

**POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD  
SAFFRON WALDEN on 11 JANUARY 2000**

Present:- Councillor Mrs M A Caton - Chairman.  
Councillors G R Brown, R P Chambers, R J Copping, A Dean, M L Foley, M A Gayler, R D Green, D W Gregory, P G F Lewis, R A Merrion, R J O'Neill, G Sell, Mrs S V Schneider and R B Tyler.

Also present at the Chairman's invitation:- Councillors Mrs S Flack,  
D J Morson and A R Row.

Officers in attendance:- K Ivory, Mrs M Cox, J B Dickson, A Farrow,  
B D Perkins and Mrs J Postings.

**I. STATEMENT BY MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC**

Mr B West, representing the Park Road Residents' Association at Stansted Mountfitchet, spoke to the Committee regarding the removal of bollards at the western end of Park Road, Stansted. A summary of his statement and the response on behalf of the Council are appended to these Minutes.

**I. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor R J Copping declared an interest in matters relating to the Great Dunmow Maltings Preservations Trust, the Great Dunmow Town Strategy Group and Business Link North West Essex.

**I. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 1999 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**I. BUSINESS ARISING**

**(i) Minute 212(i) - Statement by Representative of the Focus Groups**

In answer to a question from Councillor Copping it was reported that representatives of the two original groups had been contacted regarding a joint meeting to discuss matters relating to the Local Plan. No reply had yet been received and officers were asked to follow this up.

**(ii) Minute 215(i) - Saffron Walden Town Centre Management Scheme**

Since the last meeting, a special meeting of the Highways Sub-Committee had resolved to implement the limited changes to the scheme, but had also agreed to an immediate review of the whole scheme. Councillor Tyler said that at the subsequent Council meeting he had suggested that an independent consultant be appointed to assist in the review of the scheme. The Saffron Walden Chamber of Commerce had agreed to contribute towards the cost of appointing a consultant and it was possible that other partners might also be involved. Councillor Tyler understood that it was likely that the cost of an independent review would be in the region of £5,000. Councillor Chambers suggested that this proposal be discussed with Essex County Council Officers present at the Highways Sub-Committee to be held on 2 February 2000. Councillor Tyler hoped to avoid any further delay and asked that the question of the funding of the review be considered as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that

- 1 a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Highways Sub-Committee regarding the possibility of an independent review of the Saffron Walden Town Centre Management Scheme, and
- 2 the officers, in consultation with the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee, identify funding up to a limit of £4,000.

**(iii) Minute 215(ii) - Locally Determined Budget Programme**

Councillor A Dean referred to the statement that had been made on behalf of the residents of Park Road, Stansted at the start of the meeting and hoped that officers would look further at the issues involved.

RESOLVED that a report on this matter be submitted to a future meeting of the Highways Sub-Committee.

**(iv) Minute 221 - District Promotion Budget**

Councillor Copping was informed that no change was proposed in criteria for expenditure under the District Promotions Budget.

**(v) Minute 222 - Periodic Electoral Review of Essex Districts: Uttlesford - Consultation Arrangements**

Councillor Copping referred to the Council's preferred District Warding Scheme that had been sent to Parish Councils for consultation. He said it would have been helpful if the Parish Councils had been advised of the various options that had been considered by the Working Party.

**CALCULATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE 2000/01**

Members were advised of the calculation of the Council Tax base 2000/01.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the report of the Corporate Director - Finance for the calculation of the Council's Tax Base for the year 2000/01 be approved, and
- 2 pursuant to the Corporate Director - Finance's report in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, the amount calculated by the Uttlesford District Council as a Council Tax Base for each part of its area for the year 2000/01 be as listed in Appendix 1.

**I. A NEW FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING - CONSULTATION PAPER**

The Corporate Director - Finance presented a detailed report setting out the current situation regarding the Government's proposed new financial framework for local authority housing in the light of recent consultation papers. The report addressed the effects of the proposals on the Council's finances and recommended action to address the position. There was still some uncertainty about the position from April 2001 but some clear conclusions for Uttlesford could be drawn at this stage.

- The General Fund would lose a lot of revenue spending power from April 2001 - current indications were in the order of £1.5m.
- All interest lost on capital receipts used for HRA purposes would be at the expense of the General Fund and the Council Taxpayer.
- The spending power transferred from the General Fund to the HRA might be used, instead of capital receipts, to fund the HRA capital programme.
- Anything which this Council did now to make the future General Fund position worse than it already was would not help its case with the Government in the matter of transitional relief.

The Corporate Director - Finance suggested that a workshop be held to enable Members to consider the issues in greater detail and to prepare the bases for any responses the Council might wish to make to the consultation papers.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the Council takes the following steps towards addressing the changes:
  - (a) to immediately replace the General Fund Revenue contribution to capital, previously projected at £200,000 per annum, by the use of capital receipts instead;
  - (b) to transfer, from April 2001, the projected HRA Capital Programme entirely to the HRA itself, to be thus met from revenue rather than from capital receipts.
- 2 a Member workshop be held to present the proposals in more depth and to prepare the basis for any response the Council might wish to make to the consultation papers.

## **I. DRAFT POLICY AND RESOURCES ESTIMATES 2000/01**

The Committee received the draft estimates for the Policy and Resources Committee budgets and was advised of the significant items and changes included within the figures. The Committee had set a target that the 2000/01 budget for direct expenditure should not exceed the 1999/2000 total. The Committee's estimate for 2000/01, for direct costs excluding internal charges, was £4,349,430, an increase of £150,700. It was not yet possible to say if the overall target of no growth had been met. Officers' suggestions for growth in 2000/01 were set out in the appendix to the report.

Members drew attention to the service analysis and the areas where the estimates appeared to show a significant increase. Particular attention was drawn to the cost of revenue collection and the Corporate Director - Finance was asked to provide more detailed figures for the next meeting. Members asked for clarification on the budget proposals for the Community Information Centres at Thaxted and Stansted. Members hoped that these centres would be progressed as soon as possible.

*During discussion on this items Councillor Foley declared a non-pecuniary interest as a governor of the North West Essex Adult Education College*

The Committee then discussed the items proposed for additional expenditure. There was concern at the amount included to produce a strategy for identifying contaminated land within the District. The Corporate Director - Development agreed to review this figure but stressed that some amount had to be included as this was a new statutory duty. Some Members also questioned the continued cost of detecting benefit fraud, but were advised that the increase in this activity was a Government requirement and the expenditure was partly offset by an increase in grant income.

These draft estimates were then considered as part of the draft General Fund Revenue Estimates later in the meeting.

## **I. BUDGET STRATEGY**

The Committee received a report outlining relevant information recently received from the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) and also the Budget Strategy Working Group's proposals on options to deal with the anticipated gap in the Council's finances as from 31 March 2001.

The Corporate Director - Finance advised the Committee that the negative subsidy transfer to the General Fund would be abolished from April 2001. The estimated amount in 1999/2000 transferred in support of General Fund expenditure was £1.49m (25% of net budget). The Consultation Paper had suggested that there would be some form of transitional or other arrangements but no details were given. In the longer term, the Council would need to either reduce services or increase income to compensate. However, it appeared that the Government was expecting local authorities to hold down Council Tax increases.

The Budget Strategy Working Group had been identifying options in order to deal with this gap in the Council's funding. The Group considered the Council should look at the discretionary areas of income and discretionary grants. It had also examined other areas including: the annual surplus compared with the original estimate of the General Fund, HRA Balances and Tax Collection costs.

During the budget process last year an earmarked reserve had been created to assist in the short-term with compensating for the loss of the negative housing subsidy transfer. At 31 March 1999 this reserve was £556,000. The Working Group felt that this reserve should be maximised and suggested that any negative housing subsidy in

excess of £1.49m for both the revised estimates 1999/2000 and the original estimate 2000/01 should be transferred directly into this reserve. Also any overall surplus in the General Fund 1999/2000 should be transferred.

It was noted that due to new housing resource accounting requirements, and the large amount of Capital Receipts from the sale of Council housing over the last two years, there would be no requirement for a General Fund Revenue contribution to capital for 2000/01.

The Corporate Director - Finance pointed out that all the options listed in the report would not cover the loss of General Fund Income. The only way of totally bridging the loss would be to consider the ownership of Council assets including the transfer of Council housing subject to tenants' agreement. The work involved in the transfer programme took approximately two years and it was important that, if the Council decided to proceed, it was prepared when the DETR invited applications in the Autumn. The management of the housing stock had been placed in the first year of the Best Value review programme and the Working Group's view was that this programme would assist in reflecting the Council's Strategic Objectives and Corporate Priorities.

The Budget Strategy Working Group had concluded by identifying various areas which needed further investigation. These were:

- \* Asset Management including Council housing
  - \* The Council's overall funding requirements including any partnership opportunities.
  - \* Discretionary Income.
  - \* Discretionary Grants
  - \* Future Priorities of the Council.

