

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 – RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT held at
COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on
4 DECEMBER 2002**

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

Also present at the invitation of the Chairman:- Lady S Walker and Mrs G
Williamson – CPRE representatives.

Also present:- Councillor A Dean.

Officers in attendance:- Miss E Anderson, J B Dickson, P Dickson,
A Forrow, J Mitchell and M Perry.

S2.21 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs D Cornell,
M L Foley and A C Streeter.

S2.22 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 9 October 2002 were
received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

S2.23 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) S2.12 – Flood Defence at Bridge End

The Head of Planning and Building Surveying informed the Committee of the
progress to date. A meeting had been arranged for 10 December 2002 for
residents and authorities after which a working party could be set up to
monitor ongoing work.

In answer to a question from Councillor A Dean the Assistant Chief Executive
said that the Environment and Transport Committee would be asked to
consider provision for flood defence in the capital programme in the future.

(ii) S2.14(i) – Home Office Proposals for a Removals Centre

In answer to a question, the Assistant Chief Executive said that there was still
no further progress to report.

(iii) S2.14(ii) – Office accommodation

The Assistant Chief Executive reported that work was currently being carried
out on the car park and the project was progressing well. Members were
informed that there should be enough designated spaces for everyone taking

into consideration people who were on leave, sick or out of the offices. Staff would still be required to double park, but there would be no need to use the Swan Meadow car park for extra space. Councillor A Dean asked about the current situation concerning designated car park spaces.

Councillor Mrs Bayley was concerned about the relocation of the Members' Room to the 2nd floor and the current lift access, which had recently caused problems.

In answer to a question from Councillor Row, the Head of Planning and Building Surveying reported that negotiations were continuing regarding the use of the Council Offices in Great Dunmow.

(iv) S2.14(iii) – Audley End Station to Saffron Walden proposed cycleway

The Assistant Chief Executive agreed to follow up a request from Councillor Mrs Menell for Local Agenda 21 Forum and Road Safety Advisory Panel minutes to be agenda items at Environment and Transport Committee meetings. At present Local Agenda 21 Forum minutes were not distributed at meetings and Road Safety Advisory Panel minutes were only issued when relevant items were on the agenda. Councillor Mrs Menell also suggested that the Road Safety Officer should be present at all future meetings of the Environment and Transport Committee.

S2.24

PRESENTATION ON THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING SYSTEM

Councillor Hibbs declared a personal interest in this item.

The Head of Planning and Building Surveying made a presentation to the Committee on Town and Country Planning. He gave brief details of the history of planning, outlining how the legislation had begun and how it had changed over the years. He provided the Members with an overview of the different types of planning permission and obligations, the way in which government intervened, enforcement, public involvement and planning appeals.

Lady Walker from the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) enquired about the target for 80% of applications to be processed within 8 weeks and asked whether this period was adequate for large and small applications to be processed in this relatively short time. The Head of Planning and Building Surveying replied that this arbitrary time limit dated from pre-war legislation when there was no public involvement in the process. He said that a negotiated approval within 15 weeks would be a far better solution than a refusal in 8 weeks and therefore thought the national target was unsatisfactory.

In answer to further questions from the CPRE representatives, the Head of Planning and Building Surveying reported that at present there was no mechanism for the public to have input into the provision of schools, health and infrastructure and suggested that land use should relate to the social

aspect of the community. He pointed out the difficulties of public participation within the planning system. Planning decision-making invited public comments, but this information was sometimes difficult to use and was often not taken into account.

The CPRE representatives questioned the practice of planning applications being delegated to officers, rather than being sent to the Development Control and Licensing Committee for approval by members. The Head of Planning and Building Surveying commented that 90% delegation of applications was proposed by the Government to speed up decision-making. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) had stated that adoption of a good planning policy could enable easy delegation of work to officers, but the Head of Planning and Building Surveying expressed the view that Members should have the right to discuss applications.

In answer to a question from Councillor Stone asking what Section 106 Agreements involved, it was stated that they were to be relevant to planning, and the criteria reasonable and related to the development itself.

Councillor Mrs Flack asked whether Members of the Development Control and Licensing Committee were more sympathetic than planning officers. The Head of Planning and Building surveying informed Members that when applications were delegated to officers, Members could still be involved in the decision. Notification was given to Ward Members of the suggested decision before it was agreed and a document was currently in the process of being compiled to be available in the New Year to enable officers to gain views from Ward Members whilst still keeping to the 80% target rate of applications processed in 8 weeks.

