

**RESOURCES COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 26 JUNE 2003**

Present:- Councillor M A Gayler – Chairman.
Councillors R P Chambers, R J Copping, A Dean, R T Harris,
A J Ketteridge, A R Row, S C Jones, M J Savage and
P A Wilcock.

Also present:- Councillor S Flack.

Officers in attendance:- M Brean, M Cox, J B Dickson, J Mitchell and
M Perry.

RE1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Chambers declared a personal interest in item 14, Community Support Officers, as the Chairman of the Essex Police Authority.

Councillor M A Gayler declared a personal interest in item 7, Financial Policy Review, as he is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

RE2 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2003 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

RE3 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute RE73(i) – Benefactor Contribution – Stansted Mountfitchet Leisure Centre

The Chairman was pleased to report that the naming of the centre and the level of contribution had now been agreed.

(ii) Minute RE87 – Dunmow Office Letting

The Director of Resources had been advised by the agent that the contract for the lease of the Dunmow offices had not yet been signed. Members asked for further clarification on this matter.

RESOLVED that a full report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee.

RE4 COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICERS

At the meeting of the Committee on 5 February 2003, it had been agreed to earmark £50,000 for the purpose of Community Wardens, subject to the Essex Police Authority making adequate and proportionate provision in its own budget for the proposition to be financially viable. The Home Office had

now confirmed that it was providing 45 Community Support Officers (CSOs) on a matched funding basis and Essex County Council was providing funding for 20. It was envisaged that the Braintree Policing Division, which covered Braintree and Uttlesford Districts would receive an allocation of nine officers. If the £50,000 funding from this Council was confirmed it would provide an additional four CSOs to be deployed solely within this district. Their specific deployment within the District would be decided by the Divisional Commander. The CSOs were being recruited on a permanent basis and County Council funding was guaranteed for three years. It was anticipated that the officers would start to join the Police from October 2003

Councillor Chambers hoped that the Council would support the part-funding of these officers. Although they had lesser powers than a police officer they would provide a clear visible presence which would reassure the community, assist with crime reduction and help target problem areas and individuals. Councillor Copping questioned whether this Council should be subsidising an initiative that was a Police responsibility. He was also concerned about the limited powers exercisable by these officers. Councillor A Dean said it was important to be able to demonstrate the benefits of these additional officers to the residents of the district and some form of performance measurement scheme should be devised. He suggested that the proposal should go ahead for one year, but should be reviewed before the following year's funding was authorised. Councillor Wilcock mentioned the nine CSOs already allocated for the Braintree division and was concerned that this district might not benefit from these officers, if it funded the additional four officers within the Uttlesford area. Councillor Chambers replied that the Divisional Commander had to deploy the nine officers where they were most needed and it could well be that this would not be within Uttlesford. Councillor Savage said that during canvassing for the recent election, residents had asked for increased police presence. However, he questioned the extent of the impact of an extra four officers.

RESOLVED that the Director of Resources in consultation with the Chairman of the Resources Committee be authorised to

- 1 Proceed with the scheme of Community Support Officers in conjunction with Essex Police, subject to
 - (i) a satisfactory performance measurement scheme being agreed that demonstrated the benefits to the residents of Uttlesford
 - (ii) confirmation by the Braintree Divisional Commander of the officers' deployment and duties.
- 2 Agree funding of £50,000 initially for one year only; the scheme to be reviewed before a decision was taken regarding the funding for subsequent years.

RE5 CONFIRMATION OF OFFICER'S ACTIONS**(i) Golds Nurseries**

At the Environment and Transport Committee meeting on 10 June 2003, Members had been asked to approve the carry over of £30,000 in the Golds Nurseries budget for the year 2002/03 to 2003/04 and confirm urgent action to increase the budget provisions for repairs by £50,000 to meet the Council's obligations. The urgent action taken in consultation with the Chairmen for increasing the total budget for £50,000 would be funded from the Council's Financial Management Reserve.

RESOLVED that the Committee confirm the actions taken by officers, in consultation with the Chairmen of the Environment and Transport and Resources Committees to

- 1 Make available a sum of up to £50,000 from the Council's reserves to fund the repairs at Golds Nurseries, and
- 2 Carry forward of £30,000 as an earmark reserve for dilapidation work in 2003/04, and
- 3 An update report be made to the next meeting of the Committee.

(ii) Revenue Services Best Value Review

The Revenue Services would be subject to a Best Value Review in 2003/04 and an external consultant had been appointed as the critical friend. It was anticipated that the costs would be no more than £1,300 and could be funded from the Best Value Review Reserve.

RESOLVED that the Committee confirmed the action taken by officers in consultation with the Chairman of Resources Committee in the funding of up to £1,300 from the Council's Best Value Review Reserve for the appointment of a consultant to act as a critical friend for the Revenue Best Value Review.

(iii) Job Evaluation Scheme

As part of the Single Status negotiations, the Council's Job Evaluation Scheme, used to grade jobs within the authority had been reviewed. The scheme had been created by KPMG over 12 years ago. It was used and valued and although had some updating needs, it was not considered to be out of synch with the organisation or too dated to be useful. The Single Status Team had suggested to the Council's Corporate Management Team that instead of implementing a completely new scheme which would be time consuming and might lower staff morale, that the current scheme be updated. KPMG confirmed that they could undertake this work at a cost of £10,000 and an extra £2,000 had been budgeted by the Head of Personnel to ensure any additional days of training could be provided.

RESOLVED that the Committee confirmed the action taken by officers in consultation with the Chairman of the Resources Committee in

making available the sum of £12,000 from the Management of Change Reserve to fund the update of the Job Evaluation Scheme by KPMG.

RE6

PLANNING DELIVERY GRANT

The Committee received a report that had been considered by the Environment and Transport Committee on 10 June and the Development Control and Licensing Committee on 16 June 2003. Uttlesford had been awarded a Planning Delivery Grant in the sum of £246,261. The report explained how officers considered the grant could be spent to bring about short and long-term improvements to the service. The report set out those one-off items to be funded in the current year and also those that would have ongoing revenue implications.

Councillor Copping expected there to be a significant improvement in the Council's development control performance in 12 months time.

RESOLVED that

- 1 One-off supplementary estimates for the following items be funded from the Planning Delivery Grant in the current year

Planning Management and Administration

Consultants	£50,000
Training	£10,000
Staffing	£20,000

Enforcement

Staffing	£20,000
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Development Control

Data Processing	£10,000
External Support Services	£80,000

- 2 Supplementary estimates for the two permanent additional posts from July 2003 be funded from the Planning Delivery Grant in the current year:

Planning Management and Administration

Staffing	£12,900
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Development Control

Staffing	£11,800
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- 3 The balance of the PDG grant of £31,561 be transferred to an earmarked reserve ~~Page 4~~ subject to further decisions.

RE7 GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON REFORMING HOME BUYING AND SELLING

The Committee was informed that the Government was committed to reforming the way home sales and purchases were carried out with a view to speeding up the process and reducing the number of aborted sales. One initiative was the proposed introduction of a compulsory home information pack which sellers or their agents would have to supply to potential buyers on request. The Government had consulted on the information that should be contained in the pack.

This reform would have little impact on local authorities as it would only be required where a home was being marketed for sale to the public. Right to Buy transactions and housing stock transfers would not be affected. The report informed Members of the content of the consultation document and recommended a response to the Government.

RESOLVED that the Council respond to the consultation document as recommended in the report.

RE8 FINANCIAL POLICY REVIEW 2004/05

The Director of Resources presented a detailed report which aimed to give direction to the service priority and budget making processes for 2004/05. The Council's external auditors had recommended bringing together the budget and service plan/CIP processes to enable resource decisions to be more based on Council priorities and linked to standards of service provision. The Council also aimed to develop the capacity to plan for the medium term balancing the Council's aspirations for services with the resources the Council could make available.

The report asked the Committee to look at the main points which the Council wished to achieve in 2004/05 and it also set out the current financial context including looking at the issues determining the medium term financial prospects. Attached to the report was the Council's Quality of Life Plan which set out a programme for action for 2003 – 2007. Councillor Ketteridge questioned how it would be possible to fund all the items listed. Councillor A Dean replied that this Council, in certain cases, would be acting in an enabling role enlisting support from external partners. The Council needed to prioritise those things that were important and if necessary reorganise the budget. The budget was still at an early stage and more detailed planning would take place during the next few months.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the previous Council's working target of a District Council requirement of £7,253,960 continue to be used for budget projection purposes, subject to review under the process outlined under 3) below

- 2 Officers continue to investigate capital payment opportunities into the Pension Fund for a report to Resources Committee on 18 September 2003 and, in the meantime, to consult with employees (through the LJC) and other Councils within the County to identify ways forward in resolving Pension Fund shortfalls, and to lobby Government to revise the operation of Local Government pension schemes.
- 3 Meetings be held between the Director of Resources, the chair of Resources and the Leader of the Council with each of the other main committee chairs and relevant heads of service to examine service budgets by:
 - a) reviewing the list of priorities included in the Quality of Life Plan
 - b) Prioritising all services by the end of August in order to facilitate the planning and budget processes for consideration by committees during the September cycle of meetings
 - c) Examine the opportunities identified by officers for reducing budgets by increasing income or from efficiencies within their control.
- 4 Detailed budget proposals be presented to the September cycle of meetings on the basis of the process outlined in recommendations 1-3
- 5 A case be prepared to submit to the Government Review of Local Government Funding.

RE9

HOUSING BENEFIT AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

The Committee was advised of a consultation paper from the Department for Work and Pensions seeking views on the introduction of a housing benefit sanction to deter and address anti-social behaviour. The Local Government Association had raised a number of concerns about the proposals and did not consider that housing benefit was an appropriate tool to address anti-social behaviour. The Committee agreed that the options were seriously flawed. Councillor Copping added that it was the responsibility of the Government to create a vision for housing that would not lead to anti-social behaviour.

RESOLVED that the Department of Work and Pensions be advised of the Council's views including supporting the response made by the Local Government Association.

RE10

COUNCIL TAX – PROPOSED CHANGES FOR SECOND HOMES AND LONG TERM EMPTY HOMES

Members were advised of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's proposed changes for Council Tax discounts and exemptions. The changes required primary legislation and were included in the current Local Government Bill. Subject to Parliamentary approval, the Government aimed to implement the

changes from 1 April 2004. Owners of second homes and properties which had been empty for a long time currently received a mandatory 50% discount on their Council Tax bill. The Government proposed to allow local authorities discretion to reduce or end the discount. Also local authorities would be able to create their own discounts and exemptions in response to local factors. Members broadly agreed with the changes but commented that the additional income generated should be used within the district boundaries.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Government's proposals be noted,
- 2 a further report to be submitted containing recommendations for consideration
- 3 representations be made to Sir Alan Haselhurst MP and the ODPM to lobby that the additional income in two tier areas of the country be ring fenced for use within district boundaries.

RE11 **CAPITAL PROGRAMME REPLACEMENT FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

The Director of Resources advised the Committee that the 2003/04 IT Programme had included a sum of £130,000 for a new Financial Management System. The existing system had been purchased in 1990 and was in need of replacement. The sum included in the IT Programme had been based upon a replacement system with a similar functionality. Further investigations had identified that many of the available systems offered additional functionality that would be of benefit to the Council. Discussions had taken place with other authorities, including Stevenage who was a potential partner for the project, and it seemed that a more realistic estimate for the new system would be £220,000. A joint OJEC Notice had been placed and tenders would be submitted with a report recommending a preferred supplier being submitted to Members in the Autumn. The planned commencement date for the new system would be April 2004.

In answer to a question from Councillor Wilcock, it was confirmed that all neighbouring authorities had been contacted, but only Stevenage Borough Council had been interested in becoming a partner for the project.

RESOLVED that the Capital Programme Budget for the replacement of the Financial Management System be increased to £220,000

RE12 **COMMUNICATION STAFFING**

The Committee was asked to approve an additional post to strengthen the Council's capacity in communications. In recent years, the Government had increased the requirement on local authorities to undertake regular communication and consultations with local communities. The Council had been criticised for its limited capacity to address the Government's modernising agenda and the limitations of the consultation work undertaken.

Recent staff changes had put further pressure on the role of the Committee and Communications Manager. It was suggested that a generic Communications Officer was needed to cover media and public relations, core corporate publications, consultation strategy and co-ordination and internal communications. The post would continue to report to the Committee and Communications Manager who would retain an overview of this area of work.

Councillor Row expressed concern at the ongoing cost of this appointment and considered that the Council should wait a further six months to establish the real necessity for this post.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the post of Communications and PR Officer be established with immediate effect and recruited as soon as possible.
- 2 The maximum additional cost of £20,500 be funded by a supplementary estimate in 2003/04 and the necessary funding be built into budget projections for 2004/05.

RE13 **INTERIM DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT**

At the Annual Council meeting on 20 May 2003, proposals had been approved for the appointment of a new Chief Executive. As part of the recommendations, Members had agreed that the appointments panel should carry out the early appointment of an interim Director for Strategic Development which could be funded from the balance of £80,000 in the Management of Change Reserve.

RESOLVED that the balance of £80,000 in the Management of Change Reserve be used to fund the appointment of an Interim Director of Strategic Development.

RE14 **RISK MANAGEMENT**

The Audit Commission's most recent management letter had highlighted business risk management as an area requiring both development and improvement. Risk Management was also an integral part of the CPA process. This work had been acknowledged and had now been included in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance. The Officer Risk Management Group had been reformed and had held its first meeting. It had been concluded that there were no spare internal resources to start the action plan and make quick progress at corporate level. It had therefore been agreed that quotations be invited from suitable external consultants. The work could be funded by virement from the Corporate Management budget and authorised under the Council's Financial Regulations and Procedures by the Director of Resources. The Committee thought it would be helpful for elected Members to serve on the Officer Risk Management Group.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Council's Risk Management Policy be approved

- 2 the appointment of consultants to facilitate the process be confirmed,
- 3 two members, one from the administration and one from the opposition be appointed to the Risk Management Group.

RE15 **STAFFING UPDATE**

The Committee noted the table of staff vacancies.

The meeting ended at 10.10 pm