

**RESOURCES COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 20 MARCH 2003**

Present:- Councillor Mrs M A Caton – Chairman.
Councillors Mrs S V Schneider, A Dean, M A Gayler, D W
Gregory, P G F Lewis, R A Merrion, R J O'Neill and P A
Wilcock.

Also Present:- Councillor R P Chambers.

Officers in attendance:- Miss E Anderson, M Brean, D Demery, J B Dickson,
and J Mitchell.

RE71 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D J Morson and
R B Tyler.

Councillor Gayler declared a non-prejudicial interest as a member of the
LGPS.

RE72 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2003 and of the extraordinary
meeting held on 5 February 2003 were received, confirmed and signed by the
Chairman as correct records.

RE73 BUSINESS ARISING

**(i) RE56 - Benefactor Contribution - Stansted Mountfitchet Leisure
Centre**

It was reported that a meeting was being set up by the Industrial and
Provident Society with the benefactor and various representatives and an
Officer would be attending to represent the Council.

RE74 STAFFING – COMMUNITY AND LEISURE SERVICES

Recommendation 3 of this report concerning the monitoring of the Leisure
(PFI) contract had been referred from the Community and Leisure Committee
meeting held on 4 March 2003.

The Committee was provided with information on current work within
Community & Leisure Services and was given details of the new monitoring
arrangements for the Leisure (PFI) contract. The majority of work would be

covered by the Head of Community and Leisure Services and the Leisure Manager.

Members felt that there needed to be a good balance between monitoring contracts and providing feedback to committees. Councillor Dean considered that the situation should be kept under careful review and would like to see a review of the overall financial situation. Councillor O'Neill commented that with the amount of staff changes occurring at present in Community and Leisure Services, it was an ideal time to take a fresh look at the staffing structure in this area, taking the budget into account.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the arrangements for monitoring the Leisure (PFI) Contract set out in paragraphs 21 to 23 and Appendix 2 of the report be approved and
- 2 the Committee note the Community and Leisure staffing report.

It was further

RECOMMENDED that the overall Council budget strategy be reviewed by the new Resources Committee at the earliest opportunity.

RE75

STANSTED AIRPORT CAMPAIGN

Councillor Gregory declared a non-prejudicial interest as an employee of Stansted Airport Carz.

The committee was presented with a report, which gave up to date information on the progress of the Stansted Airport campaign and any new commitments and expenditure which had arisen. Councillor Dean reported that he had recently attended a meeting of Group Leaders and Stop Stansted Expansion representatives and informed the Committee of discussions that had taken place.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

RE76

REVENUE SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW 2003/04

Members were asked to consider a report, which detailed the proposed Terms of Reference for the Best Value Review of Revenue Services for 2003/04. The Head of Revenue Services informed Members that the three areas to be reviewed were Council Tax administration, Business Rates administration and Housing and Council Tax Benefit administration. The Housing Benefit Fraud Investigation Best Value Review would take place later in the year.

RECOMMENDED that Scrutiny Committee 2 approve the Terms of Reference for the Revenues Services Best Value Review for 2003/04 at its next meeting on 2 April 2003.

RE77 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2003/04

The Committee was given an update on the latest position on changes to the two key strands of this Council's capital funding strategy – Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG) and the use of Right-to-Buy housing capital receipts. The Committee was advised that these were both current sources of significant cash income for the Council, which were both set to be drastically reduced by Government action. The Director of Resources reported that on 11 February the Council had been informed of the Deputy Prime Minister's announcement that the LASHG would be abolished from 1 April 2003, and how the Government incorrectly thought that there would be no impact on authorities with debt and that the action would only impact on debt free authorities. The Committee was informed that the Leader of the Council had written to the Minister for Local Government to express the Council's concern at the abolishment of the LASHG.

In answer to a question from Councillor Dean, the Director of Resources commented that capital funding amounted to several million pounds but this would be significantly reduced by the Government's proposals. Councillor Dean did not want the Council to be backtracking on its intentions and felt that when the LASHG was abolished, social housing would need to be prioritised and therefore proposed that no change to the housing schemes should take place at present to show determination to improve the stock of social housing in this area. This was put to the vote and was lost by 5 votes to 4.

RECOMMENDED to Council that officers, to avoid the risk of eroding capital reserves:

- 1 progress the housing schemes included in the presented 2003-2004 Capital Programme for LASHG but only to the extent that this will not diminish the Council's cash reserves.
- 2 continue to make representations to ODPM and others that credit approvals are not a satisfactory substitute for nationally pooled cash receipts no longer available to produce an income stream for the Council taxpayer.

RE78 THE PLANNING DELIVERY GRANT

The committee was informed of the Planning Delivery Grant in which the Government had allocated £350 million to 362 qualifying local authorities for the period 2003-2006. Uttlesford had been awarded the sum of £246, 261 for 2003-2004 and the Committee was given examples of how the grant could be

used. Pending the preparation of a listed improvement and delivery plan, Members were asked to consider any further areas where use of the grant could improve performance and service delivery. The Head of Planning and Building Surveying informed the Committee that the Environment and Transport Committee and the Development Control and Licensing Committee had already approved the report.

Councillor Dean congratulated planning services for the work it had carried out recently which had helped to obtain the grant. Members felt that employing independent consultants for the Best Value Review was a good idea and asked for further details. The Committee was informed that the role of the consultants would be to carry out research and facilitate officers to bring together the Best Value Improvement Plan. Members did not disagree with any of the suggested priorities for using the grant as listed in the report and in order to improve performance and service delivery it was

RESOLVED that

- 1 officers prepare a costed improvement and delivery plan for implementing the priorities in paragraph 16 of the report to take maximum advantage of the grant resources available.
- 2 The wording of the first bullet point in paragraph 16 be changed to read "The appointment of independent consultants to assist with and drive forward the Best Value Review of Planning Services".

RE79

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

The Committee was informed of key challenges and planned action with respect to the recent report from the Improvement & Development Agency and was asked to endorse the proposed approach.

RESOLVED that Members endorse the actions identified in Appendix 1 to the report.

RE80

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

The Committee was informed of the Government and Audit Commission's requirements for all Local Authorities to adopt a Code of Corporate Governance, which must be kept under periodic review. The code was also a CPA requirement. Details were given within the report of a proposed initial Code of Corporate Governance and how it should be kept under review. The Director of Resources informed Members that the aim of the code was to install confidence in the parties that the Council deals with by showing transparency and accountability. The report suggested that Scrutiny Committee 2 should be required to monitor and review the document and ensure that it was adhered to.

Members were pleased with the code and felt that it highlighted areas for future action. Councillor Dean commented that it included work areas for improvement such as communications and risk management and Councillor Wilcock felt that the document was moulded towards the work the Council already carries out.

Councillor O'Neill congratulated the Director of Resources for producing a good Corporate Governance code but expressed concern over the final section of the document on "Areas for Future Action". He felt that the items were important but should be shown elsewhere in the code to work towards achieving an observational not inspirational document. The Director of Resources commented that all the points raised could be taken into consideration by Scrutiny Committee 2 in its monitoring and oversight role. Councillor Gayler suggested that Scrutiny Committee 2 discuss the code at its next meeting, before Council on 15 April, to ensure the Committee is satisfied with the content of the document.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 Council at its meeting on 15 April adopts the Code of Corporate Governance set out at Appendix 1 to this report
- 2 Council at its meeting on 15 April approves the monitoring and oversight role for the Scrutiny Committee 2 set out in paragraphs 10 to 12 of this report and that the Council's Constitution be amended accordingly
- 3 this report be referred to Scrutiny Committee 2 for consideration when formulating its future work programme.

RE81

LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME

The committee considered a draft response, from the Employers' Organisation, on the retirement benefit package options for the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) discussion paper, which had been issued by the Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) in Autumn 2002. The draft response had been circulated to all authorities to help in gauging employers' reactions to the key points made. Officers had inserted suggested answers in the questionnaire and Members were asked to either endorse or amend the response as necessary. The Director of Resources informed the Committee of the estimated £30 billion national Council pension shortfall from next year and said that this was twice the amount raised from total Council Tax income. Members agreed with the comments made by officers and recognised the need for the changes to the LGPS.

RESOLVED that the issues raised on the LGPS and the response to the Employers' Organisation questionnaire in Appendix 1 be agreed.

RE82 **TREASURY MANAGEMENT**

The Committee received a report detailing treasury management matters as required by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice for Treasury Management in the Public Sector ("The Code"). The Committee considered proposals regarding the Council's borrowing limits and interest exposure for 2003-04.

RESOLVED that

- 1 The borrowing and interest rate exposure limits set out in Paragraph 6 of the report be approved.
- 2 The Treasury Management Strategy detailed in paragraph 9 of the report be approved.

RE83 **RADWINTER ROAD ALLOTMENT LAND**

The Committee was asked to approve the transfer of ownership of a strip of land adjacent to the cemetery that provided access to the former allotments at Radwinter Road, Saffron Walden to enable the work to provide a footpath cycleway access to Radwinter Road as required by a planning condition associated with approving the development. The Architect clarified that the developer would pay for surfacing the track and the Council would be receiving a substantial capital sum as a result of the development.

RESOLVED that the land at the head of the track from Radwinter Road adjacent to the cemetery, as shown on the drawing attached to the report, be transferred to the owner of the adjacent property in exchange for permission to carry out works to upgrade the track in accordance with planning requirements, subject to satisfactory contract details.

RE84 **STAFFING UPDATE**

Members noted a table showing vacancies, which had arisen since the last Resources Committee meeting. The table detailed the date the vacancy arose, the job title, the relevant service and the decision taken. Councillor Wilcock was concerned about the lack of communication when key officers resigned from the Council and it was agreed that members should be advised of changes via the members' bulletin in future.

RE85 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that the public be excluded for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of Exempt Information as defined in paragraph 1, 7, 8 and 9 of part 1 of schedule 12A to the 1972 Act.

RE86 TENDER PROCESS – BRIDGE END GARDENS RESTORATION PROJECT

This item had been previously discussed at the Bridge End Gardens Working Party meeting on 3 March 2003 and at the Community and Leisure Committee meeting on 5 March 2003 and referred to this Committee for final approval.

The Committee was presented with a report outlining the proposed tendering arrangements and recommended changes to standing orders relating to contracts for the Bridge End Gardens restoration project. The Council had been awarded a stage 2 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the restoration work.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the arrangements in relation to contracts exceeding £10,000 as set out in the report be approved
- 2 The above contracts be implemented in general accordance with the agreed programme as set out in the HLF stage 2 submission, as may need to be varied during the implementation of the project.

RE87 DUNMOW OFFICE LETTING

Members were advised that an offer had been made for the letting of the Dunmow offices, which was being assessed. If sufficient progress was made, a report would be made to the Council on 15 April 2003. Members were asked to recommend to Council that officers be authorised to complete negotiations in consultation with Group Leaders and asked for a steer on any major issues they would wish officers to take into account during the negotiations. Members indicated the need for adequate car-parking provisions for the disabled and acknowledged the fact that the Committee room would continue to be available for the Council's use.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 The Council, at its meeting on 15 April 2003, be advised to authorise the officers, in consultation with Group Leaders, to complete negotiations for the letting of the Dunmow offices.

RE88 FINANCIAL SERVICES

Members were asked to consider the reinstatement of the Manager's post for Financial Services following an evaluation of both current and future work requirements and the current temporary line management arrangements.

RESOLVED that the post of Financial Services Manager be established as from the date of this meeting and recruited as soon as possible.

2 each political group nominates a representative for the interview panel.

3 Political balance rules shall not apply.

RE89 WRITE-OFFS

The Committee noted a list of NNDR balances for some businesses in bankruptcy or liquidation giving details of balances to date of bankruptcy or liquidation recommended for write-off by this committee.

RESOLVED that the Resources committee write-off the NNDR outstanding balances as listed in the report, totalling £50,412.60.

RE90 CHAIRMAN'S THANKYOU

The Chairman expressed her thanks to Members of the Committee and officers for attending meetings and being courteous throughout the past four years. Councillor O'Neill thanked Councillor Mrs Caton for her hard work as the Chairman of the Committee.