It was agreed that representatives from the Government Office, Eastern Region (GOEast) and an Essex County Council representative be invited to attend a future meeting to discuss the broader aspects of planning procedure.

S2.25

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF CORPORATE PERFORMANCE LEGAL AND MONITORING SERVICES 2002/03

The Head of Legal Services presented a report detailing the findings of the Corporate Performance Legal and Monitoring Services Best Value review and proposing an improvement plan to be forwarded to Resources Committee.

The role of the Monitoring Officer was discussed, as was reducing the external spend by carrying out most legal work in house. It was estimated that £38,951 would have been spent on outsourcing work if it had not been carried out in-house. It was reported that partnership working had been investigated, but would work out more expensive and there would be a shared risk. The option of employing a procurement officer had been investigated. Enquiries had been made to other District Councils and authorities had produced examples of perceived benefits, but no evidence of savings was available so for this reason it was not recommended that this option should be pursued further at this stage. Members were informed of a new job description, which had been devised for a position of Performance Manager. This role would help to monitor corporate policy and performance in order to

meet the requirements of the modernising agenda. Members considered the proposed improvement plan outlining details such as reducing dependence on outsourced legal services, improving case handling via a computerised case management system and the new post of Performance Manager.

Councillor Sell welcomed the suggestion that a post of Performance Manager be established and felt it was essential to improve services at Uttlesford, but felt that the additional post of Policy Officer might also be required in future. However, he wished to make some amendments to the key responsibilities section of the job description as outlined in Appendix 2 of the report and with Councillor Hibbs' support proposed that,

- 1 key responsibility number 5 be amended to read 'To provide support and advice to members and officers on and during best value reviews'.
- 2 Key responsibility number 6 become number 7 and a new number 6 be inserted which would be 'To provide support and advice to members on the effective development of Scrutiny'.

Councillor R C Dean raised concern over the subject of procurement and whether it was solely related to Legal Services or to all goods and what savings a procurement officer would bring to this authority. The Head of Legal Services stated that there was no evidence of savings from other authorities; therefore the post of Procurement Officer was not being recommended at the present time. The Director of Resources commented that currently savings were being made in regard to central purchasing of vehicles and IT equipment.

RECOMMENDED to Resources Committee that

- 1 the proposed job description for the post of Performance Manager be amended as indicated above.
- 2 the improvement plan be approved.

S2.26

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF STREET CLEANSING 2002/03

The Services Officer presented a report on the Best Value Review of Street Cleansing and a draft Improvement Plan update. At the last Scrutiny Committee 2 meeting on 9 October 2002, suggestions had been made in relation to litter picking and emphasising the educational side of litter prevention. Town and parish councils had given a positive response, and many were already active in litter picking and wished to take part in the national spring clean. Environmental Campaigns (ENCAMS, formerly Tidy Britain Group) had been contacted and information packs were available to encourage schools to take part in recycling initiatives and therefore increase responsibility for their own litter. Theatre groups could be employed to provide environmental education, but this could prove costly and was not necessary as ENCAMS could provide the necessary information, most of which was free of charge.

Members discussed the issue of litter picking on grass verges and monitoring street cleansing. Schedules were being used to help monitor street cleansing, but officers also relied on monitoring by Councillors and residents to highlight problem areas. Councillor Ketteridge suggested that full use be made of the 42 Councillors to help monitor the cleanliness of Uttlesford and proposed that Councillors be provided with a schedule of street cleansing for their ward to help to achieve this. Councillors Mrs Menell and Hibbs supported the proposal.

In answer to Members' questions, the Services Officer reported that dog fouling was not a huge problem within the Uttlesford District and that also the Pest Control Officers were extremely busy at present, he was not aware of any particular problems in this area.

The issue of waste glass bottles on streets outside public houses was discussed. Members were informed that there was no liaison with public houses to force them to clean up the area outside their buildings but street cleansing took place in the early hours of the morning to clean up the areas. Fast food outlets were currently obliged to control litter outside their premises, but public houses were not. Councillor Mrs Flack suggested that obligation to keep areas clean around businesses should be included in planning consent.

RECOMMENDED to the Environment and Transport Committee that

- 1 Schedules outlining programmes of street cleansing and litter bin emptying be issued to all Councillors.
- 2 the draft improvement plan be approved.

S2.27

COUNCIL POLICY PRIORITIES FOR 2002/03

Members were issued with a list setting out progress on Council Policy Priorities for 2002/03.

Councillor Hibbs expressed concern over the item on reduced cash targets for committees and the Director of Resources said that the Council had agreed the targets to be set. The Assistant Chief Executive added that Members would have a chance to review this at the Full Council meeting on 17 December 2002. Councillor Sell mentioned the consensus within the Community and Leisure Committee on the impracticability of the set targets.

In answer to a question from Councillor Mrs Bayley about the Community Strategy preparation, the Assistant Chief Executive replied that the draft strategy would be presented to the next Full Council meeting and put out in the New Year for consultation.

Councillor R C Dean requested the chance to comment on the new committee system.

S2.28

SIX MONTH PERFORMANCE REPORTS

Six Month Performance Reports were issued to Members of the Committee for the following five services:-

(i) Environmental Services

The report outlined performances and targets for the kerbside collection of recyclable household waste.

In answer to a question from Councillor Mrs Flack, the Services Officer replied that there were no figures available at present to show that the total amount of waste materials being collected was rising.

(ii) Planning and Building Surveying Services

At this point Councillor Hibbs declared a prejudicial interest and left the meeting.

This report advised the Committee of work carried out by the Planning and Building Surveying Service for the period April to October 2002 informing Members of Best Value Performance Indicators for planning applications and searches and the targets achieved within the past six months. The Head of Planning and Building Surveying drew attention to the high standard of the work the Building Surveying Section carried out. He reported that the Best Value review of planning services had been delayed and would now be completed by October 2003. Members were informed of work being carried out by Planning Services such as work on customer services, changes to the agenda and working practices, preparing for the move to Saffron Walden and contributing to the Council's response on the SERAS consultation. In general it had been an extremely busy year for the service with the proposed expansion at Stansted Airport and the proposal for an asylum seeker Removals Centre.

Councillor Mrs Flack asked if there had been any progress in reviewing the incidents of flooding in the bad weather of October 2001 and was informed that this issue had been to the Environment and Transport Committee and a project plan to reduce risk in future was being worked on.

RESOLVED that Members note the report.

At this point Councillor Hibbs rejoined the meeting.

(iii) Legal Services

The Head of Legal Services reported that the library source material had been transferred to become electronic material which made searching for material less time consuming. He also reported on the success rate of the land charges officers and congratulated them on their efficient work. 99% of searches were completed within seven working days and searches never took more than 8 days to complete. The Committee also expressed its thanks to the officers involved for their excellent work.

(iv) Financial Services

The Director of Resources commented that the targets were not national targets and were not included in the Best Value Performance Plan. A report on Financial Services had been presented to the Resources Committee on 21 November 2002. There had been a period of change in the Council regarding financial services. The new audit regulations, CPA and the new Local Government Bill were putting extra pressure on the services; however, all local targets had been met. The introduction of a procurement system required a lot of training and the introduction of a financial information system was planned to be implemented.

(v) Revenue Services

The Director of Resources informed the Committee of the success of Revenue Services. Some years ago there had been difficulties, but now targets and national indicators were being met. The success had come from the restructuring of the service and the progress of staff via good training. This section had won a national award of £500, which had been passed on to the BUFFY Bus Association. Payment of Council Tax via direct debit was being encouraged. Payment booklets for business rates had been discontinued and the Council Tax payment booklets were being withdrawn in April 2003 with the anticipation that people would pay by direct debit, although the cash offices would continue to take cash and cheque payments.

S2.29

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE HELD ON 12 NOVEMBER 2002

(i) Proposed Waiting Restrictions – Harvey Way, Saffron Walden

Councillor R C Dean commented that this decision extended the yellow lines around this junction to ease congestion and increase road safety. However, it was more important for trees to be cut back to enable traffic to be seen more clearly.

(ii) Draft Budgets

Councillor Copping asked if there had been any further progress with problems at the Elsenham Industrial Estate and the Director of Resources replied that a report was expected in the January cycle of meetings at the Environment and Transport Committee. Councillor Copping noted that this problem had been ongoing for some time bearing in mind the possible budgetary implications, the Committee

RECOMMENDED that an early report be produced for Council.

S2.30

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 21 NOVEMBER 2002

The Committee received the decision list of the meeting of the Resources Committee held on 21 November 2002.

S2.31 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Chief Executive reported to Members that the work required on the budgets in January might be substantial. A further session had been agreed earlier in the meeting to discuss the broader aspects of planning. The Chairman invited members to put forward suggestions for topics for future meetings of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm.