

**POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE held at 7.30pm at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 26 SEPTEMBER 2000**

Present:- Councillor Mrs M A Caton - Chairman
Councillors R P Chambers, R J Copping, A Dean, M A Gayler, D M Jones, R
A Merrion, R J O'Neill, G Sell, Mrs S V Schneider and R B Tyler.

Also present at the invitation of the Chairman:- Councillor
Mrs J F Cheetham.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs E Forbes, F Chandley, Mrs M Cox,
J B Dickson, A Forrow, Mrs S McLagan and B D Perkins.

111 MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The Chairman addressed the Members of the public who had attended the meeting for the item concerning the bollards at Park Road, Stansted. She stated that, as legal proceedings had commenced it was not appropriate for the Committee to hear statements from either party. One of the residents asked that it be recorded in the Minutes that they had been refused permission to speak on this item.

112 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G R Brown, M L Foley, R D Green and P A Wilcock.

Councillor Copping declared an interest in items 4 and 27 and stated that he would not speak or vote on these items. He also declared non-pecuniary interests in any matter relating to Great Dunmow Maltings Preservation Trust, the Great Dunmow Town Strategy Group and Business Link North West Essex.

Councillor Sell declared an interest in items 10 and 11 as a member of Stansted Parish Council.

Councillor Gayler declared an interest in items 4 and 26 as a member of Great Dunmow Town Council.

113 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2000 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

114 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute 53(i) - District Promotion Working Party

Councillor Copping reported that Business Link North West Essex was being wound up and any remaining funds would be transferred to Business Development Services (North West Essex). As the Council had made a financial contribution to Business Link he asked for further information about the function of the new organisation.

RESOLVED that a progress report on the setting up of Business Development Services (North West Essex) be made to the next meeting of the Planning and Development Committee.

(ii) Minute 57 - Transfer of Basic Credit Approval

The Chairman reported that work on the projects was progressing.

(iii) Minute 68 - Request from Uttlesford Volunteer Bureau for Funding

The Committee was advised that the Bureau had not been wound up. The existing staff would be made redundant and would be employed on a part time basis until April 2001 when the decision on the grant from the Lottery Charities Board was expected. Members asked that the updated situation be reported to the next meeting of the Community Services Committee.

115 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Great Dunmow Cemetery

At the meeting of the Community Services Committee on 19 September 2000, Members had considered a report describing the progress of the provision of a new cemetery at Great Dunmow. To meet the necessary costs, the Policy and Resources Committee had been asked to make provision of a further £10,000 from usable Capital Receipts. Members considered this request to be justified. It was confirmed that the burial ground would be available for all Uttlesford residents. Members queried how this would work in practice and asked for a clear policy on this matter.

RESOLVED that a provision of a further £10,000 be made available from usable Capital Receipts to cover the anticipated costs of providing the new burial ground.

116 BOLLARDS AT PARK ROAD STANSTED

The Committee was advised of further developments and court proceedings which had now been instituted following the removal of bollards from Park Road, Stansted. Copies of the proceedings had been served on the Council, to the intent that it should have the right to apply to join in the proceedings. It was the view of the Council's Legal Officers that no purpose would be served by joining in the proceedings. Councillor A Dean said that there was strong local feeling on this matter and the residents did feel that the Council had a role to play. He proposed a further recommendation to that set out in the report, that the Council resumes discussion with residents as soon as the outcome of the legal proceedings is known. Whilst Members hoped that this matter could be satisfactorily resolved, it was felt that officers' advice should be accepted and that the Council should not join in the legal action.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Council does not join in the proceedings between Mr and Mrs Newman and Mr Warner, and
- 2 the Council resume discussions with the residents as soon as the outcome of the court proceedings is known.

117 APPROVAL OF THE COUNCIL'S STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee was asked to approve the Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2000. The overall position for the General Fund was that net underspending had allowed over £200,000 more than the revised estimate predicted to be added to the earmarked reserve in respect of the new housing financial framework. The Statement of Accounts gave details of all the main variances against the original budget. The accounts also contained entries reflecting transactions in respect of the pig market charity and Members asked for further information on this matter.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2000 be approved,
- 2 the transactions relating to the pig market charity be endorsed.

118 CONSULTATION PAPER - TRANSITIONAL MEASURES FOR "NEGATIVE SUBSIDY" AUTHORITIES

The Committee was informed of the several options proposed by the Government regarding the detailed operation of the transitional measures proposed to be provided from April 2001. Comments were requested by 29 September and the Government would decide on the solution during November to be finally confirmed by mid December. Options were given for the length of the transitional period and for calculating the amount. The Government proposed that any use of the transitional amount would be a matter for local discretion. The Consultation Paper specifically requested comments on six key points and officer comments were set out in the report. The range of options suggested by the Government was wide and, depending upon the final decision, it could have an adverse impact on the financial model included in the Budget Strategy Report. This would need to be constantly monitored and reviewed in the light of the proposed arrangements and other external funding issues. Members agreed with the responses made to the Consultation Paper set out in the report and it was

RESOLVED that the comments be forwarded to the DETR before 29 September 2000.

119 BUDGET STRATEGY 2001/02

At the last meeting a preliminary report on the budget planning framework for the period 2001/02 - 2005/06 had been considered and a financial model showing reduced cash targets over the five year period had been endorsed. Since that meeting an initial budget strategy report had been circulated to Committee/Sub-Committee meetings. This had given information regarding the impact of the comprehensive spending review, guidance given to Business Centre Managers on the budget planning process for 2001/02 and beyond and some possible areas for efficiency savings and service reductions as suggested by the Budget Strategy Group. Members had appreciated that it would not be possible to meet all the targets solely by efficiency savings. It was also noted that a number of factors might impact on the proposed financial model, in particular the transitional arrangements for the loss of negative housing subsidy and the Green Paper, Modernising Local Government Finance.

The Leader of the Council then presented budget proposals for 2001/02 as suggested which he had formulated in conjunction with the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee as suggested. These proposals had resulted from discussions at the Budget Strategy Group which consisted of the Leader of the Council, the Chairman of Policy and Resources, the Chief

Executive and the Corporate Directors of Development and Finance. The Group had been investigating ways of overcoming the loss of negative housing subsidy on the revenue budget.

The proposed savings were as follows:-

Underspend	£100,000	
Staff Turnover		£ 30,000
DSO		£ 50,000
Museum		£ 25,000
Youth Training		£ 10,000
Financial Services	£ 50,000	
Planning		£ 34,000
Total	£299,000	

Councillor Chambers explained the reasoning behind these proposals and answered questions. A number of Members made suggestions for other areas of possible savings. These were noted and it was agreed that they would be fed into the budget planning process.

There was a feeling amongst some Members that the Community Support Grant could be discontinued from this year. This was a revenue rather than capital grant for which Town and Parish Councils could apply if they wished.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Budget Strategy Group meet with Business Centre Managers and Committee Chairmen to examine critically all budgets and to examine the impact and collate a corporate approach,
- 2 Members endorse that there is a need for expenditure reduction,
- 3 further work be undertaken on the proposed budget reductions and reports be submitted to the next cycle of meetings, and
- 4 the Community Support Grant be discontinued forthwith.

120 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000

The Committee received a report which summarised the main provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 which had received Royal Assent on 28 July 2000. The report made particular reference to the Act's implication for this Council and the actions that had been taken so far.

Part 1 of the Act would give every local authority a new power to do anything that it considered was likely to achieve the promotion of economic, social or environmental wellbeing in that area. The Act also imposed a duty on every local authority to prepare a strategy for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. The report set out a possible way forward for preparing this strategy in Uttlesford. This included a partnership seminar in November with key community partners which would allow discussion on a range of issues. Countywide discussions at officer levels were also about to begin regarding a community strategy for Essex. Further reports would be made to subsequent meetings of this Committee.

RESOLVED that the above approach be endorsed in relation to the preparation of a community strategy.

121 POLITICAL MANAGEMENT OF THE COUNCIL

A report was submitted on behalf of the Organisation Joint Working Party (OJWP) which recommended a way forward on a new political structure for the Council in the light of the requirements of the Local Government Act 2000. In November 1999, the Council had approved the principle of a new political structure involving the creation of an executive/non-executive split in Councillors' roles. The Organisation Joint Working Party had been instructed to work out the details of the new structure. Since then the Local Government Act had been passed which contained a provision permitting shire district councils with a resident population of less than 85,000 at 30 June 1999 to submit proposals for a new constitution which did not involve a clear executive/non-executive split. The proposals would have to comply with regulations made by the Secretary of State and these regulations were expected to be issued in November or December. A letter had been received which generally reinforced the position as reported to Members.

A workshop had been held in September to enable Members to consider the position. It was apparent that a clear majority of Members had favoured a modified committee system and this would mean changing the Council's current policy. The report before Members considered that the best way forward would be for the Council to authorise the OJWP to work out the details of a modified committee system and to conduct the consultation exercise in parallel with the work.

It was the view of a number of Members that there should be no further work undertaken on the new structure until the regulations were available. It was felt that it would be premature to devise a new structure until the full picture was known. Councillor Chambers moved, and it was duly seconded, that "the Council do not proceed with any new political structure nor undertake any further work until the regulations were published by the Government and a report considered by the Committee".

Other Members wanted the Council to continue to work out the principles of a new scheme which could be amended slightly, if necessary, when the regulations were published. Councillor Mrs Cheetham, a Member of the OJWP said it would be useful for the Working Party to continue to develop possible models to assist in the decision on the preferred course of action once the regulations had been issued. Councillor Gayler then moved the following amendment which was duly seconded.

- "1 The Council agrees in principle to adopt a modified committee system as the basis for the new constitution it is required to formulate by the Local Government Act 2000.
- 2 The Organisation Joint Working Party be tasked with working out details of the new structure having regard to the principles set out in paragraph 7 of this report for final approval by the Council."

On being put to the vote the amendment was lost. It was then

RECOMMENDED that the Council does not proceed with any new political structure nor undertake any further work until the regulations are published by the Government and a report is considered by the Committee.

122 PROVISION OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION

During the discussion on this item Councillor P Chambers declared a non pecuniary interest.

The Committee received a report which discussed the options for improving the provision of community information in Uttlesford. At the last meeting, Members had received the results of a survey undertaken in Thaxted and Stansted Mountfitchet to establish the need for the provision of community information and more specifically community information centres. Since that meeting it had transpired that the Post Office had not delivered a number of questionnaires. These had now been analysed but the conclusions remained unchanged from the previous report and gave no further evidence to support the provision of local information centres.

Officers had been tasked with producing a comprehensive project plan for the provision of community information but asked Members to give a steer as to their preferred ways of achieving these objectives. The report set out the current types of information provided and the opportunities to enhance the current provision of information. There were also opportunities to extend services and increase access to advice particularly in partnership with others.

Following the decision at the last meeting not to pursue the purchase of Barclays Bank in Thaxted, Councillor Chambers reported on positive discussions that had taken place with Essex Police regarding possible partnership arrangements for the provision of Community Information Centres in Thaxted, Great Dunmow and Stansted.

A number of Members still considered the questionnaire to have been flawed and that a 6% response was not a representative sample. Councillor A Dean added that it was not logical to conclude that the Community Information Centres were not needed. Councillor Gayler said that the report gave a number of options and he suggested a possible way forward.

RESOLVED that

- 1 Officers investigate the options as presented in Councillor Chambers' report and full plans and costings be prepared,
- 2 the Council considers options b, c and e of paragraph 22 of the report as a priority in developing community information in Uttlesford.

123 UTTLESFORD LOCAL AGENDA 21 STRATEGY

Members were advised of the responses to the Local Agenda 21 Strategy Document. Most of the responses were generally supportive. Some issues had been raised and the report summarised these and explained those that officers felt were appropriate to be included within the Strategy. Councillor Copping asked that a reference to the "protection of a balanced community" be included.

Councillor A Dean referred to a recent meeting that he had attended concerning Local Agenda 21 issues. This had discussed arrangements for employees travelling to work and he asked what action was being taken at the Council offices in this respect. He was advised that arrangements had been made for an officer to attend staff team meetings to raise awareness of a number of aspects of sustainability.

RESOLVED that the Uttlesford Local Agenda 21 Strategy be adopted subject to the modifications recommended in the report.

124 BALANCES AND RESERVES

A report was submitted giving details of balances and reserves at 31 March 2000.

125 EMERGENCY PLANNING WORKING PARTY

The Minutes of the meeting of the Emergency Planning Working Party held on 6 July 2000 were received.

126 HIGHWAYS SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the meeting of the Highways Sub-Committee held on 12 July 2000 were received.

Minute HW3 - Saffron Walden Town Centre

Councillor Tyler expressed his concern about the lack of progress in the review of the Saffron Walden Town Centre Management Scheme. Officers stated that the Working Group had met and a consultation letter had been sent to organisations in the town which would now need to be followed up.

127 AIRPORT WORKING PARTY

The Minutes of the meeting of the Airport Working Party held on 17 July 2000 were received.

128 BEST VALUE SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the meeting of the Best Value Sub-Committee held on 24 July 2000 were received.

129 INTERNAL SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the meeting of the Internal Services Sub-Committee held on 20 September 2000 were received, and consideration of Minute IS20 was deferred for consideration later in the meeting.

130 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100A(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 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

131 WRITE OFFS

The Committee received a schedule of outstanding non-domestic rate debts recommended for write-off.

RESOLVED that the schedule of outstanding non-domestic rate debts amounting to £24,405.45 be written off.

132 RESULTS OF TENDERING PROCESS FOR INSTALLATION OF CLOSED CIRCUIT TELEVISION CCTV

Members were advised of the results of the tendering process for the installation of CCTV. The associated revenue costs had been greater than expected.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the tender submitted by ADT be accepted,
- 2 the additional costs associated with the CCTV project be included in the draft revenue budgets for 2001/02, and
- 3 officers be authorised to progress the CCTV project on confirmation of the revenue budgets for 2001/02.

133 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The Chief Executive summarised the main points of the report considered by the Internal Services Sub-Committee at its meeting on 20 September. The Committee had before it the recommendation of that Sub-Committee.

Councillor Copping commented that the Sub-Committee minute did not convey the strength of the views expressed by Members. He was unconvinced by the proposals.

In answer to a question from Councillor Tyler, the Chief Executive explained that the phrase "implementation process" embraced a range of issues including timing and costs. Councillor Tyler was very concerned at possible detrimental effects on the Council's services and considered that implementation of the proposals should be deferred for at least 12 months.

Members generally agreed with the proposed structure, but a number shared the reservations with regard to timing. There were also concerns at the effect of some of the proposals on individual officers. Others took the view that there was never a good time to embark on any restructuring exercise. Councillor Dean considered that Members should not fear starting the process now so long as they achieved the right result for the Council.

Commenting on the points raised by Members, the Chief Executive recognised that there was never an ideal time to embark on an exercise such as this. It was important, but difficult, to separate the direction to be set for the Council from the future of some individuals. The latter issue had to be dealt within the implementation process, which clearly needed more discussion. The report formed part of the Best Value review of Political and Management Structures and Member Support, it was not a separate set of proposals.

It was proposed and seconded that "the structure as set out in Annex B to the report be welcomed and approved but that its implementation be deferred for twelve months."

An amendment was then proposed and seconded that the recommendation of the Internal Services Sub-Committee be approved as printed. On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried.

RESOLVED that the structure as set out in Annex B to the report be welcomed and approved but that its implementation be deferred to enable the implementation process, including additional financial information, to be considered further, not later than the next meeting of the Internal Services Sub-Committee.

The meeting ended at 11.05 pm.