

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 – RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES SAFFRON WALDEN on 26 SEPTEMBER 2001

Present:- Councillor R J Copping – Chairman.
Councillors Mrs C A Bayley, Mrs D Cornell, R C Dean,
Mrs S Flack, M A Hibbs, Mrs C M Little, Mrs J E Menell,
A R Row, G Sell and R W L Stone.

Also present at the Chairman's invitation:- Councillors Mrs C A Cant, A Dean,
D M Jones and Mrs S V Schneider.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs E C Forbes, F Chandley, Mrs M Cox,
J B Dickson A Forrow, R Harborough, Ms C Hughes and
B D Perkins

S2.1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D W Gregory, A J Ketteridge and A C Streeter. Apologies were also received from Councillors R P Chambers, Mrs M A Caton and Mrs J F Cheetham who had been invited to attend the meeting to speak in relation to agenda item 5.

S2.2 TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE COMMITTEE AND PROCEDURE RULES FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Committee noted its Terms of Reference and was advised of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules. Members questioned the wording of paragraph 7.4 referring to the call-in procedure. The wording of this paragraph would be clarified at the next meeting of full Council.

A suggested wording was:

“A decision or action shall be called in by any three Members, of the Council, one of whom may be the Chairman”

The Chairman would be conducting the meeting following the above principle.

S2.3 WORK PROGRAMME 2001-2002

The Committee received a report giving officers' views on the key issues that were likely to arise during the rest of the Council year. Members were then asked to decide on an initial work programme. It was difficult to predict, at this stage, the workload that would arise from the standard agenda items and those arising from developing the Council's budget policy framework. The Chairman suggested that in addition to the standard items, each meeting might consider one item of substance. Also that at the November meeting the Committee should decide how it intended to conduct service reviews in future years.

Councillor Row said that there was a need for a review of procedures in Development Control. However, as the new Head of Planning and Building Surveying was only recently in post and the Planning Service would be subject to a full Best Value Review in 2002, this might not be the most appropriate time for the Committee to address this matter.

Members suggested the following other possible topics.

- The effectiveness of Members' IT use
- Amenity site provision.
- Public relations

RESOLVED that the Committee

- 1 in addition to standard items, considers at its November meeting how it intends to conduct service reviews in future years and also looks at the effectiveness of Members' IT use.
- 2 at its January meeting considers amenity site provision.
- 3 reviews the situation at its November meeting.

S2.4

DECISION LISTS

(i) Environment and Transport Committee – 18 September 2001

Agenda item 7 Countywide Waste Strategy options – Councillor Mrs C A Bayley asked that her name be put forward to attend the all day inspection of the high diversion trials.

(ii) Resources Committee

Agenda item 6 Budget Strategy 2002/03 - All Members had received a letter from Unison. Unison had now requested a meeting of the Local Joint Committee and this had been arranged for 5 October 2001.

Agenda Item 30 Civic Suite – In answer to a question from Councillor Mrs Menell, it was confirmed that the Primary Care Trust had not been included in the list of voluntary groups. The new charging scheme would be reviewed next year.

S2.5

ITEMS REFERRED BY INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

(i) Information on proposed expansion of Stansted Airport – Councillor A Dean

Councillor A Dean had asked this Committee to investigate whether the relevant Policy Committee and its predecessor had championed the interests of the district in respect to the expansion at Stansted Airport. In particular, whether the Environment and Transport Committee was ensuring that the general public and interested organisations were being provided with

information that was balanced and diverse on BAA's current planning application for the expansion of Stansted Airport.

Councillor Dean questioned how well the Council had made the public aware of information from BAA and also of other points of view. He referred to a consultation report from BAA on the expansion of the airport and the Council's response considered at the Airport Working Party in December 2000. Councillor Dean asked whether the Council's comments had been taken on board by BAA. He also considered that the Council should have taken a more robust view.

