

**RESOURCES COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 18 SEPTEMBER 2003**

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

Officers in attendance:- M Brean, P O'Dell, J B Dickson, C Hughes,
J Mitchell, M Perry, I Orton and P Snow.

RE16 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R P Chambers and
A R Row.

RE17 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2003 were received, confirmed
and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

RE18 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute RE4 – Community Support Officers

The Director of Resources confirmed that the Council would support this
project up to 31 March 2005, subject to regular joint performance reviews in
conjunction with the Essex Police Authority.

(ii) Minute RE8 – Financial Policy Review 2004/05

The Director of Resources reported on developments following the
Committee's decision at its previous meeting to prepare a case to submit to
the Government's Review of Local Government Funding. A response had
now been received from the relevant Minister at the Office for the Deputy
Prime Minister, incorporating a reference to the Notice of Motion passed by
the Council at its meeting on 22 July. He also understood that Sir Alan
Haselhurst MP had received a response to his representations from the same
Government department.

(iii) Minute RE14 – Risk Management

The Director of Resources reported that Councillors R J Copping and A J
Ketteridge had been nominated, by their respective groups, to the recently
reactivated Risk Management Group.

RE19

CONFIRMATION OF OFFICERS ACTIONS**(i) Strategic Planning Day Costs**

It was reported that costs of up to £7,000 had been incurred on arranging the Strategic Planning Day due to be held on the following Saturday 20 September. This event had been organised to help with strategic planning and also in preparing for the CPA but no formal budget had been specifically authorised.

In accordance with Financial Regulations, it was necessary to confirm the action taken by officers, in consultation with the Chairman of this Committee, to authorise the required expenditure.

RESOLVED that the action taken to authorise expenditure of up to £7,000 to be funded from the Financial Management Reserve, in consultation with the Chairman of this Committee, be confirmed.

(ii) Planning Services Best Value Review – Use of Consultants

The Performance Manager reported that Validus Consulting Ltd had been engaged to carry out elements of the Best Value Review of Planning Services at an anticipated cost of approximately £50,000. A Government grant of £246,261 had been awarded to assist with improving the performance of the planning department. The costs of appointing external consultants would be met from this grant.

However, the requirement to complete the review by November 2003 meant that it was not possible to meet the requirement of Financial Regulations to obtain three written quotations. Financial Regulations also stipulated that this requirement could be waived in appropriate circumstances and the Chairman of this Committee had agreed, in consultation with officers, that the immediate appointment of consultants had been necessary to meet the CPA timetable.

Councillor Copping expressed his concern that Financial Regulations had been waived on the grounds of urgency as the required timetable for the planning review had been known about for a period of many months. He urged officers to avoid taking action of this nature unless circumstances made this impossible.

RESOLVED that the action of officers, in consultation with the Chairman, to authorise expenditure of up to £50,000 in connection with the appointment of consultants be confirmed, the sum involved to be utilised from the Government grant awarded for the development of planning services.

RE20

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Committee received a report regarding the intention to strengthen the monitoring and measurement of performance indicators across the whole range of the Council's services, as requested by the District Auditor. The

recommended system was intended to build upon the more limited form of performance management adopted two years ago and kept under review by the Corporate Management Team. A range of over sixty performance indicators already collected within the authority had now been identified to enable a comprehensive performance system to be adopted.

Following comments made at the Health and Housing Committee meeting, Officers had addressed problems faced by those who were colour blind or otherwise visually impaired. As a result, the quarterly reports would incorporate a suitable method of reporting other than the traffic light system originally suggested.

Members asked a number of questions about the operation of the performance management system and asked for assurances that full account would be taken of the Council's priorities and Quality of Life Plan. The Performance Manager said that a number of themes had been incorporated into the recommended system and these would be followed through following the imminent strategic planning day.

RESOLVED that the recommended range of performance measures and targets be adopted and that an appropriate indicator system be incorporated into the quarterly reporting system designed to take account of those with colour blindness or other form of visual impairment.

RE21

THE HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The Revenues Services Manager reported on the release by the Department for Work and Pensions of new performance standards for the administration of Housing and Council Tax Benefit. The Council had been invited to adopt the performance standards to demonstrate Member commitment to raising the standard of Housing Benefit administration and service delivery and to provide an appropriate benchmark against which to measure agreed performance targets.

In response to a question, he confirmed that the Council was, in effect, already complying with the main thrust of the performance standards package but that further improvements could be expected in due course. It was not anticipated that additional staffing resources would be needed to implement fully the twelve modules contained in the two volume package. It had not been considered practicable to reproduce these in full as part of this report but they were available for inspection.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Department for Work and Pensions performance standards for Housing and Council Tax benefit be adopted;
- 2 the performance standards be used to identify areas for service improvement as part of the Revenue Services Best Value review;

- 3 the Statement of Intent and Strategic Policy Objectives, attached to the report as appendices 1 and 2, be adopted; and
- 4 that arrangements be made to endorse, on an annual basis, the strategic policy objectives for benefits administration.

RE22

OUTCOME OF PARISH REVIEW

The Electoral Services Officer reported on the outcome of the Parish Review completed by the Council in 2002 and involving six proposals for change recommended to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). An order was in the process of being made implementing these changes with effect from 1 April 2004.

The major proposal involved the creation of a new parish of Swards End, formed from part of Saffron Walden Parish. There were two elements arising from this proposal that needed resolution.

The first involved making appropriate arrangements to establish the new Parish Council and this would need to be authorised by order. An approach had been received from the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) offering to carry out this work, including the first year's budgetary arrangements for the new parish, on the Council's behalf. The officers were recommending that this offer should be accepted as EALC had the necessary expertise in relation to parish council administration. The Council would offer a grant that would later be included in, and recovered through, the parish precept.

The second element involved amending the electoral arrangements in Saffron Walden to take account of the change of boundaries. The whole of the area of Swards End ward within the Town Council area, represented by one councillor, would be incorporated within the new parish. Accordingly, officers were suggesting that the Council should agree to make an order terminating the term of office of the Councillor concerned and abolishing the Swards End ward of Saffron Walden parish with effect from 1 April when the new parish council was due to come into office.

Unfortunately recent changes, involving the transfer of responsibilities to the Electoral Commission, had resulted in a difference of opinion between the Commission and the ODPM about the correct mechanism for reviewing and changing electoral arrangements in new parishes and in existing parishes affected by a Periodic Electoral Review within the previous five years. The officers had suggested, in the report, a means of overcoming this complication.

RESOLVED that

- 1 an order be made changing electoral arrangements in the parish of Saffron Walden as described in the report, provided there was legal authority to do so after first consulting with the Electoral Commission; and

- 2 the offer of EALC in relation to the new parish of Swards End be accepted and that a (repayable) grant be made in due course.

RE23

DISTRICT COUNCIL'S DEPOT AND OFFICES IN GREAT DUNMOW

The Committee received an initial report dealing with a range of possible options for dealing with the Council's offices and depot site in Great Dunmow. The options included in the report ranged from taking no action to disposal of the entire site. The report had reached no conclusion as to which option ought to be followed as further research would be required, particularly on financial issues. It was requested that the Committee signal its preference at this stage to enable officers to progress matters further.

Councillors R J Copping and M A Gayler both declared a personal interest in this item as members of the Dunmow Town Strategy Group.

Members had before them a proposal submitted by Councillor Copping that:

"This Committee notes the report and instructs officers, in parallel with any current negotiations, and taking into account the Council's Quality of Life Plan:

After full consultation with the public and relevant public organisations

- 1 To begin negotiations to convert the offices, by lease arrangement or otherwise, to provide a Voluntary Sector Centre as from 1 April 2004; and
- 2 To produce a design brief for the future use of the depot site;

and indicate the financial consequences of such proposals in a further report to this Committee on 20 November 2003."

Councillor Copping said that the Council could no longer afford to keep these buildings empty and he hoped the Committee would agree to proceed as set out in the proposal. The Leader said that he supported the broad thrust of the proposal and hoped that the design brief would incorporate a thorough evaluation of the whole site.

Councillor Ketteridge said that he had no objection in principle to the action set out in the proposal, but that the financial implications would need to be looked at carefully.

After further discussion, the proposal having been seconded was put to the vote and carried.

RESOLVED that officers proceed to negotiate and report back to the Committee in accordance with the proposal set out in this Minute.

RE24 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 item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 7 and 8 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

RE25 LAND AT GACES ACRE NEWPORT

The Head of Legal Services reported on the circumstances relating to a land ownership dispute at Gaces Acre, Newport which involved a member of staff. Members of the Committee enquired into various aspects of this dispute and agreed upon a solution.

RESOLVED that the Council agree to the disposal of this area of land to the claimant for the sum of £500.

RE26 READMISSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that the public be readmitted to the meeting for the remaining items of business.

RE27 LOCAL SERVICE AGREEMENT

The Head of Personnel and Office Services reported on the progress of a partnership agreement with Essex County Council and Epping Forest District Council in the areas of recruitment, temporary recruitment and policy development. Working together with two advertising agencies, Bartlett Scott Edgar and TMP, an advertising campaign and microsite had been devised to assist directly with recruitment. The campaign would begin from the beginning of October and would run for approximately three months. It was intended to attract commuters back into the area to encourage them to work closer to home.

Taking part in this partnership arrangement would involve a contribution from the Council of £2,000 and this amount would have to be met from reserves.

Members supported the aims of the Local Service Agreement but were anxious to ensure that the response to the advertising campaign could be measured to see how much benefit was derived. The Head of Personnel and Office Services replied that statistics would be available indicating where advertisements had been seen by job applicants.

RESOLVED that the LSA between Essex County Council and Epping Forest and Uttlesford District Councils be endorsed and that funding of £2,000 be approved as a contribution to this project from the Financial Management Reserve.

RE28 STAFFING UPDATE

The Committee noted the table of staff vacancies as circulated.

RE29 APPOINTMENT OF A HOMELESSNESS OFFICER

The Director of Resources advised Members that the Health and Housing Committee had recommended this Committee to agree to the immediate appointment of an officer to deal with homeless cases and implement the Homelessness Strategy. The Council was required to adopt a Homelessness Strategy in accordance with provisions contained in the Homelessness Act 2002 which required the Council to tackle homelessness in a more proactive manner than had previously been the case. This would involve, among other things, the eventual phasing out of the use of bed and breakfast accommodation.

He reported that the post would be entitled "Housing Support Officer" and that evaluation of the post grade now indicated that costs were likely to be less than the £30,000 to £32,000 quoted in the report. It was noted that the initial year's cost would, in any event, be covered by Government grant.

Members agreed the appointment of an officer in these circumstances but felt that the way in which the Council dealt with homelessness issues should continue to be closely monitored.

RESOLVED that the immediate appointment of an officer to deal with homelessness (the post title to be "Housing Support Officer") be approved in accordance with the recommendation of the Health and Housing Committee.

RE30 RESOURCES COMMITTEE POLICY PRIORITIES AND BUDGETS 2004/05

The Committee received a report outlining the Council's proposed approach to General Fund budget setting for 2004/05 within the context of the newly adopted Quality of Life Plan. The report contained early proposals for budget amendment and areas for further research following meetings previously agreed between the Leader of the Council, the Chairman of this Committee and other committees and appropriate officers.

It was intended that this Committee would issue further guidance to officers and committees following an updating of the Council's overall budget position at this meeting.

As far as this Committee's own budget was concerned, Members noted those budget variances highlighted in appendix 2 to the report and agreed the general approach being adopted at this stage.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the budget variances listed in appendix 2 to the report to this meeting be noted; and

- 2 the proposals for budget review contained in appendix 2, be approved, pending a more detailed report to the Committee's next meeting.

RE31

GENERAL FUND POLICY PRIORITIES AND BUDGETS 2004/05

The Director of Resources introduced a detailed report bringing together the deliberations of committees regarding their General Fund budgets for 2004/05 within the context of the Council's overall financial position. The report was seeking guidance from this Committee to enable officers to continue with the budget making process. He reported that the whole budget process for the year ahead would be dominated by the continuing difficulty caused by the Pensions fund deficit and the need to comply with the new statutory Prudential Code. The General Fund would also be affected by the new regulations concerning capital finance and by a number of other significant factors. The approach outlined in the report built upon the principles included in the Financial and Policy Review report submitted to this Committee on 26 June and incorporated work being undertaken to develop fully the Council's Quality of Life Plan.

