

**EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES  
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 24 NOVEMBER 2015 at 7.30pm**

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

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

Also present: C Rockall – retained as a consultant in the recruitment process

**C49 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Barker, Goddard and  
Parr.

**C50 APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND INTERIM ARRANGMENTS**

The Chairman invited the Leader to explain the process leading to the  
recommendation to appoint a new Chief Executive.

Councillor Rolfe described the process followed by the cross-party Chief  
Executive Appointments Task Group in recruiting to this position. Using the  
consultancy services of SOLACE, an external advertising exercise had resulted  
in 25 applications being received for the position.

He wished to thank Colin Rockall for acting as mentor and advisor to the task  
group. Mr Rockall had extensive experience of recruiting to senior positions and  
had been instrumental in liaising with SOLACE throughout.

The 25 applications had been narrowed to twelve then to six. Two candidates  
had withdrawn but the remaining four candidates had been subjected to rigorous  
testing.

The task group agreed unanimously to recommend that Dawn French should be  
appointed to the position of Chief Executive. Dawn French was presently  
Commissioning Director (Corporate Support) with Basildon District Council  
having worked previously at Chelmsford and Colchester. She had extensive  
leadership experience in local government and a successful track record in  
delivering large, complex projects resulting in service improvements and some  
significant savings.

She had been involved in preparing a new corporate plan focussed on outcomes  
so that resources followed identified priorities. She had led the difficult process

to achieve compliance with the enforcement actions at Dales Farm. She had also been involved in projects in China and India. The task group had been impressed by the range and depth of her experience and believed she was the right candidate to take the Council forward.

The Leader recommended the following interim arrangements following John Mitchell's departure:

- Roger Harborough would become the Director of Public Services and interim Head of Paid Service
- Adrian Webb would continue as the Director of Finance and Corporate Services and Section 151 officer
- Michael Perry would become the interim Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer

The Leader proposed the motion to appoint Dawn French as Chief Executive, Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer from a date to be agreed at a starting salary of £105,000 p.a. He further proposed the adoption of the interim arrangements outlined above. The motion was seconded by Councillor Chambers.

Councillor Lodge said that he had little to add to the Leader's comments and recommendation. The process had been comprehensive and had worked well. He had been impressed by SOLACE's involvement and pleased to report there had been no division on political grounds. He supported the motion.

Councillor Dean endorsed everything that had been said. The process followed had been thorough and robust. Several of the applicants could have been appointed but the right candidate had been chosen.

Councillor Asker asked whether a trial period of employment would apply in this case. The Chief Executive confirmed the normal terms and conditions would apply involving a six month probationary period. The appointment was subject to the Council's pay policy. Membership of the Essex Local Government Pension Scheme applied and would be transferred in the normal way.

The chairman called for a single vote on all three aspects of the motion. Upon being put to the vote the motion was carried by 35 votes with none against.

The Leader said the vote was a great endorsement of Dawn French who was keen to meet with members and officers.

He then referred to the impending departure of John Mitchell on 11 December 2015. John had been in local government for 37 years and at Uttlesford for the past 14 years. He was first appointed as Head of Planning and Building Services before becoming Chief Executive in 2008.

He had taken office at a time of great challenge and had faced significant changes and pressures, including some enforced redundancies. He had steadied the ship and maintained a good spirit and working atmosphere throughout his time as Chief Executive. He had inherited a busy agenda

including the difficult task of steering the local plan process and dealing with a number of potential partnership arrangements. There had been some significant achievements during his time in office. Above all, Mr Mitchell had left the legacy of a robust financial base.

He wished to give John Mitchell his personal thanks for the wise and impartial counsel he had provided always accompanied by a firm hand on the tiller. He would be much missed and he wished John a happy, lengthy and enjoyable retirement.

In replying to these remarks, John Mitchell said it was logical that this should be his last Council meeting as a new Chief Executive had now been appointed. He had not missed a single Council meeting during his time in office and would never miss going to another one. He was pleased to be able to leave at a time of his own choosing.

He was leaving the Council in better shape than when he had taken over. At that time Uttlesford faced an uncertain future, being named in Parliament as one of the three most at risk councils in the country. The Council had recovered by maintaining sound and disciplined financial management and could face the challenges to come from a strong and confident position.

He wished to thank his colleagues Michael Perry, Roger Harborough and Adrian Webb for their strong support as well as Sue Kempster for carrying out the role of personal assistant so supremely well during the whole of his term of office. Adrian Webb especially had been a tower of strength and had worked tirelessly in the Council's interest. He thanked Colin Rockall for the expertise and support provided during his early years as Chief Executive. He was pleased that Colin had been involved in the recruitment process. Finally, he thanked Peter Snow and the democratic services team for the way they had supported his role as Returning Officer during several demanding elections, especially the combined polls in 2015.

In conclusion John Mitchell wished all members and officers well and said he had enjoyed his time at Uttlesford more than anywhere else he had worked. Uttlesford was a brilliant Council and he urged those he was leaving behind to take care not to break it.

The Chairman then presented John Mitchell with an arrangement of flowers she had made herself. She said the main presentation would be made on a later occasion.

RESOLVED to appoint Dawn French as Chief Executive, Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer on a date to be agreed, at a starting salary of £105,000, and to agree the interim arrangements to manage the Council set out in the bullet points above.

The meeting ended at 8.00pm.