The Director of Community Services reminded Members that the Council, as the determining authority, could not be seen to put forward an opinion at this stage as this might prejudice the proper consideration of the application when all the relevant information and advice had been received and evaluated. He said that the issue of the application had been in the public domain for the last eighteen months. He reminded Members of the formal process of the scoping report and opinion submitted by the Council. However, because of its significance he outlined a number of extra measures that were being taken to inform the public about the planning application.

- Over 160 interested organisations and bodies had been consulted before the submission of the application to ascertain their requirements in relation to the supporting documentation. Further bodies had been added at the recent meeting of the Environment and Transport Committee.
- There had been a press release, summary document on the website and an item in the Council Page.
- A progress report was to be prepared in November and submitted to the Development Control and Licensing Committee.
- The above progress report would be made widely available.
- Once the application had been assessed the final report with the officers' recommendations would be available for an extended period before the relevant committee meeting.

The Chairman then invited three members of local organisations to speak to the Committee on this subject.

Suzanne Walker from the Council for the Protection of Rural England said that she was aware that the Council must be seen to be impartial and therefore it was very difficult for officers to do any more than they had done. However, she would find it useful to be advised at how officers would arrive at their final advice to Councillors. Pat Dale from Friends of the Earth commented on the amount and complexity of the information available and said it was very difficult to interpret without specialist knowledge. She was particularly concerned at some of the predictions made by BAA. Michael Hurford from CAUSE believed that the application was too large to be dealt with by the District Council in the usual way and had asked for a full debate at a public inquiry.

The Director of Community Services replied that he would try and address the points made in the progress report, which would hopefully summarise the key issues in an understandable format. With regard to a public inquiry, this was a decision for the Secretary of State and until any decision was made the Council must continue to process the application in the usual way.

Members then discussed how to enable ordinary members of the public to become more involved in the process. They commented that if a person was not aware of how the Council operated it would be difficult to obtain the relevant information. Members considered that this issue should be looked at further and referred back to the Environment and Transport Committee. Also the Stansted Airport Advisory Panel should be advised of the views expressed at this meeting.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Environment and Transport Committee be asked to consider ways of communicating and informing the general public regarding the Stansted Airport planning application, and
- 2 the Chairman advise the Stansted Airport Advisory Panel of the views expressed at this meeting.

(ii) Coalition Policy Priorities for 2002/ 2003 and Policy Targets 2002/2003 – Referred by Councillor R J Copping

Councillor Copping had asked for a review of and clarification on the priorities and targets to enable full consideration of them at the earliest opportunity in the budget setting process. He asked for information on how the extra savings figures had been arrived at. Councillors R P Chambers and Mrs M A Caton had been unable to attend this meeting, but the Vice Chairman of the Resources Committee, Councillor Mrs Schneider, explained the reasoning behind the Administration's additional savings targets. Some Members expressed concern at the possible effect of the proposed savings, particularly in the Community and Leisure Committee. The Director of Resources said that the detailed estimates would be looked at during the next cycle of meetings, at which time the impact of the savings targets would be clearer. Members of the Committee agreed to accept the figures for now and to scrutinise them in more depth during the next round of meetings.

S2.6

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A) 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 1, 7 and 9 of Part I of Schedule 12(A) of the Act.

S2.7

POLICY COMMITTEE – AGENDA ITEM 16 – REQUEST FOR EARLY RETIREMENT

Following the meeting of the Resources Committee on 20 September 2001, three Members, Councillor A Dean, M A Gayler and G Sell had requested that the decision be called in on the grounds of insufficient justification and financial information.

Councillor Mrs Schneider read a statement in response to points raised by Councillors Dean, Gayler and Sell. Members discussed the details of this request, the financial implications and the impact of recent events.

It was moved by Councillor Copping and seconded by Councillor Bayley that the matter be referred to full Council. Councillor Sell, seconded by Councillor R Dean, then moved an amendment that the item be referred back to the next ordinary meeting of the Resources Committee.

On being put to the vote the amendment was carried. It was, therefore,

RESOLVED that, this item be referred to the next Ordinary Meeting of the Resources Committee (subject to the Chairman of that Committee agreeing that a special meeting was not necessary) and that Councillor Copping advise the Chairman of Resources about the points raised at the meeting.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm.