

COUNCIL MEETING held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 17 DECEMBER 2015 at 7.30pm

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

Officers in attendance: 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)

C51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Asker, Fairhurst, Goddard, Knight, Lemon, Parr and Ryles.

Councillors Anjum, R Freeman and Morris each declared a pecuniary interest as members of Saffron Walden Town Council in respect of the motion calling on the Council to reimburse the Town Council's costs in defending the Kier planning appeal.

Councillor S Barker declared an interest as a member of Essex County Council.

C52 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Minutes of the meetings held on 13 October and 24 November 2015 were received and signed as a correct record, subject to the addition of Councillor Davey's name to the list of those present on 13 October, and the deletion of the final two paragraphs of Minute C48 as the question concerned, and the response to it, occurred after the close of the meeting.

C53 MATTERS ARISING

(i) Minute C45 – Local Plan Consultation

Councillor Lodge asked to clarify misunderstandings about the actions of councillors representing the Residents for Uttlesford group in respect of the Local Plan consultation. He wished to make clear that the issues raised at the meeting had concerned the content of the document and not the principle of consultation itself.

Councillor S Barker commented that Councillor Lodge had not been present at the meeting and so had not heard the comments made.

Councillor Light supported the statement made by Councillor Lodge. Her group was very much in favour of consultation but had wished to make the document more comprehensible. Councillor Artus supported this interpretation.

Councillor Rolfe then confirmed that the consultation presented for adoption had been pre-approved by all three group leaders. Points of clarification were acceptable but the Minutes reflected the discussion taking place.

The Chairman reiterated that it had now been agreed to remove the final two paragraphs of Minute 45 from the record of the meeting.

C54 REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR 2016/17

The Chairman invited Janet Pearson, Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel, to present the Panel's report and recommendations for a member allowance scheme to operate in 2016/17.

She welcomed Jackie Anslow, who had acted as last year's Chairman, to her final meeting as her three year term of office was coming to an end. She thanked Mrs Anslow for the valuable contribution she had made during her period in office.

Janet Pearson then presented the Panel's report for 2016/17. She said the Panel had decided to concentrate upon four main strands in reviewing member allowances. These were: the reduction in size of the Council and the associated impact on member workload; the reduction in Cabinet size and the continuing role of executive members; the role of portfolio lead member introduced after the election; and finally the role of the main and other opposition group leaders.

Having examined the basic allowance, the Panel had concluded that some upward movement was justified after a long period when no increase had been applied, but this should stay within the limit of 1% set by the public sector pay cap. A small increase was felt justifiable in recognition of the perception that members' casework had increased since the new larger wards were introduced at the election.

The Panel had also looked at whether the ASHE index used to measure the basic allowance was still a viable unit of measurement and had concluded it was still the most relevant index available.

They had also examined the role of executive members bearing in mind the reduction in Cabinet size and had concluded the level of responsibility undertaken by individual executive members, which was acknowledged to be considerable, had not altered since the election. The lack of individual delegated powers had led to the final year of the three year plan to rebalance special responsibility allowances to be abandoned last year and nothing had since happened to alter that view.

The Leader had asked the Panel to assess the role of portfolio lead member introduced in May 2015. The panel had concluded that this new role was not yet sufficiently well developed or defined to justify a new special responsibility allowance.

Finally, the Panel had signalled an intention last year to assess the role of opposition group leaders as evidence appeared to indicate allowances paid at Uttlesford were lagging behind those generally in place elsewhere.

In formulating their proposals, the Panel had consulted with group leaders and taken account of responses to the survey of councillors, as well as conducting the usual benchmarking exercise.

In summary, Mrs Pearson informed the meeting that the cost of implementing the proposed 1% increase in basic allowance and the uplift in SRAs to opposition group leaders would be in the region of £6,000 as against a reduction of £25,000 in the current year arising from the reduction in council size. She expressed hope the Council would approve the recommendations and offered to answer any questions members might have.

The Leader responded by commending Mrs Pearson and her team for their work in preparing the report. The Panel consisted of experts commissioned to review allowances on an independent basis and it would not be appropriate for the Council to tinker with the proposals put forward. He proposed approval of the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Chambers.

Councillor Light thanked Panel members for their work and recognised the time commitment involved. At a time of austerity she expressed the view that increases should not be accepted until circumstances changed.

Janet Pearson commented that it was the right of every member to decline any increase or the allowance altogether.

In contrast to the comment in the report about the lack of individual decision making by executive members, Councillor S Barker pointed out that she had made decisions on behalf of the Council.

Councillor Sell said he was pleased the Panel had recognised the importance of the work of opposition group leaders to the health of democracy and commended the report as fair and balanced.

Councillor Chambers called for a recorded vote on the motion.

For the motion: Councillors Artus, G Barker, S Barker, Chambers, Davey, Dean, Farthing, Felton, Foley, Gleeson, Gordon, Harris, Hicks, Howell, Jones, Loughlin, Mills, Oliver, Ranger, Redfern, Rolfe, Sell and Wells

Against the motion: Councillors Anjum, R Freeman, Hargreaves, Light, Lodge, Morris and Parry

The motion was declared carried by 23 votes to seven.

RESOLVED THE Council adopts for 2016/17 the allowances set out in the following table:

Type of allowance	Existing scheme £	Recommended scheme £
Basic allowance	5,000	5,050 (increase of 1%)
Special Responsibility Allowances		As Special Responsibility Allowances are expressed as a multiplier of the Basic Allowance, the recommendation is that all would be adjusted to reflect the proposed 1% increase in the Basic Allowance. The phrase “no change” used in this table below signifies there is no change to the multiplier, but that the 1% increase is to be applied.
Chairman	4,000 (80% of basic allowance) + civic expenses	4,040 (no change other than as a consequence of the proposed increased Basic Allowance) + civic expenses
Vice-Chairman	2,000 (40%)	2,020 (no change other than as a consequence of the proposed increased Basic Allowance)
Leader	12,250 (245%)	12,372.50 (no change)
Deputy Leader	6,500 (130%)	6,565 (no change)
Portfolio Holders	6,000 (120%)	6,060 (no change)
Overview/Scrutiny Committee Chairmen	3,500 (70%)	3,535 (no change)
Planning Committee Chairman	3,750 (75%)	3,787.50 (no change)
Planning Committee members	462 (6 days calculated at the daily rate with reference to the basic allowance)	466.62 (based on the rate originally calculated with reference to ASHE subject to an increase of 1%)
Licensing & Environmental Health Committee Chairman	3,750 (75%)	3,787.50 (no change)
Standards Committee	2,000 (40%)	2,020 (no change)

Chairman		
Area Forum Chairman	1,000 (20%)	0 (payments to be phased out following abolition of the Area Forums in May 2015 – in practice payments ceased at that time)
Main opposition group leader	1,250 (25%)	3,535 (70% of basic allowance)
Other opposition group leader(s)	750 (15%)	2,020 (40%)
Independent members of Standards Committee	500	505 (no change)
Panel members of Independent Remuneration Panel	500	505 (no change)
Approved duties	As set out in Schedule 3 Part 6 of the Constitution	To include in paragraph 2 of the list of Approved Duties reference to Portfolio Lead Members
All other elements of the scheme to remain unchanged. Only one Special Responsibility Allowance may be claimed.		

C55 LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP – CHILDREN AND FAMILIES GROUP

The Leader welcomed the Rev'd. David Tomlinson and Alan Hawkes to speak to the meeting about the work of the children and families group of the Local Strategic Partnership. This was one of four groups making up the LSP in Uttlesford, the others being those dealing with community safety (reporting to the previous meeting), health and wellbeing, and economic development, the environment and transport. The various LSP groups represented a lot of external work and it was right to channel back information to members on the progress being made.

David Tomlinson said the work of the children and families group was characterised by collaboration and was influenced by the impact of austerity. Effective collaboration was at the heart of what had been achieved enabling significant gains to be made.

The group had been supported and facilitated by the Council and this was due in large part to the backing provided by Councillor Rolfe. He also paid tribute to the work carried out by Gaynor Bradley, Kerry Vinton and Fiona Gardiner.

Child poverty was an emotive issue and he commented in some detail about the distribution of pockets of deprivation in the district, identifying those wards where the biggest need was known to be concentrated. In facing this challenge, his group had focussed on outcomes in a number of specific areas including school readiness, publicising an awareness project, and sponsoring a day conference for schools in Uttlesford.

These projects had especially showcased the work of the citizens' advice bureaux which had been instrumental in referring a number of cases for direct assistance. The group had closely examined safeguarding issues and this had helped to highlight problems of trafficking, slavery and child exploitation.

They had supported a number of other collaborative enterprises including the support for the Uttlesford Save credit union and the monitoring of welfare reforms. A multi-agency centre would be starting soon.

In conclusion, Rev'd. Tomlinson urged the Council to continue its support for the work of his group.

Alan Hawkes then spoke about the work of the Foodbank initiated in July 2014. This was located at Shire Hill, Saffron Walden, with a number of distribution points such as at the Salvation Army Hall, The Hub in Great Dunmow and other parishes in Uttlesford including Takeley.

The Foodbank provided emergency assistance to those in acute need and a total of 109 individuals had been helped. Of that number more than half were living alone. Around 60% of those helped applied to the Food Bank only once and the majority of others on only two occasions. Many of those applying for assistance required help from other agencies.

Food parcels provided typically weighed 20 kilos for a single person and 30 kilos for two people. They were designed to last for three days but were carefully constructed so as to be lightweight enough to be carried by those in receipt of the parcels, most of whom did not have access to a vehicle.

Mr Hawkes described some of the problems associated with running the Foodbank such as dealing with outdated products and potential contamination issues. This caused some of the food donated to be disposed of.

At the close of the presentation, members asked a number of questions as summarised below:

- How much of the district is covered by the foodbank? *Answer: The Foodbank is Uttlesford wide but there is no specific large settlement in the south of the district and not enough people to justify the transport system that would be needed. A number of people in Great Dunmow have been assisted.*
- How much rural poverty is hidden? *Answer: No figures are currently available; please share all relevant information with us.*
- Could the travelling play bus be used for this project? *Answer: this suggestion will be followed up.*

The Chairman thanked David Tomlinson and Alan Hawkes for their time.

C56 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman informed members that, among other events, she had attended the staff long service awards and the annual carol service. These events had

resulted in £220 and £340, respectively, being raised for her nominated charities and she was grateful to all those concerned.

C57 REPORTS FROM THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Councillor Rolfe commented on three main topics of current concern. The budget process was continuing with a member workshop due on 11 January. The Local Plan consultation had finished and had been followed by the call for sites. He had circulated papers relating to the last devolution meeting and gave an assurance that no decisions would be made until the Council had been asked to form a view.

There was potential for more growth to be accommodated in Essex and a Greater Essex Independent Commission had now been established under the chairmanship of Andrew Sentance.

It had been confirmed that Dawn French would join the Council on 29 February. John Mitchell remained Chief Executive until 6 January.

He had asked Councillor Ranger to progress the member group set up to consider community engagement arrangements.

A cross-party group had been established to consider the training needs of new members.

Councillor Gleeson asked the Leader why the results of the Local Plan consultation had been published on 7 December without warning. He replied that officers had indicated in advance the results would be published on that date and the information was publicly available. He would make sure members were fully aware of future announcements

Councillor Howell reported on the outcome of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 25 November. In the circumstances, he intended to give a more detailed report to members than was usual at this stage of the budget process.

The impact on the Council's budget remained unclear although some individual matters had been clarified. It now appeared the Government's funding for local government at a macro level would reduce by 46% in cash terms. On the other hand the Government claimed that local government spending would increase by £2m in cash terms as a result of the changes in business rates and taking account of council tax increases.

The impact of the changes in funding would most severely affect district councils as money would be transferred to county councils to fund changes in social care provision.

A number of other changes would occur. New Homes Bonus would not now be frozen in 2016/17 and would remain at the current level. Thereafter the Government was consulting on NHB and was seeking to reduce the current six year scheme to four, three or two years. This seemed likely to reduce the level of NHB support by two thirds.

The government proposed to allow councils to retain 100% of their business rates in return for local government taking on some additional responsibilities. As this change seemed likely to coincide with the reduction in NHB the Council would be no better off.

The phased withdrawal of Revenue Support Grant would now be accelerated and would now end in 2017/18. The reduction in the 2016/17 budget was expected to be in the region of £550,000.

The budget would be submitted to the Cabinet on 12 January next year and this would be preceded by a budget briefing to which all members were invited. He had concluded that the budget position was manageable next year but would become difficult after that.

C58 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE AND CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES

Councillor Dean said that a devolution proposal by authorities in Hampshire had been turned down even though it involved an increase in housing numbers. If Essex therefore stuck to the SHMA housing figures he asked Councillor Rolfe whether this would make the proposals look shaky.

He had been made aware of an intention by the southern unitary councils to go their own way. In addition there were indications that a group of authorities around Colchester might prefer to enter an arrangement with Suffolk and Norfolk. If cross border arrangements were permitted might Uttlesford be able to look towards Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire?

The Leader said there was no intention to increase housing numbers beyond figures indicated in the constituent local plans. However, there was a clear difference between overall numbers and the rate of building. For example, the rate of house building had last year fallen behind the target both locally and nationally. The Government intended to increase construction levels but this would not affect the total numbers.

As for the second point, it was known that Braintree, Colchester and Tendring were in joint discussions about progressing a single settlement village garden development. The outcome of these discussions was as yet unknown.

In relation to cross-boundary arrangements, he needed to understand more about this might work before he could comment. Devolution proposals must suit all Essex authorities to meet Government aims and the intention was to keep all 15 councils in line. However, individual Essex authorities could choose to walk away if they wished.

C59 MATTERS RECEIVED FROM THE EXECUTIVE – LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

Councillor Howell presented a recommendation from the Cabinet meeting on 10 December to approve the LCTS scheme as set out in full in the report. The

Council was required to consult annually and the final decision to adopt the scheme was taken by the Council.

The Council had decided to use its resources to support the scheme and had agreed to phase it in over an extended period. As a result the liability cap contribution level had been set at 12.5% which was the lowest percentage cap within Essex. This enabled a number of categories of claimants such as low income pensioners to be protected.

The proposal was to continue to freeze the contribution rate for the second successive year. It provided for a continued subsidy for town and parish councils as set out in the report. The third element of the scheme was to set Council Tax discounts at the same rate as in 2015/16.

The outcome of the consultation had been referred to the Scrutiny Committee and demonstrated strong support for the protection measures proposed.

He was proud of the compassionate approach adopted although it must be borne in mind that this was funded by the rest of the community. The burden of supporting the scheme in this way was likely to increase and might need to be reviewed in future years. He proposed adoption of the scheme as recommended by the Cabinet.

RESOLVED to approve the Local Council Tax Support scheme as set out in the report

C60 **MOTION ON THE KIER APPEAL DECISION COSTS**

The Council received the following motion submitted by Councillor Lodge:

“The Council has a duty to support the valid decisions of its Quasi-Judicial Planning Committee. The Planning Committee refused an application by Kier Homes for 300 dwellings off Thaxted Road in Saffron Walden and the applicant appealed to the Planning Inspector. A decision was taken then by UDC not to defend the Planning Committee’s decision at the subsequent hearing of the Planning Inspectorate on the basis that there were no grounds for refusal. At the hearing, Saffron Walden Town Council successfully defended the decision of the Planning Committee. The cost to SWTC was £47,000 and the motion is that UDC reimburses SWTC from the reserves set aside to cover such appeals.”

Councillor R Freeman asked for clarification about whether he was allowed to speak to the motion having declared a pecuniary interest as a member of Saffron Walden Town Council. The Assistant Chief Executive – Legal advised Councillor Freeman that he could speak and then should withdraw from the meeting.

Councillors Anjum and Morris then left the meeting as they had declared a pecuniary interest and had not requested to speak.

Councillor Lodge asked the Council to reimburse Saffron Walden Town Council the expenses incurred in defending the appeal by Kier Homes against the refusal of planning permission to build 300 homes off Thaxted Road in Saffron Walden.

The application had been considered and refused by the Planning Committee. The developer had then appealed and the planning inspector had held a full hearing lasting over two weeks.

He contended it was very unusual for the consideration of whether or not the appeal should be defended not to have been referred back to the Planning Committee. Instead, it was referred to Full Council for decision on the basis of two legal opinions stating that the appeal was not defensible under planning law.

Officers and Cabinet members had refused to give evidence to the Council and councillors were not allowed to see the legal opinions. This was wrong and the Planning Committee was entitled to expect full backing for the decision it had taken.

The appeal hearing then took place. Saffron Walden Town Council had decided to defend the appeal and the inspector's decision was to uphold the refusal of planning permission. The planning reasons given for refusal were upheld by the inspector and the decision of the Planning Committee shown to be correct.

A great deal of effort had gone into defending the appeal. The Town Council had spent £43,000 and should fairly be reimbursed for defending the interests of this Council and the district.

Councillor R Freeman said he had a great deal of experience of determining regulatory matters as a current member of the Planning Committee and a former member of both the Development Control and Licensing committees. He had deep concerns over the Council's failure to support its own planning committee and this led to suspicions about the process followed.

The Council had a duty to support the decisions of its own quasi-judicial body and should not countermand decisions it did not like. This was a bad principle and dangerous. The decision not to defend the appeal would have remained but the Town Council had decided to pick up the baton and do the Council's job. A small local town or parish council should not be expected to take such action.

There had been two counsels' opinion and both had proved to be wrong. The inspector had found against the decision of an unqualified body of elected members. The Council's decision had been wrong and had had a damaging effect on public trust.

Councillor R Freeman then left the meeting having earlier declared a pecuniary interest.

In responding to the debate, the Director of Public Services said that he wished to place the remarks made in support of the motion into a proper planning context.

The Planning Acts provided an opportunity for any party to an appeal to claim costs from another party if it could demonstrate the other party had acted unreasonably. Saffron Walden Town Council made no such application for costs in this case. Kier Homes did but the application was refused. The Inspector's

decision on Kier's claim stated the Council had acted reasonably by informing the applicants it would not contest the appeal before the statements of case were due.

The Town Council did not successfully defend the decision of the Planning Committee as the motion suggested as the case presented only overlapped in part with the reasons for refusal. The Inspector's principal reason for dismissing the appeal was his finding of a significant negative factor in the planning balance exercise: his conclusion of the effect of the proposal on the efficient operation of the local highway network. This had not been one of the reasons for refusal as the Planning Committee had accepted the advice of the highways authority that the impact could be acceptably mitigated through conditions and obligations.

At the time of determining the application and considering the Council's potential case at the appeal inquiry, the context for the proposals was the submission draft local plan, including provision for a full link road from Radwinter Road to Thaxted Road and other junction improvements. By the time of the appeal inquiry the draft local plan had been withdrawn and, with it, the basis for securing the delivery and funding of a traffic management solution.

Other aspects of the Town Council's case at the inquiry, such as the impact on the character and appearance of the area, on air quality and local infrastructure and services, and sustainability of the site's location, were not found to represent unacceptable harm.

He advised members that functions of town and country planning and development control were Council functions. They had been delegated to the Planning Committee but were exercisable by Full Council. In deciding not to contest the appeal, the Council was fully informed by two opinions from counsel who had independently reviewed the planning evidence. In considering the legal advice, copies of both opinions had been made available to all members in full.

In summary, the Director confirmed that the Town Council had not taken the opportunity at the end of the public inquiry to pursue a claim for costs. The planning authority had acted reasonably in deciding not to contest the appeal having taken account of counsel's advice.

Should the Council decide to support the motion, members would need to determine where the money would come from as it would be unbudgeted expenditure. The planning reserve covered only costs associated with Stansted Airport studies, planning appeals and the Local Plan and could not be used to fund the costs identified in the motion.

Councillor Dean seconded the motion.

Councillor Hargreaves said the motion was not just about the money. Saffron Walden people had taken on a task never attempted before and had thus incurred costs that should be this Council's responsibility. This was a matter of morals as the Council was seen to have behaved badly. It would therefore be an astute move to do the right thing and accept the motion.

Councillor S Barker said that the refused application represented a lost opportunity for infrastructure gains. In considering what to do the Council had taken legal advice and acted correctly. It would be quite wrong for this Council to reimburse the costs of the town council for a decision they had made.

Councillor Loughlin said she was a member of the Planning Committee that made the decision to refuse the application as well as four other members present at this meeting. It was the job of officers to recommend and for members to decide. The highways authority was a statutory consultee but had been wrong before and members were not obliged to follow the representations made.

The Planning Committee had decided against the application and committee members had then been obliged to come to a full Council meeting to be told they had acted wrongly. She would have defended the appeal but was unable to do so. Having been a planning committee member for 14 years she found it reprehensible and humiliating to be told she had no idea. The Planning Committee had made the right decision and it should have been supported.

Councillor Ranger said it would have been madness not to have accepted due legal advice. He was saddened that some members had been influenced by people in the Residents for Uttlesford campaign and the outcome was to lose the opportunity for a new school, highway improvements and sports facilities.

Councillor Hicks spoke as a member of the Planning Committee then and now. He said that some committee members had not been above politics and the decision on the Kier application was not independent. Those concerned should be called to account and shamed.

While Councillor Hicks was speaking, Councillor Loughlin objected to his remarks and left the meeting. She did not subsequently return.

The Chairman called for proper order and good behaviour in debate.

Councillor Chambers said he was not a member of the Planning Committee at the time of this application. He said that the Director of Public Services had pointed out why the Thaxted Road site had not been supported at appeal but two independent legal opinions had been taken to Council and the decision had been taken democratically. It was hypocritical to put forward this motion.

Councillor Howell said he was sorry Councillor Loughlin was not in the room. It was certainly not his intention to humiliate anyone. He was not a member of the Planning Committee but acknowledged these decisions were often challenging and difficult. In his professional life he had often instructed counsel and, with very few exceptions, had learnt the wisdom of only proceeding to court with an 80/20 chance of winning. The Council had accepted the advice given quite correctly. There was a duty to respect other opinions but not to support them.

Councillor Jones expressed sympathy for the Planning Committee at any time but could nevertheless not support the motion. Saffron Walden Town Council had decided on a course of action without discussion with this Council. He could not therefore vote committing the Council to meet any of the fees incurred.

Councillor Rolfe commented that the Council had twice voted to support the site at Thaxted Road as included in the Local Plan. The circumstances had changed after the Local Plan was withdrawn but the Council had made the decision not to contest the appeal. The town council had not applied for costs at the time and it would be an extraordinary step to support the motion.

Having seconded the motion, Councillor Dean considered the best approach would nevertheless be to enter into negotiations rather than to name a specific sum. Relationships had been impaired and needed to be rebuilt. Simply because a site was included in the Local Plan did not mean an application must be supported if considered unsound. There was a moral obligation to pay the expenses incurred or enter into a negotiated settlement.

The decision not to defend the appeal was highly political and an insult to members of the Planning Committee. They had been proved right on the judgement they had made at the time and the fees paid for legal advice was a waste of money. The Council should now do the proper thing.

In summing up the debate, Councillor Lodge observed that it had proved surprisingly heated. He was sorry that Councillor Loughlin had left. He commented on the remarks of Councillors Hicks and Chambers that the decision made by the Planning Committee had not been democratic and asked for these remarks to be withdrawn.

There was no direct response to Councillor Lodge's invitation but a recorded vote was requested.

For the motion: Councillors Dean, Foley, Gleeson, Hargreaves, Light, Lodge, Parry and Sell

Against the motion: Councillors Artus, G Barker, S Barker, Chambers, Davey, Farthing, Felton, Gordon, Harris, Hicks, Howell, Jones, Mills, Oliver, Ranger, Redfern, Rolfe and Wells

The motion was declared lost by 18 votes to eight.

Councillors Anjum, R Freeman and Morris then came back into the meeting.

C61 **MOTION ON LOCAL POLICE SERVICE**

The following motion was submitted by Councillors Sell and Dean:

“THE PUBLIC'S SAFETY MUST COME FIRST

Following the announcement of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Essex of the need for changes to Essex policing:

This Council opposes:

- *a proposed cut to Police Community Support Officers from 27 to 20 in Braintree and Uttlesford Saffron Walden Police*
- *the withdrawal from dealing with “low level crime”, including pavement parking and low level anti-social behaviour*

Supports:

- *the retention of a police station in Saffron Walden which is fit for purpose.*
- and to write to the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Chief Constable and Essex Police and Crime Panel accordingly.”*

Councillor Sell proposed the motion. He said the motion sought to prevent further erosion of the blue line. Law and order was fundamental to the quality of life enjoyed by residents in Uttlesford. Changes to the level of local policing should be measured by whether they contributed or detracted from the quality of life.

He understood the need to spend police resources on matters such as fighting terrorism and cyber-crime but the reality of what happened to one retired couple living near Maldon was of most relevance to local people. He recounted the circumstances of the incident concerned which had involved a house burglary and said the effect on the couple had been very severe, leaving them feeling alone and vulnerable.

The level of community policing had an effect on crime. The Council had match funded the provision of PCSOs in the district and this had had a positive effect in Stansted where regular visits had been made to the youth centre. This had now stopped and it seemed police visits now only occurred after a crime had been committed.

The Police must have the confidence of the community. If the planned cuts were to proceed he feared it would bring about a two tier police system operating in Essex. Already, residents in Tiptree had turned to a private security firm and the same was happening in Walton and Frinton.

The police station in Saffron Walden was the only one still operating in a small town in Essex. The Police service must be fit for purpose and he urged members to support the motion. This would send a message to the Police and Crime Commissioner that Uttlesford valued community policing.

Councillor Dean seconded the motion.

Councillor Ranger said he supported the aims of the motion but wished to propose an amendment. Great Dunmow did not presently have a police station counter for use by the public and this exposed the folly of building a new station on the edge of town so that people could only visit in person by catching a bus or driving there.

He proposed the following amendment to replace the third part of the motion:

The Council supports the retention of a manned police station facility in Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted.

Councillor Jones seconded the amendment.

Councillor Sell indicated his acceptance of the amendment to be incorporated into the motion.

Councillor Rolfe said he accepted the spirit of what was being proposed. He read out comments made by the Police and Crime Commissioner about working with the Council to explore options to provide shared accommodation in Saffron Walden to retain front counter services and an operational base for the police service. This would have clear benefits for the Police, the Council and for local people and if a proposal were to be made the Commissioner has said it would receive urgent consideration. Councillor Rolfe was pleased to report that the option being considered was to provide a shared facility in the Lodge within the grounds of the Council Offices and this demonstrated a link between working effectively with the police, retaining a presence in Uttlesford and joining services together.

As for the first part of the motion, he understood the sentiments expressed but said that Councillor Sell's figures were not correct. Under the proposed arrangements there would only be six PCSOs covering Braintree and Uttlesford but, as members knew, the Police had fared better than expected in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and this proposal had now been postponed. He was pleased to inform the meeting that this Council would be fully funding two additional PCSOs from April 2016.

He spoke about the Essex Police services new approach to anti-social behaviour prioritising high risk calls from the public concentrating on incidents involving vulnerability, a high risk of harm, and other factors including repeat victims or locations. Taking all these factors into account he proposed the following amendment to replace the wording in the first two parts of the motion:

"The Council proposes to discuss with the Chief Superintendent the level of PCSO support in Uttlesford to gain the best advantage available and to establish an operational plan for low level crime that involves partners and protects those most in need."

Councillor Sell confirmed he would support the proposed amendment.

Councillor Chambers then indicated he wished to propose a further amendment in the following terms:

"The Council requests that the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable look at local policing in Uttlesford again in view of the Chancellor's announcement that no new cuts will be made to police funding in the next four years."

After further discussion, Councillor Sell agreed to accept the wording in the amendment. The effect of the acceptance by Councillor Sell of the three separate amendments was that the amended version would become the substantive motion requiring only one vote.

Councillor Gordon said the Council should be realistic in what could be achieved. The matters discussed were operational concerns within the remit of the Chief Constable and had implications across the county not just in Uttlesford. The Chief Constable had a responsibility to prioritise resources across Essex. In view of the concerns raised by members, he would make efforts to secure the attendance of senior officers to answer questions raised during this meeting. He also clarified that Essex Police would attend any reported incident of aggravated anti-social behaviour representing a threat to the preservation of life or property.

Councillor Light said she would be happy to support the attendance of senior police officers if this could be arranged. The accountability of the Police and Crime Commissioner to people in Essex should be noted.

The amended motion was then put to the vote and approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to adopt the following policy:

The Council proposes:

- To discuss with the Chief Superintendent the level of PCSO support in Uttlesford to gain the best advantage available and to establish an operational plan for low level crime that involves partners and protects those most in need
- Supports the retention of a manned police station facility in Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow and Stansted and will write to the Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable accordingly
- Requests that the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable look at local policing in Uttlesford again in view of the Chancellor's announcement that no new cuts will be made to police funding in the next four years

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chairman wished members and officers a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

The meeting ended at 9.50pm.