

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2 – RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT held at  
COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on  
2 APRIL 2003**

Present:- Councillor R J Copping – Chairman.  
Councillors Mrs C A Bayley, 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.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs M Cox, J B Dickson, Mrs E Forbes, A Farrow,  
Miss R Haylock, J Mitchell and B D Perkins.

Also in attendance:- John Dowie – Director of Planning and Transport  
Government Office for the Eastern Region.

**S2.43 WELCOME**

The Chairman welcomed Rebecca Haylock to the meeting. She had recently taken up the post of Temporary Committee Officer.

**S2.44 APOLOGIES**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor R P Chambers.

**S2.45 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2003 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**S2.46 BUSINESS ARISING**

**(i) Minute S2.35(ii) – Home Office Proposals for a removals centre**

The Chief Executive confirmed that there had been no further developments concerning the proposed removals centre.

**(ii) Minute S2.35(iii) – Office Accommodation**

In answer to a question from Councillor Row, officers confirmed that the Resources Committee had been informed that an offer had been received for the letting of the Dunmow Offices. It was hoped to make a further report to the Council on 15 April.

**(iii) Minute S2.35(iv) – Audley End Station, Saffron Walden – proposed cycleway**

Councillor Hibbs was disturbed that there was no plan to pursue the construction of a cycleway from Audley End Station to Saffron Walden.

**(iv) Minute S2.35(v) – Proposed Waiting Restrictions – Harvey Way, Saffron Walden**

Councillor R Dean said that the work to cut back the overgrown trees at this junction had been ineffective and the visibility was still poor. The problems at this junction had first been raised in September 2000 and he was surprised that there had not been a major incident at this blind corner.

Councillor Mrs Flack agreed to meet Councillor Dean at the site and to pass his concerns to the responsible Cabinet Member at the County Council.

**(v) Minute S2.36 – Benefactor Contribution – Stansted Mountfitchet Leisure Centre**

The Chairman reported that he had attended a meeting of all parties regarding the naming of the Stansted Mountfitchet Leisure Centre. This had been a positive meeting and the benefactor had requested that the matter be resolved by the end of April. The IPS would make the final decision.

**(vi) Minute S2.37(i) – Car Park Charges**

Councillor Hibbs was concerned at the manner in which the increased charges had been introduced, particularly as notices had been put up early which had caused confusion. He considered that the Council's partner, Waitrose, had not been adequately consulted.

S2.47

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME**

The Committee had received the report of the final follow up visit of the IDeA Review Team. The Challenges that had been identified had subsequently been considered by the Council's Corporate Management Team and ways of moving forward had been identified. The Committee discussed these challenges in detail.

The Chairman asked how the Council would deal with the challenge to prioritise existing priorities to establish strong direction for the authority. The Chief Executive replied that the Council had agreed its priorities in October and during the coming cycle of meetings these would be further clarified and sharpened. The intention was to align budget planning with these priorities. The Chairman then asked whether enough had been done to ensure that corporate priorities were widely communicated and understood. The Chief Executive said that in the next few months the Best Value Performance Plan and a draft of the Community Plan would be published and these drew attention to the Council's priorities. From this year the summary Best Value leaflet had been circulated with the Council Tax bills.

Councillor Hibbs commented that there had been some explicit criticisms of the working relationship between officers and members. He felt these points should be addressed specifically. Councillor Mrs Flack was disappointed at the comments and felt that any problems affected only a few officers and were probably the result of the tight political balance of the Council. She considered that normal staff relationships were working well. The Chief

Executive said that an external advisor had recently facilitated workshops with Members and Officers and the outcome had informed the drafting of the Member/Officer Protocol. Councillor Sell referred to instances where officers had not informed ward members of important issues within their wards. The Chairman said that this matter would be addressed in the Protocol. Councillor Hibbs felt that the CMT's report to Resources Committee did not give enough information.

With regard to the preparation for CPA, the Chairman said that a successful review would depend on several issues including members' knowledge and ability to respond. The Chief Executive agreed there was much work to be done before the review in February next year. The Performance Manager would be in post from 1 May and would be working on this with members and officers. There would be workshops during the summer and a decision would need to be made on which Member body would oversee the process.

S2.48

## **PLANNING AND THE GOVERNMENT**

Councillor M A Hibbs declared a personal interest in this item by reason of his profession of architect.

John Dowie, Director of Planning and Transport for the Government Office for the East of England, gave a presentation on the role of the Government Office (GO-East). He briefly outlined the proposals for changes to the planning system and the relationship between the Regional Office and the Local Authority.

Lady Suzanne Walker and Mrs Gillian Williamson from the CPRE attended the meeting for this item. They commented, as did a number of other members, on the tensions between Central Government and local authorities in respect of the control of local planning decisions. In particular, they questioned how the announcement that there should be 200,000 new homes in the south-east squared with local decision making. Councillor Copping mentioned the Planning Delivery Grant and the £60,000 that had been awarded to Uttlesford because it was located within a community growth area. John Dowie confirmed that there was no connection between accepting the grant money and getting extra houses in the district. At the moment the growth area had been drawn with a broad brush. The Chairman thanked Mr Dowie for his presentation and Mr Dowie then left the meeting.

S2.49

## **ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL COMMUNITY STRATEGY**

The Committee was given details of the County Council's recently published draft Community Strategy. It presented a similar vision to the Essex 'Challenges and Vision' document which the Council had considered at its meeting on 16 July 2002. It identified broad challenges for the County and visions for the future. A response was needed by 31 March 2003 and the document had already been considered by Scrutiny Committee 1 at its last meeting. Members concurred with the comments made by that meeting and also officers' comments set out in the report. The Chairman questioned if and when any of the visions would be implemented, given the budgetary

constraints of the County Council. Councillor Mrs Menell said this document was a broad statement of visions not specific to this area. She felt that this Council should work towards its own Community Strategy.

RESOLVED that the Committee's observations be relayed to the Chief Executive for inclusion in the Council's response to the Essex County Council.

S2.50

### **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE HELD ON 11 MARCH 2003**

#### **(i) Locally Determined Budget Programme 2002/03**

Councillor Mrs Flack said that the County was increasing its overall road maintenance budget and Uttlesford District was likely to get an increase of 40%. She asked whether this would feed into the Locally Determined Budget. Officers replied that they were aware of County Council budget increases, which would be discussed at a future meeting at County Hall.

#### **(ii) Car Boot Sales – The Common Car Park, Saffron Walden**

The Committee questioned the decision that had been taken by officers to suspend holding car boot sales on the Common Car Park. Councillor Mrs Bayley said that the decision had been taken when one person had been slightly injured in the car park, and pointed out that this could have happened at any time. A number of residents and charities were very unhappy about the decision. Councillor Mrs Menell said that it had caused a lot of misunderstanding and bad publicity for the Council. She asked why the issue had not been discussed at the Community and Leisure Committee, before the decision had been taken. Councillor Hibbs commented that the reason for the decision was that there was no way of preventing people from parking on the car park during a car boot sale and it was therefore difficult to ensure safety. Councillor Mrs Flack said that the Council should adopt a 'can-do' mentality and find a way of reinstating the car boot sales at this location.

RECOMMENDED that the car boot sales on the Saffron Walden Common Car Park be reinstated as soon as practicable pending further examination, if necessary.

S2.51

### **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 20 MARCH 2003**

#### **(i) Stansted Airport Campaign – Progress Report and New Commitments**

In answer to a question by the Chairman, officers confirmed that NWEHHPA's response to the Council's request that it consider allowing three Uttlesford Members to serve on its Management Committee had not been formally reported to the Resources Committee.

**(ii) Corporate Governance**

The Committee was advised that all local authorities had to adopt a Code of Corporate Governance and keep it under periodic review. An initial code had been prepared and considered at the Resources Committee and had been recommended to the Council meeting for approval. It was suggested that this Committee should have the monitoring and oversight role for this code.

RESOLVED that

- 1 the Council be informed that the Committee agrees to undertake the monitoring and oversight role for the Code of Corporate Governance,
- 2 the new Committee consider the Code as part of its future work programme.

**(iii) Dunmow Office Letting**

Councillor Row commented that the Council Offices in Great Dunmow had been unlet for three months of this year. He asked how this would affect the projected first year figures that had been presented as part of the report on the office move. Councillor Hibbs understood that savings had also not been made on the personnel side and asked how this would affect the budgeted figures. Councillor Mrs Menell commented on the need for a induction loop system to be considered.

RESOLVED that officers report to the next meeting of the Committee on the financial implications of the leasing of the Dunmow offices.

S2.52

**BEST VALUE REVIEWS TERMS OF REFERENCE****(i) Refuse and Recycling Services**

The Committee considered the proposed terms of reference for the Best Value Review of Refuse and Recycling Services. Councillor Flack asked for an additional question to be included under the heading 'