

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN on 19 DECEMBER 2000

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

Officers in attendance:- Mrs E Forbes, Mrs M Cox, J B Dickson, A Forrow, Mrs C Hughes, Mrs S McLagan and M T Purkiss.

188 **APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R D Green.

189 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2000 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

190 **BUSINESS ARISING**

(i) **Minute 116 – Bollards at Park Road, Stansted**

Under this Minute Councillor A Dean considered that for the sake of clarity the Council should reaffirm its position on this issue. He proposed and it was duly seconded that

“the Council supports attempts to return the road to a cul-de-sac”. Other Members did not think it appropriate for the Council to side with one party as it had a role as a mediator. The Chief Executive advised that it was imprudent to declare an emphatic position at this time. On being put to the vote the proposal was lost.

(ii) **Minute 121 – Political Management of the Council**

Councillor Chambers had circulated a paper which suggested the principles of a possible way forward for a new political management structure. The proposal was in line with the Government's option for a streamlined committee system for Councils with a population of less than 85,000. He thought that the majority of Members had expressed a preference for these alternative arrangements rather than the executive/non-executive system.

Councillor Gayler asked why this report had been prepared at this time when it had been decided at the last meeting of the Council that any decision on the new management structure should be deferred until the regulations had been issued. He felt that any new arrangements should be worked up through the

proper channels, starting with the Organisation Joint Working Party. He moved an amendment, which was duly seconded that “the Council pursue a streamlined committee system and the Organisation Joint Working Party work out detailed proposals”. On being put to the vote this amendment was lost.

A number of Members considered that asking this Committee to approve details of a new committee system undermined the work of the Organisation Joint Working Party. Members then questioned Councillor Chambers on various issues raised in the paper including the terms of reference of some committees and arrangements for scrutiny.

It was then

RESOLVED that the Council pursue a streamlined committee system according to the report and that the Organisation Joint Working Party be asked to work up detailed proposals.

Councillor A Dean commented that effective leadership involved taking your “troops” with you. He considered that the decision just taken had alienated half of the Council on a very important issue. This was not conducive to making progress at a difficult time.

191 **ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES**

(i) Rent Arrears Write Offs

The meeting of the Housing Services Sub-Committee on 21 November 2000 had recommended that two former tenants’ rent debts be written off.

RESOLVED that the list of former tenant rent arrears, totalling £2,182.80, be written off.

192 **CALCULATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE 2001/02**

Members were advised of the calculation of the Council Tax Base 2001/02.

RECOMMENDED that:

- 1 the report of the Corporate Director – Finance for the calculation of the Council’s tax base for year 2001/02 be approved.
- 2 pursuant to the Corporate Director – Finance’s report in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Tax Base) Regulations 1992, the amounts calculated by the Uttlesford District Council as a Council Tax base for each part of its area for the year 2001/02 be as listed in the attached Appendix 3.

193

NEW HOUSING FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK FOR NEGATIVE SUBSIDY AUTHORITIES

Members were advised that the Government had now issued the arrangements for transitional measures for negative subsidy authorities to be implemented from April 2001. They received a report which set out the implications for Uttlesford. One measure covered the discretionary arrangements between the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and General Fund that were available to offset the loss of "negative subsidy" transferred out of the HRA under the new framework. Details were given of the maximum discretionary transfers. Any use of the discretion could only be transitional and was not available after a five year period. It was now clear that the use of the transitional discretion would not impact on rent setting decisions for the HRA. For Uttlesford this meant that effectively the discretion was between supporting General Fund expenditure in a sustainable way or using capital receipts to fund housing planned maintenance costs.

There had also been an unexpected decision concerning changes to the amount of interest earned on Capital Receipts which had to be transferred into the HRA. For Uttlesford this meant that for 2001/02 the General Fund should be £409,000 better off and the HRA correspondingly worse off by the same amount. In practice, the loss to the HRA could be more than off-set by transferring the planned maintenance programme from revenue to the HRA Capital Programme.

It was concluded that in terms of the base budget, the size of the real shortfall was £565,371 and not the £1 million included in the indicative financial model approved by the Policy and Resources Committee on 4 July 2000.

The Leader of the Council commented that the amount of relief was better than expected and he was pleased that the lobbying of Ministers had, in this instance appeared to have paid off. However, there was still a considerable shortfall and he hoped that the Council would use the transitional relief prudently and achieve a sustainable budget position as soon as possible.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Council's Budget Strategy be now reviewed by the Budget Strategy Working Group for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee.
- 2 the Budget Strategy Working Group consider a target date for the Council to achieve as soon as possible a long term sustainable Budget for consideration by the next meeting of the Committee.

194

TREASURY MANAGEMENT

The Committee received a report setting out details of the Council's borrowing and investments. The report also recommended changes in the Council's lending policy to a ratings based system. The parameters would still be extremely prudent and only the most secure major national institutions would fall within them. This, however, would exclude two institutions which the Council had used extensively and it was considered that these should continue to be used.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the criteria for acceptable banking sector counter parties be amended as set out in the report with the addition of Northern Rock and the Co-operative Bank.
- 2 the criteria for local authority, building society and public utility counter parties remain unchanged.
- 3 the limit of lending to any one counter-party remain at £3 million or 30% of funds invested whichever was the greater, groups being considered as one borrower.

195

DRAFT POLICY AND RESOURCES REVENUE ESTIMATES 2001/02

The Committee received the draft Service Plan and Revenue Estimates for 2001/02. The Committee had set a target that the 2001/02 budget for direct expenditure should not exceed the 2000/01 total. The estimate for 2001/02, excluding the growth items, showed a reduction of £259,540. All Business Centre Managers had been asked to identify 5% savings targets. The report set out the target savings from the various services and the savings that had been approved by the Budget Strategy Group. There were two items of uncommitted growth for this Committee including the staffing arrangements in the Revenues and Benefits service and the Young Workers' Allowance, both of which would be decided in the next round of committees.

Some Members queried the impact of the 5% savings on the services provided by the Council. Councillor A Dean asked that information on the implications of such savings on individual services be available at the next round of Committee meetings.

Members were then informed of a situation within the Personnel and Office Services Business Centre. A temporary post of clerical assistant had been created in 1998. As the personnel function had developed, the post had become increasingly important in supporting the three specialist staff, and there was a clear need for this post to be made permanent. A permanent contract had been issued in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Chairman of the Internal Services Sub-Committee. In the current financial year the post was being funded by a transfer from the personnel consultancy budget head. The estimates for 2001/02 showed the post as unavoidable additional

expenditure. Members were asked if they wished to reduce the personnel consultancy budget for the following year so as to avoid any overall increase in personnel related costs.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Committee consider the draft Revenue Estimates 2000/01 at the next meeting.
- 2 the action taken by Officers in consultation with the Leader of the Council in respect of the post of Clerical Assistant in the Personnel and Office Services Business Centre be confirmed and the post continue to be funded from the personnel consultancy budget.
- 3 Members consider the impact on services of the 5% savings exercise at the next round of Committee meetings.

196

DRAFT GENERAL FUND SERVICE PLAN SUMMARY AND REVENUE ESTIMATES 2001/02

The Committee received a report which brought together the overall draft General Fund Revenue Estimate of Direct Cost and Income for the revised estimate 2000/01 and the estimates for 2001/02. The budget had been prepared in the context of the Council's difficult budget situation and an overall General Fund savings target of £250,000. Members noted that a significant amount of financial information was still incomplete including some potential growth items, the Capital and Leasing Programme and forward projections. It was felt that no decisions could properly be taken until this information was available, and Members asked that the Estimates be considered further at the special meeting of the Committee on 8 February 2001.

Members then considered a request from the Leisure PFI Board to approve a growth item of £80,000 to cover consultancy and other costs, the additional expenditure to be funded from the management of change reserve. These costs had already been included in the Amenities and Planning and Development budgets for 2001/02.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Service Plan summary and Revenue Estimates 2001/02 be considered at the next meeting and
- 2 a growth item of £80,000 to cover consultancy and other costs associated with the Leisure PFI Board to be funded from the Management of Change Reserve be approved.