The budget preparation cycle for 2004/05 would involve a mixture of continuity and change. The Council continued to have well developed and effective procedures for budget preparation and a clear path to approve a budget and setting of the Council Tax in February next year. The change was based on the factors referred to in the previous paragraph and explained in more detail in the report. He was particularly concerned about the Pension Fund deficit and referred to severe funding difficulties in local government generally as highlighted in recent press reports. A workshop would take place shortly on this issue.

The guidance given to committees included the necessity to undertake a robust review of fees and charges and the officers were continuing to work on the necessary guidance for this review to take place.

The report also contained detailed suggested guidance to be issued to the next cycle of committee meetings and this Committee was now being recommended to endorse that guidance. This guidance asked committees to examine priorities, restrict budget growth items to those which met one of four specific criteria, maintain a careful use of reserves subject to the same criteria, and accompany all proposals with a rigorous risk analysis.

Budget reports had been submitted to all committees in the current cycle with the exception of the Development Control Committee. This would be addressed at the meeting of that Committee on 13 October.

During the course of the discussion on General Fund budgets for next year, the Chairman expressed his disappointment that full information on the Pension Fund deficit was still awaited from the Actuary. The extent of the deficit would clearly affect all budget decisions to be taken in the lead up period to next year but the relevant information had not been received in

sufficient time for consideration at this stage. It was hoped that this matter would be addressed at the proposed workshop on 6 October.

Councillor Copping again referred to the position regarding the Council's Revenue Support Grant settlement for the current financial year. Although the Council had already written to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) regarding this year's settlement, Councillor Copping felt that the response received was inadequate and he proposed that the Council should write again drawing attention to the deliberate switching of resources away from Essex authorities generally and Uttlesford in particular.

He also referred to the reference from the Community and Leisure Committee indicating a possible need for an additional Leisure Officer. He thought, and other Members agreed, that this was an important area of expenditure deserving of some priority and that the contractual arrangements made with Leisure Connection would need to be kept under constant review and robustly monitored.

The Leader stressed the importance of the proposed access to services review involving, among other things, possible partnership arrangements with Essex County Council and other bodies. All of the expenditure items highlighted should be checked in relation to the achievement of seamless public services.

Members also welcomed the proposed zero-based budgeting approach for the 2005/06 estimates and Councillor Wilcock suggested that one or two aspects of expenditure might be selected as part of a test to assess the practicality of this approach.

The Chairman asked the Director to arrange to circulate the Minister's response to the Council's representations regarding the review of Local Government funding. The recommendations contained in the report were agreed subject to the addition of making further representations to the ODPM as previously proposed by Councillor Copping. It was therefore

RECOMMENDED to Council :

- 1 that committees be asked to adhere to the guidance set out in paragraph 10 of the report to this meeting when considering budgets and potential growth items, pending the overall updating of the projected budget for next year;
- 2 that committees follow the particular guidance regarding the need for a robust and proactive approach to raising income from fees and charges, as given in paragraph 10(c) of the report;
- 3 the budget review items contained in appendix 1 to the report be further investigated;
- 4 that this Committee considers at its next meeting a report dealing with the three cross-cutting budget review items highlighted in the report (access to services, administrative support and Trust status);
- 5 that the Committee note the revised budget projection at General Fund level for 2004/05, given in appendix 2;
- 6 the revised budget timetable set out in the report be agreed;

- 7 the zero-based budgeting approach proposed for the 2005/06 estimates be endorsed; and
- 8 that further representations be made to the ODPM concerning the unfavourable RSG settlement.

RE32 **STATUTORY PRUDENTIAL CODE**

The Financial Services Manager outlined the key requirements of the Prudential Code which would affect the Council's General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme. The Code had been prepared by CIPFA and would become statutory from December this year after the Local Government Bill became law. The main principle of the Code was that local authorities could invest in capital spending provided their spending plans were affordable, prudent and sustainable.

Adhering to the Code would mean that local authorities would be required to prepare three year revenue and capital budgets, rather than dealing with budgeting matters one year at a time. The Council was moving towards this approach in any case but the adoption of the Code as a statutory document would ensure that this began, to happen with effect from the 2004/05 budget. It was noted that there were also particular implications for debt free councils but some of these were presently unclear. A further detailed report would need to come before this Committee dealing with the full implications of the Prudential Code. It was noted that these would have to be assessed and worked through during the remainder of the current budget cycle.

A question was asked about whether it was intended to change or update the Council's financial accountancy software systems to incorporate the requirements made by the Code. The Director of Resources confirmed that this was the intention.

RESOLVED that the key requirements of the Prudential Code be noted and that a further report be considered in due course.

RE33 **STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2002/03**

The Council was required by regulation to approve the 2002/03 Statement of Accounts (subject to audit) before the end of September. A report was received setting out the background to this requirement and enclosing the full Statement of Accounts in draft form. The Members' role in this process was to demonstrate their ownership of the accounting statements and their confidence in the responsible financial officer (Director of Resources) and in the process by which the accounting records were maintained and statements prepared.

RESOLVED that the Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2003 be approved.

RE34 BALANCES AND RESERVES

A report was submitted giving details of balances and reserves at 31 March 2003. Members noted that the final accounts indicated a General Fund Revenue balance of £1,200,000. In addition, balances amounting to £2,800,000 had also been earmarked for specific purposes.

Officers already intended to carry out a review of the earmarked reserves to assess whether the projects concerned were likely to be carried out within a realistic time frame. The Financial Services Manager said that there was a good deal of scope to link reserves to the whole budget making process.

In response to a question, Members were advised that a full breakdown of earmarked reserves, including those referred to as "other ongoing projects and initiatives" in the report was included in the Statement of Accounts. A full risk assessment would now be carried out and a report brought back to the Committee's next meeting.

RESOLVED that

- 1 target levels for General Fund and Housing Revenue Account reserves be retained at £1,200,000 and £500,000 respectively and that these targets be reviewed during the budget setting process;
- 2 a report be considered at the Committee's next meeting including an assessment of whether those projects for which reserves had been earmarked were still required.

RE35 TREASURY MANAGEMENT

The Financial Services Manager reminded Members that the Committee had agreed, in March 2002, to formally adopt the key recommendations of CIPFA's Treasury Management in the Public Services Code of Practice. One requirement of the Code was that an annual report be made to Members after the year end.

In accordance with this requirement, a report before Members set out details of the Council's borrowing and investments. It was noted that no new long or short term borrowing was undertaken in 2002/03 and the Council's debt free status had been maintained. Steps had also been taken to appoint a Fund Manager to manage a fund of £5,000,000 and a timetable for the selection process and transfer of the funds concerned was currently being prepared.

More comprehensive information on performance and adherence to agreed policies and procedures would be incorporated by officers into a report to be presented to the March 2004 meeting of this Committee.

RESOLVED that the report on Treasury Management procedures be accepted and a further detailed report submitted to this Committee in March 2004.

RE36 **REVISING THE TRIAL PERIOD FOR THE STEVENAGE AND
UTTLESFORD AUDIT PARTNERSHIP**

The Committee was reminded that a two year trial period had commenced on 1 October 2002 for an internal audit partnership with Stevenage Borough Council. An officer review had concluded that the partnership was operating successfully and it was now being recommended to this Committee that the trial period be reduced to 18 months ending on 31 March 2004. The partnership would then be in alignment with respective audit plans operating inclusively from March to April.

A detailed report would be submitted to the next meeting recommending that the partnership be made permanent from 1 April next year.

RESOLVED that the trial period for the internal audit partnership with Stevenage Borough Council be reduced by six months ending on 31 March 2004.

RE37 **ELECTORAL COMMISSION CONSULTATION PAPER ON THE CYCLE OF
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS IN ENGLAND**

The Electoral Services Officer presented a summary of a consultation paper issued by the Electoral Commission posing a number of questions about the cycle of local government elections and examining options for change. The consultation had been requested by the Government because of a perception that the current electoral cycle was confusing.

The paper therefore asked whether there should be a more uniform pattern of electoral cycles and how this could be achieved. For example, shire districts and unitary authorities presently elected either by whole elections or by thirds while metropolitan borough councils elected only by a system of thirds. In contrast, London boroughs and county councils elected all their members at once but the elections for all these types of authority were held at different times.

The consultation paper also asked whether there was more scope for elections to be combined (including national and local elections together) and whether the current four year term of office for local councillors should be retained.

Group leaders had already considered the questions raised in the consultation paper and had indicated their preference was to retain whole Council elections, combined with the election of parish councillors, together with the staggered election of county councillors. Suggested responses to each of the questions raised in the paper were included in the report broadly supporting these general principles. The Chairman said that he did not feel that combined elections were satisfactory as the tendency was for the local government election to be overshadowed.

RESOLVED that representations be made to the Electoral Commission in response to this consultation, on the basis set out in the report,

broadly supporting a continuation of whole council elections for this authority, every four years, that would continue to be staggered with county council elections.

RE38

ELECTORAL COMMISSION CONSULTATION PAPER ON THE MINIMUM AGE OF VOTING AND CANDIDACY IN UK ELECTIONS

Members received a report summarising a further consultation paper received from the Electoral Commission reviewing the current minimum age at which people could take part in elections. It was pointed out that, in the UK, there was no standard legal “age of majority” as different age limitations applied in different circumstances.

An approach had also been received from Essex County Council Youth Service seeking support for a new method of electing youth representatives to an Essex Assembly within each District. It was hoped that 79 members would be elected to the Assembly, mirroring the number of county councillors for each district and that Essex representatives to the UK Youth Parliament would be elected from within this Assembly. District Councils were being asked for help and support to allow for a system of election to be carried out within each district during January next year. It was anticipated that the official launch of this initiative would take place during Local Democracy Week commencing on 13 October.

Members expressed the hope that it would be possible to consult with representatives of the younger generation within Uttlesford. It was noted in this context that it was hoped to arrange a debate in the Council Chamber involving representatives of the main secondary schools within the District.

Councillor Harris said that he was trying to arrange for a speaking competition to be held next spring involving year 10 pupils from all four secondary schools.

In relation to the consultation paper, Councillor Wilcock said that he wished to propose a reduction in the voting age to 16 and that a letter should be sent to Sir Alan Haselhurst MP, drawing his attention to Early Day Motion 746 seeking his support.

Councillor Ketteridge did not agree that the voting age should be reduced to 16 but felt that it would be right to recommend lowering the minimum candidacy age to coincide with the current voting age of 18.

Members agreed with the principle expressed by Councillor Ketteridge but the majority view supported a reduction in both the voting and candidacy age to 16 and it was proposed and seconded accordingly.

RESOLVED that

- 1 a response be sent to the Electoral Commission’s consultation paper supporting a lowering of the voting and candidacy age to 16;

- 2 a letter be sent to Sir Alan Haselhurst MP, drawing his attention to EDM746, and asking for his support; and
- 3 account would be taken of any views expressed by young people in Uttlesford, provided it proved practicable to arrange for such a view to be obtained.

RE39

PERIODIC ELECTORAL REVIEW OF ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL: DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS

It was reported that the draft recommendations of The Boundary Committee for England (BCE) relating to Essex County Council's electoral arrangements had now been received. The proposals allowed for an overall reduction in the number of county councillors from 79 to 75. The consequence of this would be that Basildon, Brentwood, Castle Point, Epping Forest and Harlow Districts would each lose one councillor and Braintree District would gain one. Provision was made for the first time for some two member divisions in Basildon, Chelmsford and Harlow.

The proposal was that Uttlesford would retain four single member divisions, based on the four main population centres as at present. It was noted that the recommendations were identical to those submitted both by Uttlesford and the County Council, except that Takeley and the Canfields Ward was proposed to be included wholly in the Dunmow Division instead of being split between that division and Thaxted as both Councils had proposed.

The Chairman drew attention to representations submitted by the Liberal Democrat Party proposing a different arrangement of electoral divisions. He acknowledged that it was difficult to achieve a proper balance between the four divisions as, whatever was decided, it was inevitable that the Thaxted Division would be geographically much larger than the remaining three.

Councillor Foley said that the Thaxted Division, as proposed, was unsatisfactory and Councillor Savage said that he was very concerned about the inclusion of the Ashdon ward in Thaxted Division.

However, Members accepted that the proposal now being made probably amounted to the least unsatisfactory outcome that could be achieved given the criteria about electoral equality that had to be taken into account by the BCE. In the circumstances, it was agreed that the Council should endorse the present proposal.

RESOLVED that a letter be sent to the Boundary Committee endorsing the Committee's draft recommendations for Essex County Council's future electoral arrangements.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm.