

RESOURCES COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 24 JANUARY 2002

Present:- Councillor Mrs M A Caton – Chairman.
Councillors R A E Clifford, A Dean, M A Gayler, P G F Lewis, R A Merrion, D J Morson, R J O'Neill, Mrs S V Schneider and R B Tyler.

Also present:- Councillor R P Chambers.

Also present at the invitation of the Chairman: - Councillors R J Copping, Mrs C M Little, and R W L Stone.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs E Forbes, Mrs L J Crowe, D B Demery, J B Dickson, J Mitchell and Mrs V Rogacs.

RE34 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor M L Foley.

RE35 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2001 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

RE36 MATTERS ARISING

(i) Minute RE21 – Resources Committee Draft Budget 2002/03

In answer to a question from Councillor O'Neill, Officers confirmed that the Assistant Chief Executive was Monitoring Officer.

(ii) Minute RE26 – The Establishment of a Policy Officer Post

Councillor A Dean said that since the last Resources Committee meeting in November, it had become apparent to him that more corporate support was needed to deal with the pressure arising from Government initiatives. Councillor Chambers reminded Members that officers had been looking at making better use of existing staff to carry out this work in-house. The Chief Executive said that some analysis had been carried out but officers had not yet identified how all of the extra work could be achieved. Councillor Mrs Caton drew attention to the financial constraints on the budget and it was

RESOLVED that the question of how policy work might be dealt with be included in next year's Best Value Review of Legal and Monitoring Services.

RE37

REPORT ON THE BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CORPORATE SERVICES – OFFICE ACCOMMODATION

Members received a report on the Best Value review option of office accommodation as an element of asset management. The report recommended that the principle of administrative centralisation at the Saffron Walden offices be agreed and further consultation and negotiation should proceed to achieve this objective with future reports submitted as appropriate.

During 2000/01 the District Audit had recommended better utilisation of office accommodation as the current arrangements were, by comparison with other authorities, using space less effectively with costs far higher than the average. The Head of Planning now had responsibility for building surveying and engineering. Both services are located at Saffron Walden as was the Corporate Director who held the planning portfolio. The Planning staff were based at the Dunmow Office and delivered the planning service for the whole of the district from this site, supplemented to a degree by plans being held at Saffron Walden Town Council and Thaxted CIC for inspection. The Dunmow building was also the location for the Community Information Centre which included a cashiering facility and was a base for the CAB and UCVS. A weekly surgery was held by Housing services at the Dunmow office. The adjacent Council depot might also be relocated within three years. At present the planning service was delivered from one location and isolated from other services delivered in the district. The location arrangements did not assist effective corporate management. The relocation of staff to the Saffron Walden office would ensure that all staff have equal access to information and facilities. However, it would be necessary to develop the Information Centre to ensure that service delivery at Dunmow was enhanced.

Members were informed of the consultations that had taken place with Members, staff, Town and Parish Councils and the Dunmow Chamber of Trade.

It would be necessary to use all available space at London Road and review the existing accommodation arrangements comprehensively. Careful thought would need to be given to parking arrangements. Some form of control would be necessary, probably barriers with swipe card access.

Councillor Chambers said that the ongoing Best Value review of corporate services had been Member led. Officers had produced a very thorough report which dealt with 1) the principle of centralisation and 2) implementation.

The Director of Resources went through the principle of administrative centralisation. The CIC in Dunmow would remain but be stronger. Hot desking would be made available. Service delivery was the most important factor, not the financial implications. The District Auditor had carried out a thorough value for money study on asset management during 2000/01 and his recommendations were covered by the terms of reference agreed by Members last April. At this point the meeting went into private session and it was

RESOLVED that under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of

business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in paragraphs 8 and 11 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

In answer to a question from Councillor Gayler, officers said that the maintenance costs and rates of the vacated offices at Dunmow would be the responsibility of the lessee. Councillor Gayler said that the move could be more difficult for the staff in Saffron Walden due to extra people being moved into the same space. There were a number of concerns for Dunmow residents that appeared not to have been answered. He could not support the principle of the move as there needed to be a lot more comparisons made.

In answer to a question from Councillor A Dean, officers confirmed that the running costs of the lodge building had not been taken into account. Councillor Dean felt that the figure of £16,000 to make the lodge premises habitable was a little low. The Director of Resources said that an estimated capital one off set up cost of £145,000 was consistent with figures presented on other schemes. There would be a significant saving of £100,000 pa after five years with cumulative estimated revenue savings of £257,000 over the first five years. Councillor Tyler said that the Council had a duty to cut costs and maintain service delivery. Councillor Mrs Little expressed concern that the Saffron Walden offices were already overflowing and expansion of new development was currently mainly in the south of the district.

In answer to a question from Councillor Morson the one off set up costs would be financed from capital resources. Decentralisation would give an opportunity to hold more surgeries.

Councillor O'Neill said that the District Auditor had shown an overwhelming case for the move in financial terms. In operational terms the advantage was for staff to be in one place which in turn was good for morale.

The Chief Executive said that there had been much emphasis on service delivery and the objective was to improve the service to the public of Uttlesford. Councillor A Dean then proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Gayler, that the present service should be maintained until the Best Value review of Planning had been delivered in 2002/03. On being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

The public were then readmitted to the meeting.

RECOMMENDED to Council that

- 1 the principle of relocating Planning staff at Saffron Walden be agreed,
- 2 following further consultation a detailed action plan be prepared to cover such issues as car parking and relocation arrangements within Saffron Walden offices,
- 3 the market for leasing/selling potentially surplus accommodation be explored, and
- 4 improved service delivery through website development, the provision of hot desk sites and the Community Information Centre be progressed.

RE38 RESOURCES BUDGETS AND SERVICE PLANS 2002 - 03

Members received the draft revenue estimates for final consideration. The detailed figures now included savings approved at the last meeting, internal charges and developments since 15 November 2001. The figures were subject to final checks for consistency and accuracy and did not include any new growth or savings items, the implications of any new capital programme items or the impact on internal charges of any growth or savings. Officers had prepared service plans and full budgets for 2002/03 in the light of the previous Administration proposals for savings and the report now also included additional recommended savings.

The Director of Resources reported that there would be a Special Meeting of the Resources Committee on 4 February to discuss the draft capital and leasing programmes 2002/03 – 2005/06 and the draft general fund revenue estimates 2002/05 and to make recommendations to Council on 12 February.

RESOLVED that the Administration's additional proposals for savings be included in the draft revenue estimates as follows

Office Services	£28,000
CMT contingency	£8,000
Finance contingency	£5,000
PR development reduction	<u>£5,000</u>
	£46,000

RE39 BUDGET STRATEGY – SUMMARY GENERAL FUND POSITION

Members received the latest summary general fund service budget positions for the revised 2001 – 2002 and 2002 – 2003 estimates. The report reflected the figures presented during this cycle of meetings and as far as possible within the constraints of the current committee timetable any further decisions made by individual committees.

Confirmation of the final Local Government settlement figures were not expected until 30 January 2002 and therefore only the provisional grant figures were included. The Director of Resources also stated that final estimates were still being calculated on external factors such as interest on balances. Accordingly, a Special Meeting of this Committee had been arranged for 4 February 2002 to make final recommendations for council tax setting. The report sought confirmation both of the overall Committee budget figures and the preferred level of council tax increase to be used by officers when preparing the final report for that meeting. Members noted that £5,000 for Saffire had been deleted from the Administration's suggested savings. £13,000 would be added from Day Centres giving a total saving of £46,000.

Councillor A Dean queried the £25,000 shortfall in the Community and Leisure budget. The Director of Resources confirmed that this was due to the loss of the Meals on Wheels contract in which Essex County Council reimbursed the District Council for indirect charges. Councillor A Dean then proposed that

savings of £85,000 be made from the overall Planning Services budget. The proposal was duly seconded.

Councillor A Dean said that he was very concerned at the loss of the Policy Officer. If the savings were made from the Planning Services budget, £35,000 could then be added to the Resources budget which would enable the Council to employ a Best Value Officer. On being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

Councillor Copping drew attention to the Museum Society's Acquisition and Display Fund. As it appeared the Museum could use this fund the Council could make further savings by reducing payments made to the Museum.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the overall General Fund net service budget figure to be used be £7,427,990 adjusted as follows:-

Bridge End Gardens	£12,190
Additional Resource savings	(46,000)
Assisted travel	22,340
Day Centre	(13,000)
- 2 6% be the preferred percentage council tax increase, subject to external factors and officers identifying any additional savings.

RE40

COMMUNICATIONS

Members were informed of action taken to implement the Council's communications strategy since the Committee's meeting in September 2000. The report recommended that the Committee approve arrangements for partnership working with the Uttlesford PCT with effect from 1 April 2002. Some Members expressed concern about using free newspapers for distributing Council information. The Chairman reminded Members about the high cost of using other methods of communication.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the introduction of arrangements for partnership working with the Uttlesford Primary Care Trust as outlined in the report take effect from 1 April 2002.
- 2 Officers be authorised to implement the arrangements within the limits of the Council's public relations budget.
- 3 A further report be made to the Resources Committee in January 2003.

RE41 CONSULTATION DOCUMENT ON ESSEX MAGISTRATES' COURT PREMISES PFI SCHEME

Previously Members had received a report of plans to replace Magistrates' Courthouses throughout the County including a proposal for a new courthouse at Great Dunmow to replace the Courts then existing at Braintree, Epping, Great Dunmow, Halstead and Saffron Walden. These proposals had been superseded by the Government's decision to apply the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to Magistrates' Courts. The PFI Scheme was now the only way that new courthouses could be obtained. It was now considered that in the long term the optimum number of courthouses for the county should be five. The site which would serve Uttlesford was proposed to be at either Harlow or Great Dunmow. The current proposal was that northwest Essex be served by a single new courthouse comprising four courtrooms to be built in or around Harlow. Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED that

- 1 Members support constructing a local Administration of Justice building in Uttlesford,
- 2 if the building had to be in Harlow it should be situated not more than one mile from available public transport accessible from Uttlesford.

RE42 IT PROGRAMME 2002/03

Members received details of the various information technology projects being considered for inclusion in the draft 2002/03 IT Programme. It was recommended that the sum of £150,000 be included in the draft capital programme to supplement the specific capital grant provided for Electronic Government (e-government) of £200,000. As the cost of the draft programme exceeded available funding it was recommended that priorities be identified by the e-government Member Task Group and a further report be submitted to this Committee in March 2002.

RESOLVED that

- 1 in addition to the specific Capital Government grant of £200,000 in 2002/03 the sum of £150,000 be included in the draft Capital Programme for 2002/03,
- 2 the e-government Task Group to establish which projects should be regarded as priority for funding, and
- 3 a further report be made to this Committee in March 2002 based upon the recommendations of the Task Group.

RE43 PROPOSED PERSONNEL POLICY NOTE 26 – REDEPLOYMENT

Members received a Proposed Personnel Policy Note (PPN26) which had been developed in consultation with Corporate Management Team, Heads of Service and Unison. It was designed to be used if either PPN 24 Redundancy Policy and Procedure was invoked or an employee was unable to continue in their current role due to a disability as defined in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

RESOLVED that Personnel Policy Note 26 to be used in the circumstances outlined in the report with immediate effect.

RE44 STAFFING UPDATE

Members received a report, for information, showing every vacancy, the date it arose, the job title and the decision taken since the last date of the table prepared for the previous meeting of the Committee.

RE45 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.

RE46 PROPERTY MAINTENANCE – STAFFING

Members received a report proposing the introduction of an additional post of plumber at the Newport Property Maintenance depot to meet the current and growing workload, improve customer service/care and better meet performance targets.

RESOLVED that an additional post of plumber at the Newport Property Maintenance depot be approved with effect from 1 February 2002.

RE47 DRAFT CONTRACT SERVICES ESTIMATES 2002/03

Members received a report on the revised estimates for 2001/02 and estimates for 2002/03. The report also sought the Committee's view on an issue arising from previously approved expenditure on a health and safety action plan.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the revised estimates for 2001/02 and the original estimates for 2002/03 be approved.

- 2 the sum available for profit share in 2001/02 be calculated including the expenditure on the health and safety action plan.

RE48

NNDR WRITE-OFFS

Members received details of outstanding National Non Domestic Rates listed for write-offs.

RESOLVED that National Non-Domestic Rates amounting to £50,128.70 be written off.

The meeting ended at 10.30 pm.