

**FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE held at 7.30 pm at  
COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 24 MARCH  
2011**

Present: Councillor R P Chambers—Chairman  
Councillors K L Eden, A Dean, 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), S Joyce (Assistant Chief  
Executive-Finance), T Cowper (Principal Accountant), C  
Oakey (Procurement Manager), P Snow (Democratic and  
Electoral Services Manager) and C Roberts (Democratic  
Services Officer).

Also in attendance: Andrew Epsom and Janet Whyte from Braintree District  
Council.

FA65

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

Declarations of interest were made as follows:-

*Councillor R P Chambers – a personal interest in so far as he was a  
member of the Essex County Council.*

*Councillor G Sell – a personal interest in so far as he was a member of the  
Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council.*

*Councillor A Dean – a personal interest in so far as he was the Chairman of  
the Economic Development, Skills and Learning Working Group.*

FA66

**MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Administration Committee  
held on 8 February 2011 were approved and signed as a correct record  
subject to amendment of Minute FA62 for completeness at the request of  
Councillor A Dean to reflect opposition by Councillors Chambers, Ketteridge  
and Knight to Councillor Dean's suggestion that a Big Society fund could be  
established, funded from the New Homes Bonus.

Councillors Chambers and Ketteridge confirmed that they had said they  
would not spend money they had not received; they had said nothing about  
Autumn in this context but it had been said that the outcome of the Localism

Bill (which might have implications for the New Homes Bonus) would not be known until the Autumn. On this basis the amendment was agreed.

FA67

## **BUSINESS ARISING**

Councillor Dean said it was important to note that he considered the Committee had not been given accurate information at the last meeting relating to the New Homes Bonus.

The Chairman said that during the past four years the Council had been very prudent in its financial management. He hoped that this would continue, that the Council would not spend money it had not got and that if it received money it would spend it on things which benefited the residents of the District.

Councillor Sell commented that the residents of Forest Hall Park were likely to have been responsible for a lot of the District's New Homes Bonus. He asked that some of the bonus be used for the residents of communities most affected such as that one.

The Chairman answered that he was sure use of the funds would be considered very carefully and would be the subject of consultation with residents.

FA68

## **LEAD OFFICER'S REPORT**

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive-Finance updating them on developments since the last meeting and other matters.

The Assistant Chief Executive-Finance referred to the cost sharing agreement being negotiated between authorities in connection with the Single persons discount review, explaining that to date the Police Authority had declined to contribute, but that the matter would be pursued.

The Essex County Council Pension Fund Board had met and given formal confirmation to the funding strategy.

In addition, the Government had announced a new review of local authority funding to last up until July 2011. It was understood that the Government intended local government to depend in future more on business rates and council tax than on Government funding. The terms of reference of the review had only just been announced so it was unclear as yet what would be the impact from this.

Councillor Dean asked why Uttlesford had been the only district council visited by the Comptroller and Auditor General, whether the Revenues and

Benefits Partnership was on schedule for October, and whether the Assistant Chief Executive-Finance knew when the Council would receive any New Homes Bonus.

In answer to the first question the Chief Executive explained that the National Audit Office had selected Uttlesford by reason of it being exemplary in its finances, for which, he suggested the Assistant Chief Executive-Finance deserved congratulation.

The Chief Executive informed the Committee that a project manager had been appointed for the Partnership and that progress was on schedule.

The Assistant Chief Executive-Finance informed Councillor Dean that the New Homes Bonus grant was to be paid from the April following each October's dwelling count, but no amount was as yet confirmed and no formal notice of any payments had been received from the Government. It seemed the scheme was underfunded and the balance expected to come from local government formula grant so there was a need for caution in this matter.

The Chairman stressed that it was important to ensure the Council had received the money before it made commitments.

Councillor Sell informed the meeting that some other Councils had included the New Homes Bonus in their budgets.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

FA69

## **ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN 2011/12**

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive – Finance, and the Chairman welcomed to the meeting Andrew Epsom and Janet Whyte from Braintree District Council.

The Assistant Chief Executive – Finance explained that the new asset management plan was a substantial improvement on the previous one, more reliable and comprehensive, and that thanks were in order to the Braintree District Council staff who had helped to compile it and would help to maintain it. The improvements would be well received by external auditors and would enable corporate/strategic management of the Council's assets.

The Assistant Chief Executive-Finance answered Members' questions and explanations of ownership categorisation were given by the Principal Accountant and the Braintree staff present.

Councillor Rolfe thought the report very helpful, particularly the action plan on page 12, and stressed the importance of implementing the action plan.

Councillors Ketteridge and Sell were agreed that allotment land should be administered by the parish and Members' attention was drawn to the Council policy on amenity land set out on page 9 of the report.

RESOLVED to approve the Asset Management Plan for 2011/12 as attached to the report.

FA70

### **WEST ESSEX DISTRICT COUNCILS LOCAL INVESTMENT PLAN**

The Committee considered the report of the Interim Housing Strategy and Planning Policy Manager alerting the Committee to boundary review matters, raised by Epping Forest District Council as a precondition of it approving the joint Local Investment Plan (LIP) for West Essex.

Epping Forest officers were recommending that the adoption of the LIP by EFDC be subject to an exchange of letters taking place between the Chief Executives of all three local authorities confirming that each district council gave a commitment not to seek a boundary change in respect of any area where new housing was developed close to its boundary, other than through mutual agreement, and that if a proposal for boundary change was instigated by a third party, the affected councils would work together to ensure that any changes were not to the detriment of either council.

The Chairman of the Committee stressed the need for the three councils to move forward together and to keep each other informed.

RESOLVED that the Committee recommends to the Full Council that the proposed exchange of letters between West Essex District Councils concerning boundary changes be approved.

FA71

### **COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW AT FORESTHALL PARK AND PRIORS GREEN**

The Committee considered the recommendations contained in the minutes of the meeting of the Electoral Arrangements Working Group held on 7 March 2011.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager explained the consultation undertaken for the review, implementation date and harmonisation with District boundaries.

In answer to questions from Councillor Sell the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager confirmed that consultation had shown an overwhelming preference, in Forest Hall Park, to form part of the Parish of Stansted

Mountfitchet, and that it was necessary to apply to the Boundary Commission for England to have parish and district boundaries harmonised. He added that the new parishes would come into existence in the Spring of 2012 and explained aspects of the Stansted Mountfitchet boundary in answer to questions from Councillor Dean.

RESOLVED to

- i. Confirm draft proposal 1 in respect of the proposed change of boundaries between Birchanger and Stansted Mountfitchet, by realigning the boundary as follows: from the existing boundary between the parishes of Birchanger and Stansted Mountfitchet at Gipsy Lane the new boundary will run in a north-easterly direction to the junction with Stansted Road, then in a southerly direction to the junction with Foresthall Road, then following the centre of that road for nearly its entire length in a generally easterly direction nearly to the junction with Parsonage Lane, and then following the rear boundaries of the properties known as 1 and 2 Parsonage Farm Cottages to a point where it meets with the line of bridleway 27, and then continuing along the length of that bridleway in a generally south-westerly direction to a point on that bridleway where it meets the existing parish boundary south-west of Parsonage Farm. The effect of the change will be to transfer from Birchanger to Stansted Mountfitchet parish all land presently in Birchanger parish lying to the north of Forest Hall Road; and transfer from Stansted Mountfitchet to Birchanger parish that area of land to the south of Forest Hall Road lying in between the new boundary line as described and the existing boundary.
- ii. Confirm that Birchanger should continue to have a parish council.
- iii. Confirm draft proposal 2 that there should be no change to the boundary between the parishes of Little Canfield and Takeley.
- iv. Confirm that Little Canfield should continue to have a parish council.
- v. Confirm that Birchanger should continue to have nine councillors, with no warding scheme to be introduced.
- vi. Confirm that the number of councillors representing Little Canfield should increase from seven to nine, with no warding scheme to be introduced.
- vii. Confirm that the number of councillors in Stansted Mountfitchet should remain at 15 but that the balance between the existing wards should change so that the North ward is represented by six councillors instead of seven as at present, and that the enlarged South ward should be represented by nine councillors instead of eight as at present.

- viii. Confirm that the number of councillors to be elected in Takeley should increase from 11 to 13, with no division of the parish into wards.
- ix. Confirm that the ordinary year of election for all of the parishes concerned should remain as 2015, and that the respective terms of office from May 2012 should be three years reverting to four years from 2015.
- x. Confirm that an application be made for a consequential changes order to harmonise the district ward boundary between Birchanger and Stansted South with the revised parish boundary, in accordance with proposal 1, at the earliest practicable time.
- xi. Confirm that the proposals be published and that a parish reorganisation order be made implementing all of the matters covered above (except for the consequential changes order which is beyond the Council's powers), unless new matters are raised within one week of publication requiring further consideration by the Council.
- xii. Confirm the implementation dates of the reorganisation order as 1 December 2011 in respect of the registration of electors and for proceedings preliminary or relating to the election of parish councillors to be held on the ordinary day of election in 2012, and 3 May 2012 in respect of the revised scheme of electoral arrangements in each of the parishes.
- xiii. That parish arrangements at Priors Green should be re-examined three years from the date of the conclusion of this review, or as otherwise requested or required as a result of a change of circumstances occurring before that date.

FA72

## **PROCUREMENT STRATEGY 2011/12**

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive-Finance, on the revision and updating of the Procurement Strategy which had been carried out under the auspices of the Procurement Manager further to requirements of external audit. This process provided effective management of procurement, an improvement upon the previous arrangements.

Councillor Rolfe expressed a preference for collaboration in purchasing.

The Assistant Chief Executive – Finance said that the Strategy made it clear that there were overarching legal duties regarding value for money. The next consideration was the preference for local suppliers. There were already references to collaborative purchasing within the document.

In answer to a question from Councillor Dean the Procurement Manager explained difficulties in measuring carbon footprint.

RESOLVED to approve the Procurement Strategy for 2011/12 as attached to the report.

**FA73 2011/12 BUDGET MONITORING (CORPORATE)**

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Chief Executive – Finance detailing 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 January and forecasts for the end of the financial year.

The Assistant Chief Executive – Finance explained that there was a net favourable variance on net operating expenditure of £488,000, but after planned use of earmarked reserves to fund specific items of expenditure included within that sum, the net favourable variance was £631,000.

Councillor Dean asked why a staff redundancy had arisen due to the transfer of grounds maintenance services in-house. The Assistant Chief Executive – Finance explained that this was due to the existing workforce being transferred into the Council, and as a result, a reduction in supervisory roles was needed.

RESOLVED to note and approve the report.

**FA74 NEW COMMITTEE ARRANGEMENTS**

Councillor Ketteridge, the Council's Leader, said that the meeting was a landmark since it was the last meeting of a policy committee in the current administration. Much had been achieved by the Committee in the past four years resulting in the Council's exemplary finances being recognised by the Government. He wished to place on record his thanks to officers for their support and work to this end.

The Chairman of the Committee echoed the Leader's sentiments, and Councillor Lemon thanked Councillor Chambers for his excellent chairing of the Committee throughout the four years during which there had been some contentious meetings. Councillor Sell commented that he felt the Council was now much better served by the quality of the information with which it was provided and that this was reflected in the work done.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm.