

**FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE held at 7.30 pm at  
COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 28  
JANUARY 2010**

Present: Councillor R P Chambers–Chairman  
Councillors, A Dean, K L Eden, D M Jones, A J Ketteridge,  
R M Lemon, H S Rolfe, G Sell, A D Walters and P A  
Wilcock.

Officers in attendance: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), T Cowper  
(Principal Accountant), A Knight (Principal Accountant), S  
Joyce (Chief Finance Officer), S Martin (Head of Customer  
Support and Revenue Services), M Perry (Assistant Chief  
Executive), C Roberts (Democratic Services Officer) and A  
Webb (Director of Central Services)

**FA35 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Clover, J E N  
Davey, T P Knight and R D Sherer.

**FA36 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2009 were received  
and signed as a correct record subject to the amendment in Minute FA30  
of an inaccurate reference to the Scrutiny Committee to read “the  
Performance Select Committee”.

With the consent of the Chairman of the Committee it was agreed to re-  
order the agenda.

**FA37 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that under Section 100(I) of the Local Government  
Act 1972 the public be excluded for the following two items of  
business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of  
Exempt Information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of  
Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

**FA38 COUNSEL’S ADVICE**

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive  
regarding information to be considered in the context of the budget  
process.

RESOLVED that the advice received be accepted and the  
suggested course of action adopted.

FA39 **WRITE OFF**

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Customer Support and Revenue Services, pursuant to legislation, regarding write off of a sum in excess of £5,000.

RESOLVED to approve the write off.

(Members of the Press and public were then re-admitted to the meeting.)

FA40 **2009/10 BUDGET MONITORING REPORT**

The Committee considered the Chief Finance Officer's report on Budget Monitoring.

The Chief Finance Officer drew attention to the overall underspend and the likely budget adjustments.

RESOLVED to approve the report.

FA41 **2009/10 CORPORATE BUDGET MONITORING REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer. This report was produced in accordance with the budget reporting method and timetable approved by this Committee on 25 June.

It detailed financial performance relating to General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, Capital Programme and Treasury Management.

It was based upon actual expenditure and income from April to November and forecasts for the end of the financial year.

The Strategic Management Board had reviewed the report on 13 January and their comments were included.

The Chief Finance Officer drew attention to key areas of uncertainty which had the potential significantly to affect the outturn. He also updated the meeting on investigation of possibilities of buy-out of the Landsbanki debt.

Councillor Dean referred to the underspend arising, in Development Control and Planning Management, from the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) Scheme award, deferral of Stansted G2 work and staffing vacancies. He expressed the view that transfer to the Council's reserves of sums equivalent to the HPDG Scheme award and G2 budget took money away from the taxpayer and gave rise to income which was not budgeted for. He asked that these funds should be described as a £1 million underspend for presentation purposes rather

than being identified by source as set out in the Chief Finance Officer's report.

Councillor Ketteridge said he thought the Chief Finance Officer should be commended for his accounts and the way that his budget monitoring reports were set out which he considered was much clearer than ever before, with details and explanatory notes. The HPDG income had turned out to be less than half the amount forecast in previous years and he felt it was a credit to the officers that the Council was underspent; he had no wish to be overspent as before.

Councillor Lemon said he was delighted that the Council was acting prudently, and asked that the matter of housing property voids be flagged up as worrying since it had impacted on income to the tune of £100,000.

Councillor Sell asked whether the Council would assume next year that the HPDG Scheme award would be nil; whether an underspend was necessarily good; and whether the staffing vacancies referred to impacted on Planning. He also asked if the training budget had been spent.

The Chief Finance Officer replied that there was high confidence that the Council would receive something under the Scheme in 2010 but that it was impossible to predict how much; the budget was for a figure of £100,000.

Councillor Sell asked the Chief Executive whether the underspend would be affected next year by addressing the staff vacancies, and the Chief Executive replied that there were only two vacancies. A greater problem was covering and paying for long term illness.

An amendment was proposed by Councillor Wilcock and seconded that officers should limit the Corporate budget to the effect that council tax income should increase by no more than 2%.

Councillor Lemon referred to the substantial deficit which the Council had yet to meet.

The amendment was put to the vote and lost.

RESOLVED to note and approve the report and to approve the Capital Programme budget adjustments detailed in the report.

FA42

## **2010/11 FEES AND CHARGES**

Members considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer regarding the Committee's Fees and Charges for the coming municipal year.

Councillor Dean asked why a Scrutiny decision about fees and charges had not been pursued until recently and the Chief Finance Officer explained that consultation in December had elicited only two replies, and that the size of the work envisaged and its likely impact on the community made it impossible to be properly carried out for the current budget round.

RESOLVED that the Committee's proposed Fees and Charges set out in the Appendix to the report be approved for inclusion within the draft Budget.

FA43 **2010/11 FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE REVENUE BUDGET**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer regarding the Committee's Revenue Budget and were alerted to the changes involved in the proposals.

RESOLVED that the Committee's proposed revenue budget set out in the Appendix to the report be approved for submission to the Council.

FA44 **CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2009/10 – 2014/15**

Members considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer regarding the Committee's Capital Programme.

The Chief Finance Officer offered to provide Councillor Jones with information concerning energy use and the funding of the energy efficiency programme.

RESOLVED

1 that the proposed 2010/11 capital programme be approved for submission to the Council

2 that the indicative capital programme for 2011/12 to 2014/15 be noted.

FA45 **ANTI FRAUD POLICY**

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive regarding the Council's Anti Fraud policy.

As a matter of good practice this was submitted to the Committee for review annually.

Councillor Wilcock asked that thanks be recorded to the Enforcement Team.

RESOLVED that the existing Anti fraud policy be endorsed.

FA46

### **CORPORATE PROCUREMENT STRATEGY**

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer regarding the Committee's new Procurement Strategy the purpose of which was to provide a framework and direction for procurement activity in the Council. Better value for money should be achieved, as well as compliance with Audit Commission recommendations.

A discussion ensued about the sourcing of supplies and it was noted that the Chief Finance Officer intended to measure the local spend.

RESOLVED to approve the new Procurement Strategy as attached to the report.

The meeting ended at 8.30 pm.