader and the Senior Planning Policy Officer. She asked that all members fully read the plan and consultation, and took the information about consultation dates back to their communities. She proposed the motion that the Local Plan Consultation Document and Sustainability Appraisal be agreed for public consultation for a six week period commencing Thursday 22 October and closing on Friday 4 December 2015.

Councillor Light said there were a number of issues she wished to raise. First the language in the consultation document was “planners’ language”, and not easily accessible to non-planners. Many of the questions were leading, and the document was too long and complex. Residents for Uttlesford would like to review the document.

Councillor S Barker said the language reflected the need to be clear and people who were interested would attend the consultation events.

Councillor Knight said she agreed with Councillor Light and disagreed with Councillor S Barker. Many of her constituents were interested in planning but did not understand “Council speak”. If the Council wanted a response, plain English would encourage a better response.

Councillor Ranger said it was important to bear in mind that ultimately the Council’s consultation processes would be looked at by the Inspector, and it would be counterproductive to go forward with too simple a consultation process.

Councillor Morris asked what percentage response was usually obtained.

The Assistant Director Planning and Building Control said the level was difficult to predict, but the last few consultations had resulted in very good response levels. The Planning Advisory Services had looked at the consultation questions, and had made no changes as they felt the consultation followed best practice.

Councillor Rolfe said suggestions on changes to wording which might mitigate any confusion could be submitted to officers. However the questionnaire had been considered by the three leaders and by the Planning Policy Working Group, so had been subjected already to scrutiny.

Councillor Rolfe seconded the proposal, which was carried by 22 votes to 8.

RESOLVED that the Local Plan Consultation Document and Sustainability Appraisal be agreed for public consultation for a six week period commencing Thursday 22 October and closing on Friday 4 December 2015.

Councillor Rolfe said the intention was to make this a cross-party process, and in view of the involvement of the groups it was extraordinary to oppose the consultation.

GREATER ESSEX DEVOLUTION

Councillor Rolfe presented a report on the discussions about devolution which had been taking place between the County Council and the various Unitaries, Districts, Boroughs and City Councils that comprised Greater Essex.

A decision was not yet required, and members would be kept informed. The proposals aimed to increase productivity and to take better local control of activities which had until now been carried out by central government. Councillor Rolfe invited questions.

Councillor Parry asked about the mandate of the Leader to pursue such discussions. She expressed concern that the Council should be kept involved and asked for an explanation from the Assistant Chief Executive Legal about the mandate of the Leader to pursue such discussions.

The Assistant Chief Executive Legal said the Leader and the Chief Executive were entitled to enter discussions, and any decision on devolution was reserved to Full Council.

Councillor Redfern reminded members that a workshop on devolution had taken place which was open to all members.

Councillor R Freeman said it was important not to present members with a *fait accompli*.

Councillor Chambers said no decisions had been made and this report was for noting only at this stage.

Councillor Hargreaves said it was disappointing that the report included reference to many positive potential gains but gave what seemed to be unrealistic growth projection of 8%. It was important to look at facts rather than to make assumptions and he requested future reports include factual examples.

Councillor S Barker said she would circulate slides from a presentation she had recently attended given by East of England Local Government Association, which stated more detailed information.

Councillor Rolfe said it was leaders to convince their own councils, and further details would be made available in due course.

Members noted the report on the aims and objectives of devolution and noted the expression of interest registered by all 15 of the Greater Essex Councils in working with the Government to develop a devolution deal, any decision on which would be for Full Council to consider.

APPOINTMENT TO INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

Members considered a report on the appointment of a new member of the Independent Remuneration Panel, Mr David Brunwin and a request for approval

of a payment of £250 to a “shadow” member of the Panel, who would take on the full role in April 2016.

Councillor Jones said he did not see the necessity for appointing a candidate before the time when that vacancy arose.

Councillor Rolfe said the role of the Panel was important. Recruitment of both people enabled the shadow member to get up to speed before taking up the full post.

Councillor Rolfe proposed the motion, which was seconded by Councillor Redfern.

The motion was passed by 28 votes to 2.

RESOLVED to note the appointment to the Independent Remuneration Panel and to approve the payment of £250 to the shadow member.

C48

ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS

Councillor Harris said there would be an extraordinary meeting of the Council on 24 November in order to receive a recommendation for the appointment of the Chief Executive.

Councillor Light said she wished to clarify the intention of the voting on the item relating to the Local Plan. She said her Group was in favour of consultation, and had not voted against consultation itself, but viewed the document as in need of improvement.

The Chairman said the vote was on the resolution, and if this was not the intention of those voting, it was their error.

The meeting ended at 9.15pm.