Members discussed the recommendations in the report and in particular Recommendation 1 which referred to the Best Value Service Reviews to be undertaken during 2000/01. They agreed that a review of the Council's assets, including Council housing, should be undertaken and that this issue be considered very seriously. The Committee discussed whether discretionary grants should be looked at during the first year of the Best Value Review Programme. Some Members felt that as Grants were a high profile service and a good way of getting things done in the Community, they were not priority for a review. Councillor Gayler wanted the Council to look initially at efficiency savings and suggested that the review of Development Control, Enforcement and Conservation be brought forward to Year 1. The programme for the Best Value fundamental service review had been recommended at the meeting of the Best Value Sub-Committee held on 6 January 2000 and the Chairman agreed to consider this item at this time.

#### **Best Value Sub-Committee 6 January 2000 - Minute BV22 - Service Review Programme**

The Corporate Director - Development explained that the Sub-Committee had given a lot of thought to the order and had analysed a range of criteria before it devised the programme. It was very important that the Year 1 programme should not be over burdened and to review the Planning Service in the first year, in addition to the other services, would be very demanding in terms of staff and resources. Councillor Gayler had also suggested that the Revenues Service be brought forward but it was explained that this service had already recently been reviewed and the method of paying benefits was to be examined by the Government in a few years time. Some Members felt that the Council should initially be looking to review the services which were likely to produce the most substantial savings.

Councillor Gayler proposed that the revised Fundamental Service Review Programme as set out at Appendix A to the Minute be amended to move grants from Year 1 to Year 2 and Development Control/Enforcement/Conservation from Year 2 to Year 1.

Councillor Chambers then proposed an amendment

"that the Revised Service Review Programme as set out at Appendix A to the Minutes be approved".

On being put to the vote the amendment was carried. It was therefore

RESOLVED that the Revised Service Programme as set out to Appendix A to the Minutes of the Best Value Sub-Committee meeting of 6 January 2000 be approved.

The Committee then returned to its consideration of the Budget Strategy item.

Councillor Gayler then proposed that Recommendation 2 in the report be amended as follows:-

"the negative housing subsidy transfer to fund services be capped at £1.3m and additional amounts be transferred to the earmarked reserve for new housing finance proposals". On being put to the vote this proposal was lost. It was however agreed that the Corporate Director - Finance should examine the impact of this figure being reduced.

RESOLVED that

- 1 Best Value fundamental service reviews be undertaken during 2000/01 for  
Housing Management and  
Discretionary Grants
- 2 The negative housing subsidy transfer to fund services be capped at £1.49 million and additional amounts be transferred to the earmarked reserve for new housing finance proposals,
- 3 Any overall surplus on General Fund revised estimates 1999/2000 and original estimates 2000/01 be transferred to the earmarked reserve for new housing finance proposals,
- 4 No General Revenue contribution to Capital be made in 2000/01 or future years,
- 5 A Member Workshop be held during March to consider the Audit Commission's recommendation on the setting of discretionary fees and charges and
- 6 The Budget Strategy Working Group look in depth at the areas included in paragraph 15 of the report having regard to the Best Value fundamental service review programme.

## I. **DRAFT GENERAL FUND, REVENUE, CAPITAL AND LEASING PROGRAMMES 2000/2003**

### (i) **Capital and leasing programmes 2000/2003**

The Committee received the draft Capital and Leasing Programmes 2000/03. It was noted that apart from the IT Programme, the Leisure PFI Project represented the only General Fund Capital Scheme timetabled for future years. The projection of the overall Capital Programme up to 2003/04 was shown as if all new items had been approved. Funding had been projected on the basis that the HRA Capital Programme would be transferred to Revenue from 2001/02 and the General Fund Revenue Contributions ceased from 2000/01. The figures demonstrated that from the point of view of capital spending power all the proposed new projects could proceed and still leave scope for future additions to the programme. However, the Council was facing pressure on its future revenue spending power and as well as any associated revenue costs, any Capital expenditure would result in a loss of interest.

No material alterations had been identified to the currently approved leasing programme. The report stated that the pressures on General Fund revenue expenditure, resulting from the new financial framework for housing, might mean that there would be advantages to reviewing current policy on the use of operational leasing.

The Council had been allowed a Basic Credit Approval (BCA) of £600,000 for 2000/2001. As the Council was debt free, the BCA was of no practical use to this Council in funding its own Capital Programme. However, credit approvals might be transferred over to principal authorities. Approaches had been made to the County Treasurer to determine whether there might be partnership opportunities to enable projects to proceed in the Uttlesford area. A number of possible projects were suggested, though the list was not intended to be prescriptive.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the proposed IT Programme as recommended by Internal Services Sub-Committee be approved

- 2 the contents of the report be accepted as the basis upon which the Leasing and Capital Programme would be prepared.
- 3 The Corporate Director - Finance continue discussions with the Essex County Council Treasurer regarding the transfer of this Council's Basic Credit Approval to fund the following projects:-
  - Saffron Walden to Audley End Cycle Link
  - Dunmow Library
  - Stansted Community Information Centre
  - Highways Locally Determined Budget Programme
- 4 Where financially viable, Officers seek to implement outright purchasing rather than leasing arrangements with immediate effect.

*Councillor M A Gayler declared an interest in matters relating to the Dunmow Library.*

**(ii) General Fund Revenue Estimates 2000/01**

The Committee considered the Draft General Fund Revenue estimates 2000/01. Members were asked to give an indication of the total overall General Fund expenditure they would wish to incur in 2000/01 and consider which items to include in the list of additional items of expenditure. The provisional Revenue Support Grant settlement figure was £3,431,883. Any net revenue expenditure above this would have to be met from Council Tax. The Government expected Councils to exercise self restraint when considering Council Tax levels and had set a guideline figure which for Uttlesford was a 4.5% increase in Council Tax. Members considered and discussed the draft figures. Councillor Chambers hoped that the Committees and Sub-Committees would carefully consider the sustainability of the spending proposals in view of the fact that the Council was unlikely to receive additional resources, would continue to face rising revenue expenditure demands, and faced the loss of the 1.5 million negative housing subsidy.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the total General Fund estimated net expenditure for 2000/2001 should not exceed a level equivalent to a Council Tax increase of 4.5%,
- 2 additions be made to the earmarked reserves as set out in line 14 of the budget forward projection table and appendix 2,
- 3 Sub-Committees and Committees be instructed to re-examine their estimates, rank growth items in priority order, all items having an individual ranking, and look seriously at any possible efficiency savings.

**I. HIGHWAYS SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Minutes of the special meeting of the Highways Sub Committee held on 17 November 1999 were received.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the special meeting of the Highways Sub-Committee held on 17 November 1999 be approved and adopted.

**I. INTERNAL SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Internal Services Sub-Committee held on 15 December 1999 were received.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Internal Services Sub-Committee held on 15 December 1999 be approved and adopted including the following recommendations:-

IS31 - IT Programme 2000/01

IS34 - Uttlesford Local Allowance

## I. **BEST VALUE SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Best Value Sub-Committee held on 20 December 1999 and 6 January 2000 were received.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meetings of the Best Value Sub-Committee held on 20 December 1999 and 6 January 2000 be approved and adopted including the following recommendations:-

BV11 - The Council's Strategic Objectives

BV22 - Service Review Programme

## I. **PERIODIC ELECTORAL REVIEW WORKING GROUP**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Periodic Electoral Review Working Group held on 24 November, 6 and 20 December 1999 were received.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meetings of the Periodic Electoral Review Working Group held on 24 November, 6 and 20 December 1999 be approved and adopted.

## I. **POLITICAL MANAGEMENT - PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

At its last meeting the Council had approved in principle the proposals for a new political management structure made by the Organisation Joint Management Working Party. It had instructed the Working Party to develop those proposals further and to come to this meeting with suggestions for public consultation. The Working Party considered that the main method of consultation should be a leaflet to all households, Town and Parish Councils and appropriate organisations. It should include a brief background; the options proposed by Central Government; Council's preferred approach and the reasons for it; and a brief questionnaire seeking views. The likely cost of this exercise would be in the region of £3,000.

RESOLVED that

- 1 Members approve the suggested approach,
- 2 a draft leaflet be submitted to the Council meeting on 18 January 2000 and Members be invited to submit comments on the detailed wording by 24 January 2000, and
- 3 the Organisation Joint Working Party be authorised to conduct the consultation process.

## I. **CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING**

The Committee received details of a new Anti-Fraud Statement and the associated Guidance notes and a Confidential Reporting code. These had been considered by Management Team, UNISON and by nearly all staff at workshops. The principle and contents of the documents were supported by the Councils staff. The Anti-Fraud Policy Statement and Guidance Notes were intended to be used by members of the public and by Members and Officers of the Council and its contractors, and service providers. The confidential reporting code was to be used by Officers and Members and was a Personnel Policy Note. The report gave details of appropriate publication procedures.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the Council adopt the Anti-Fraud Policy Statement and approve the Anti-Fraud guidance notes and Confidential Reporting code.
- 2 The changes to PPN1 and 13 set out in paragraph 4 of the report be agreed.
- 3 The documents be published as set out in paragraphs 7 and 8 of the report.

## I. CAR PARKING AT SAFFRON WALDEN OFFICES

Members were advised that car parking at the Saffron Walden Offices had become a concern, demand frequently outstripping supply, and there was a concern that visitor car parking did not have an appropriate prominence. The difficulties had been investigated, and staff and Members' views had been sought. Proposals had been drawn up to improve the visitors' car parking and to provide setting down and picking up lay-bys. There was also a suggestion that reserved car parking be provided. The possibility of providing a barrier controlling access to the main car park had also been looked at but this was regarded as a last resort provision that could be implemented later if the problem was not alleviated. The cost of the work to improve visitors' car parking would be in the region of £9,000 and this had been included in the General Fund Budget report.

The Committee generally felt that the public should be given priority in the car parking at the offices. Members thought that the measures proposed were acceptable in the short-term but the whole issue of parking at the Council Offices should be considered further.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the following proposals be implemented:-
  - (a) visitors car parking to be provided in the area marked A on the map which was currently the reserved parking.
  - (b) Setting down and picking up lay-bys to be provided either side of the entrance positions marked B on the plan (the entrance to reception)
- 2 In the medium term Officers look at ways to manage and regulate the use of the car park beyond this scheme and report to a future meeting of the Committee.

## I. THE PRIORITIES OF UTTLESFORD COMMUNITY - INTERIM REPORT

### (i) Community Priorities Consultation

Members were advised that in November 1999 all households in the district had received a letter asking for comments on the future priorities for the Uttlesford District. Copies of the letter had also been circulated to Town and Parish Councils, local organisations and businesses in the district. The report advised Members of the main thrust of the replies received.

### (ii) Community Consultation

Following the public consultation on Community Priorities, the Best Value Sub-Committee now proposed to respond to the Community. It was intended to thank the community for its response, to show how the Council proposed to deal with the priorities, and tell the community about the five year service review programme in relation to Best Value. Members considered a draft set of proposals on how the Council proposed to meet the community priorities as originally put forward.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the suggested Council's response to the Communities Priorities be agreed in principle and the Best Value Sub-Committee take the necessary action.
- 2 Councillors be invited to submit any individual comments to the members of the Best Value Sub-Committee by Monday 24 January 2000.

## I. CORPORATE PLAN 1999/2000 - MONITORING REPORT

The Committee received this Committee's first six months monitoring report.



I. **MILLENNIUM YOUTH CHALLENGE**

Members were reminded that the first prize in the Millennium Youth Challenge had been awarded to the First Thaxted Scout Troup's Project, "Adventure for all Kayak Club" to be implemented from 1 April 2000. The Council had now been advised that due to circumstances beyond the troupe's control it was not possible to implement the project. The judging panel had now reconvened to reconsider the remaining applications and options available. A full report on the outcome of the Panel's deliberations would be made to the next meeting of the Committee.

I. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that under Section 100 A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in paragraphs 1, 7 and 9 of Part I of Schedule 12 A of the Act.

I. **INSURANCE TENDER**

The Committee was given details of the result of a recent tender exercise for the provision of the Council's Insurance Services. A number of specific technical issues remained to be resolved with the parties involved and it was recommended that the authority to award the contract for the provision of the insurance services be delegated to the Corporate Director - Finance in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee.

RESOLVED that, subject to the satisfactory resolution of a number of technical issues, the Corporate Director - Finance in consultation with the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee, be authorised to determine the award of the contract for provision of Insurance Services from 1 April 2000.

I. **WRITE-OFFS**

The Committee received the Schedules recommended for write-off.

RESOLVED that the Schedules of Non-Domestic Rates totalling £56,312.44 be written off.

I. **EASTERN SECTOR GREAT DUNMOW**

The Committee received a report providing details of proposals to develop the Eastern Sector site in Great Dunmow which involved using part of this Council's White Street Car Park. The report asked Members to decide, in principle, whether or not the sale of part of the car park was appropriate. This report had also been considered by the Planning and Development and Community Services Committees.

RECOMMENDED that the Council agree in principle to the sale of land at White Street Car Park, Great Dunmow as discussed in the report.

The meeting ended at 11.30 pm.

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