

**OPERATIONS COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 28 JUNE 2007**

Present:- R P Chambers – Chairman.
Councillors R Clover, K L Eden, M L Foley, A J Ketteridge,
R M Lemon, H S Rolfe, R D Sherer, G Sell, A D Walters and
P A Wilcock.

Officers in attendance:- A Bovaird, G Bradley, S Martin, P O'Dell and
C Roberts.

OP1 CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Members to the first meeting of the newly constituted Committee and informed Members that it was his intention to propose a change of name to "Finance and Administration Committee" which he felt more clearly indicated the purposes of the Committee.

OP2 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M A Gayler, D M Jones and T P Knight.

OP3 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2007 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

OP4 LEAD OFFICER REPORT

The Committee received the report of the Director of Resources updating them on items not on the agenda and recommending that any presentations in future take place prior to 7.30 pm when the meeting commences.

The Chairman informed the meeting that it was his intention to present a complementary Chairman's report showing the dovetailing of the officer and elected member work.

OP5 COMMITTEE FORWARD PROGRAMME

The Committee received the report of the Director of Resources on the Committee's forward programme for 2007/08 and the Director of Resources described it as containing for the most part budgetary and some one off reports.

The Chairman explained that the programme would be extended and would contain a substantial number of additional reports.

RESOLVED that the work programme so far be approved and adopted and it be noted that further items are expected which have not yet been identified.

OP6

GREENWAYS PLAY AREA

The Committee considered the report of the Leisure and Community Development Manager, referred from the meeting of the Community Committee held on 21 June 2007, recommending that an area of land containing a children's play area at Greenways, Saffron Walden be leased on a peppercorn rent to Saffron Walden Town Council for a period of 99 years if the Town Council also approves of this arrangement and that a capital contribution of £20,000 be made to the Town Council towards the refurbishment and maintenance of the play area if the residents survey demonstrated a requirement for such a play area. The report envisaged officers working with Saffron Walden Town Council to raise external funding to enable a suitable range of equipment to be installed on the site. The report detailed the history of this matter and the improvements required for acceptable maintenance.

It was noted that the land had been transferred to the Council as a result of obligations set out in a Section 106 agreement entered into by the developer of the properties at Greenways and was restricted to use as public open space so carried little freehold value. The Council's obligation to continue to mow the grass, keep it in neat and tidy condition and keep it available as a public recreational area, would endure.

Councillors A J Ketteridge and K L Eden declared personal and prejudicial interests in this item insofar as they were members of the Saffron Walden Town Council. Councillor A J Ketteridge made a statement prior to leaving the Committee Room, that he understood that at the time of the Section 106 agreement the £20,000 referred to had been set aside for the purposes outlined in the report. Councillors Ketteridge and Eden then left the Committee Chamber. Councillor H S Rolfe pointed out that the play area was in his ward, but that he was not on the Saffron Walden Town Council.

The Leisure and Community Development Manager explained that the Town Council was better resourced with staff to maintain play areas and that the necessary refurbishment, resurfacing and replacement of equipment would cost all of the sum allocated and more.

In answer to questions from a Member, she added that the play area was the only one in the ownership of the district and that all health and safety responsibilities would transfer with the transaction, but that the responsibility under the Section 106 agreement to mow the grass would remain with the District Council. She added in answer to a question from another councillor that the Town Council had indicated itself willing to undertake responsibility for the play area subject to the payment of the £20,000 and to the District Council's staff working them to raise the necessary funding to refurbish the play area. The Town Council was unwilling to take over the area until these matters were complete.

RECOMMENDED that the Full Council approves the recommendations referred from the Community Committee on 21 June 2007.

OP7 **CORPORATE PLAN**

The Chairman informed the meeting that this item had been withdrawn.

OP8 **UTTLESFORD IN 2011 TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME – (A)
PROGRAMME INITIATION DOCUMENT - (B) PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Business Transformation who explained that the programme initiation document was the prince 2 best practice system. The rest of the document incorporated a report to the Council on 15 February 2007 which set out the work streams, a governance model linking the programme project management to the words initiate design, execute and review, and, the second half of the report, a risk register for each work stream. He added that the risk register was the responsibility of the Assistant Chief Executive who had developed a register for each work stream. Members asked questions about the gap between the deficiency referred to in the medium term financial strategy and the one in the transformation programme which seemed to be about £600,000. The Director of Business Transformation explained that the figure of £1.5M was a target arrived at in the autumn of 2006 when the programme was embryonic. By 15 February, the medium term financial strategy figure was 2.485 million, but was now reduced to 2.085 million. The organisational re-engineering was to provide £1.119M, therefore the gap was just under £1M. The balance was to be provided from shared services and partnership over the next few months. A Member asked whether the individuals in charge of divisions knew what early wins they were responsible for obtaining. The Director of Resources said that the medium term financial strategy defined the problem and the 2011 programme was part but not all of the savings. The Chief Executive explained that he had not given targets to work stream leaders deliberately so as to avoid constraining their imagination. He wished them to bring forward self consciously ambitious staff, a scale change and a real step change not just 1% efficiency gains.

A Member commented that the impact assessments of the risk assessments might be very subjective and he asked who carried them out and how often they were reviewed. The Director of Business Transformation replied that this was done by a small group lead by the Assistant Chief Executive with the Acting Head of Audit and officers from the Joint Management Team. The Assistant Chief Executive was also sitting on the programme board which would meet monthly to review the progress of the 2011 programme. Changes to the Risk Register were to be reported to the Committee.

A Member commented, in the context of the programme deliverables that he hoped the Council was a community leader on more than just carbon change.

The Chief Executive explained that the Council could act as a cajoler in the matter of climate change exemplifying the right things to do. Members commented that they felt the Council was a community leader on Stansted

Airport. In answer to a question, the Director of Business Transformation explained that Programme Deliverable item three (“not only speaking to ‘one council’, but ‘one government’.”) was included because the Council should be looking to deal with government agency type enquiries. Members expressed concern that this would take up staff time and the Director of Business Transformation explained that the staff of other government agencies could be provided with desk space in the Council Office.

The Chief Executive added that it would be possible for Council officers to forward on complaints or integrate Council systems with those of other organisations or answer to any other council, questions from an individual. He suggested that the Council might sell season tickets for railways with appropriate business cases. Members expressed concern that such arrangements should be reciprocal, that the Council should not be tarred with the same reputation as other organisations it partnered, and that the resource demand in an organisational ready tight for resources, should not be overwhelming. They also expressed a requirement for Members to guide this process.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes and endorses the programme initiation document.

OP9

UTTLESFORD IN 2011 TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME – PROGRESS REPORT

The Director of Business Transformation explained that it was accepted that organisational reengineering could not deliver all the necessary savings and therefore were under work stream 11, shared and collaborative services – discussions were taking place with another district council concerning the options for joint working of the two council’s revenues and benefits services set out in appendix 2 to the report before the Committee.

The Chief Executive added that the various possibilities might take months or years to work through.

In answer to a question from a Member as to whether the Head of HR post was to be filled or not, the Director of Resources explained that in view of resourcing and partnership considerations, it had been decided not to fill the post until January and additionally, possibilities with HR staff in other councils were being investigated. A Member enquired whether HR management was embedded across the organisation and was assured that the management went on around the organisation.

RESOLVED that the Committee notes the report.

OP10

LOCAL HOUSING ALLOWANCE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Corporate Support and Revenue Services informing Members of a new type of housing benefit for new tenants in privately rented accommodation. The new scheme was designed to pay an amount to tenants with similar circumstances living in the

same area rather than one tied to the rent actually paid. In addition, local housing allowance would be paid directly to the claimant rather than, as at present, frequently to landlords direct. New claimants only were affected therefore the old and new schemes would be run in tandem.

Members were concerned about the possible future implications of this scheme and asked that a judgement be made as to whether the Council had enough small accommodation to downsize to. The Head of Corporate Support and Revenue Services commented that the scheme had been piloted in other authorities, for example, Norfolk and the Chairman asked that information be obtained from these authorities for the Council.

RESOLVED that the Welfare Reform Act changes be noted with concern.

OP11 **GENERAL FUND STRATEGIC BUDGET REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Resources concerning the Council's general fund budgets and reserves. The Director of Resources explained that there were not outturn figures he could announce. He asked Members to note that in paragraph 16 of the report the spending pressure provision should read £100,000 not £200,000 per annum. Members enquired how the pension deficit position could be improved and the Director of Resources informed the meeting that the fund performance had in fact improved.

RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- 1 Notes the position in relation to the 2007/08 budget.
- 2 Approves the updated medium term financial strategy figures as the basis for the budget process for 2008/09 and beyond.
- 3 Agrees that the budget timetable for 2008/09 including public consultation be set at this Committee's meeting on 20 September 2007.

*(The following items were withdrawn:- Agenda item 10-Statement of Internal Control 2006/07
Agenda item 11 -Statement of Accounts 2006/07)*

OP12 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that under Section 100 A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

OP13

URGENT OTHER BUSINESS – STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2006/07

The Director of Resources submitted a report setting out the current position regarding the Statement of Accounts 2006/07. It was noted that he expected the position to be back on track by the meeting of the Full Council on 31st July and that a report would be received on the findings of the person to be appointed by the Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.