197

COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The Committee was asked to approve a proposed Communications Strategy for Uttlesford. The Strategy had been based on the principles approved by Members in November 1999, and the recommended aims to improve and develop communications that had been suggested by the Best Value Review of Communications. The achievement of the targets and action plan flowing from the proposed strategy would have resource and staffing implications.

A further report on these issues would be made following the outcome of the Best Value Reviews for Communications and Committee Management.

Councillor Sell drew attention to the recent IDeA report which had highlighted some deficiencies in the Council's communications. He felt that if improvements were to be made, a full-time Public Relations Officer should be considered. Councillor Gayler added that it was shortsighted to remove £10,000 as proposed in the 5% Budget Reduction Exercise. Other Members felt that in the current financial climate it was not realistic to appoint a dedicated PR Officer. There was some discussion as to the merits of a Council Newspaper rather than the current "Council Page". The general feeling was that the Council Page was more likely to be up to date and was less costly. However, its presentation could be improved and its circulation widened. Members asked for an action plan for the implications of the various proposals.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Council Page be developed and improved.
- 2 the issue of Citizens' Panels, Focus Groups, surveys and questionnaires and Citizens' Juries be referred to the Organisation Joint Working Party.
- 3 the Communications Strategy be approved subject to a costed action plan being put forward to a future meeting of the Committee.

198

APPEARANCE IN MAGISTRATES' COURTS

The Committee was asked to authorise various Officers to appear on behalf of the Council in proceedings before a Magistrates' Court. This would give greater flexibility and reduce the cost of employing solicitors in private practice.

RESOLVED that

Michael Brean, Revenues Services Manager; Susan Ellis, Revenues Team Leader; Ann Parry-Jones, Revenues Team Leader; Christopher Andrew Bannister, Revenues and Overpayments Officer; Julian Sayer, Revenues Quality and Development Officer; Christopher Casey, Senior Investigations Officer and Sarah Roper, Trainee Investigations Officer, be so authorised pursuant to Section 223 of the Local Government Act 1972.

199 **POLITICAL MANAGEMENT – GUIDANCE ON NEW COUNCIL CONSTITUTIONS**

Members were given details on the guidance on new Council constitutions issued by the Department of the Environment, Transport, and the Regions, and also asked to agree a mechanism for enabling the necessary consultation to take place at the appropriate time. Given the amount of work to be done, if the Government's timetable was to be met, it was possible that decisions would be needed at times which would not fit the Committee timetable. These decisions would relate both to the content of the consultations/information and the methods to be used.

RESOLVED that

- 1 a time-limited task group be established for the sole purpose of agreeing the content of any information/consultation document prepared for the public on possible future structures and the consultation methods to be used,
- 2 this group to comprise two Conservatives, two Liberal Democrats one Labour and one Independent to be nominated by Group Leaders.

200 **PERIODIC ELECTORAL REVIEW OF UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL: FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

Details were given of the final recommendations of the Local Government Commission for England on the future electoral arrangements for Uttlesford. The recommendations were almost identical to the draft except for three changes of ward name.

RESOLVED that the final recommendations of the Local Government Commission for England on the future electoral arrangements for Uttlesford District Council be formally endorsed.

201 **COMMUNITY INFORMATION CENTRES**

Members were advised of progress made towards providing Community Information Centres (CICs) in Thaxted and Stansted Mountfitchet. In Thaxted, the owner of 7 Town Street (previously Barclay's Bank) had agreed to lease the ground floor of the building to the Council for 5 years at an annual cost of £10,000. Essex Police wished to use the facility to provide a community police contact point and had confirmed that they would meet 60% of the capital costs associated with altering the ground floor and also 60% of the on-going revenue costs.

The Thaxted Information Centre, currently housed in The Cottage, adjacent to Clarence House, was to move to the new building. The Information Centre currently received a grant from this Council towards its rent. With regards to the

Community Information Centre, an Information Assistant would be provided initially on Friday mornings. Once demand had been established this might increase to three mornings a week. Arrangements would also be made for Council Officers to provide surgeries. The Council was not in a position to provide cash/ATM facilities at the centre because of the onerous security arrangements needed and the costs of providing and maintaining such facilities. Alterations would be required to the building and these were detailed in the report. The estimated revenue costs associated with the scheme could amount to £19,270 per annum. There was already a revenue budget of £20,000 per annum toward CIC provision in Thaxted and Stansted Mountfitchet. It was hoped that the centre could be operational by the first Friday in April 2001.

With regard to Stansted, the possibility of providing an information centre in the police station did not appear to be practical due to the location of the station and the fact that it was extremely busy and fully staffed. Discussions with other partners about the availability of the Peter Kirk School for possible joint arrangements were still continuing.

Councillor Foley asked if Officers could pursue the possibility of a bank presence at the building or an ATM machine. Councillor O'Neill felt it would be prudent for the five year lease to include a break out clause. Members hoped that funds would be available for the Community Information Centre at Stansted when the need arose.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Council enter into arrangements with Essex Police for a use of 7 Town Street, Thaxted
- 2 the Council enter into a lease for use of 7 Town Street, Thaxted on terms to be agreed by the Chief Executive
- 3 work proceeds, in partnership with Essex Police, to establish a CIC from April 2001
- 4 the Council actively pursue the option of establishing a Community Information Centre in Stansted
- 5 Officers investigate the provision of ATM/cash facilities subject to an appropriate risk assessment.

202

EXTERNAL LIGHTING OF DUNMOW OFFICES

Councillors R J Copping and M A Gayler declared non-pecuniary interests in this item and did not speak or vote.

Great Dunmow Town Council had requested that this Council fund the provision of flood lighting of the District Council Offices at Great Dunmow.

RESOLVED that the request be refused.

203 **PROGRESS ON BV PPI ITEMS**

Members received a progress report on the Best Value Performance Indicators.

204 **AIRPORT WORKING PARTY**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Airport Working Party held on 16 October and the special meeting held on 4 December 2000 were received.

205 **HIGHWAYS SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Highways Sub-Committee held on 18 October and the special meeting held on 28 November 2000 were received.

206 **BEST VALUE SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Minutes of the meetings of the Best Value Sub-Committee held on 25 September and 27 November 2000 were received. Members considered the recommendations under Minute BV20. It was felt that the recommendations from the Best Value Reviews should be agreed by the relevant Committees or Sub-Committees. In respect of the Grants Review, the Head of Leisure and Amenities drew attention to the timetable for dealing with grants and the possible impact of referring the recommendations back to the Amenities Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the recommendations in Minute BV20(ii) and (iv) be referred back to the competent Committee or Sub-Committee.
- 2 Recommendations BV20(i), (iii) and (v) be approved.

207 **INTERNAL SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Internal Services Sub-Committee held on 6 December 2000 were received.

RESOLVED that the recommendation in Minute IS24 (ii) - Gardener/Supervisor for Bridge End Gardens and IS26 - Draft IT Capital Programme 2001 be approved

208 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded 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

209 PAYROLL SERVICES

Members received a progress report on the options for the provision of the payroll services.

RESOLVED that a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

210 PROPOSED STAFF CHANGES FOR REVENUES SERVICES

Members were advised of developments within the Revenues Services Business Centre and of proposed changes to the approved structure. The report covered the staffing of the business centre and the consequent costs.

RESOLVED that a growth item of £27,900 be approved for an additional 2.5 posts.

211 TENDERS

Tenders had been invited from six contractors for the building and window cleaning contract for the District Council offices, depots, toilets, sheltered accommodation, museum and the TIC. Four tenders had been received. In this instance the lowest bidder for the building cleaning had not submitted for the window cleaning contract and it had been necessary to split the contract. It was noted that the figures were higher than the budget for 2001/02.

RESOLVED that the contract be split and awarded to Superclean Services at £137,617 for the building cleaning contract and Strand Limited at £9,802.50 for the window cleaning contract.

212 MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

The Committee had before it the report of the Chief Executive to the Internal Services Sub-Committee of 6 December 2000 on Management Structures and Minute IS29 of the Sub-Committee's meeting. The Sub-Committee had recommended that the proposals contained in the report be approved and that the member appointment panel should consist of 2 Liberal Democrats, 2 Conservatives and 1 Independent.

The Chief Executive reminded Members that the report was part of the Best Value Review of Political and Management Structures. It did not repeat all the issues dealt with in an earlier report but summarised the principles underlying the restructuring. The theme of increasing the council's ability to work corporately had been echoed in the report of the IDeA Review Group. The structure agreed would provide for a tighter organisation, and assist in succession planning. It would be flexible enough to respond to further developments. The staff had gone through a protracted period of uncertainty and it was important to make progress for their sake. Further financial information was available if required.

Councillor Copping remained unconvinced. The IDeA review had sought clarity in the rationale for the restructuring. He did not see it. He was concerned at the large sums of money that would be spent on this and inevitably on other future reorganisations. He could not support the restructuring without a more detailed implementation plan.

Councillor Copping also considered that the likely costs of what was only a partial restructuring were likely to exceed the maximum indicated in the report. The Chief Executive circulated details of the relevant figures for information.

Councillor Chambers emphasised that the new structure would provide the necessary flexibility to tackle change. He stressed that the figures indicated in the report were maximum figures. If the Council wished to go forward on a management structure, which had been agreed in principle, it should do so now in the interests of staff. The structure was a sensible, flexible way forward, which would produce financial savings but also deal with change. Councillor Chambers then proposed the recommendations of the Internal Services Sub-Committee and the proposal was duly seconded.

Councillor Dean said he had previously supported the structure and supporting arrangements but had had reservations about the process. He had reconsidered the proposals in the context of Best Value and would have great difficulty in explaining to the outside world the benefit to service delivery of what we were spending. The rationale had to be considered, as did the challenges facing the authority. The timing of changes was always difficult, but when changes were made the rationale needed to be clear.

Councillor O'Neill considered that the structure made good sense.

In relation to the benefits, the Chief Executive said that the Council had traditionally been orientated towards professional and technical rather than managerial expertise. The benefits would be tighter, better quality management across the Council and would thus be more indirect than direct. There were a relatively large number of senior managers compared with other councils of a similar size, and there was sometimes more emphasis on specialism than management. Increasingly, local government was required to look across the organisation and not in vertical lines. Short term costs were a potential deterrent but were inevitable unless an evolutionary approach was adopted that was so long term that the objectives of change could be lost sight of. The

structures of other similar sized authorities were broadly similar to that proposed.

Following further discussion of the rationale for and the costs of the restructuring, Councillor Dean moved the following amendment, which was duly seconded:

“that a management restructuring is implemented at the earliest feasible date after the Council is satisfied that the following conditions have been met:

- 1 The purpose of the changes has been linked to the Council’s requirements for prioritised service delivery.
- 2 The Council has decided the substance of its preferred future political management arrangements and the support that this will require from its officers.
- 3 The cost implications of any structural changes have been fully evaluated and explained to Members.
Furthermore, to assist the achievement of these supporting activities, Members agree to meet early in 2001 in workshop session to address the matters appropriate to them and to consider the District Auditor’s Letter and the report from the Local Government Improvement Programme where these may be relevant.”

A recorded vote was requested and Members cast their votes as follows:

For the amendment

Councillors R J Copping
A Dean
M L Foley
M A Gayler
G Sell
P A Wilcock

Against the amendment

Councillors Mrs M A Caton
R P Chambers
D M Jones
R A Merrion
R J O’Neill
Mrs S V Schneider
R B Tyler

The amendment was therefore declared lost by 7 votes to 6.

Members debated further a number of procedural issues. Councillor D M Jones then moved an amendment that recommendation 5 of the report be replaced by a requirement that, if any potential compulsory redundancy arose as a result of the implementation process, the matter be referred to the Internal Services Sub-Committee.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried by 7 votes to 6. It was then

RESOLVED that the recommendations contained in the report to the Internal Services Sub-Committee meeting on 6 December 2000 concerning Management Structure be approved, subject to the following amendments:

- 1 The Member panel referred to in recommendation 3 consist of 2 Liberal

- 2 Democrats, 2 Conservatives and 1 Independent
Recommendation 5 be replaced by the following:

“If any potential compulsory redundancy arises in the implementation process, the matter be referred to the Internal Services Sub-Committee”

213 **SEASON’S GREETINGS**

The Chairman wished all present a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and Members and Staff responded in kind.

The meeting ended at 11.40pm

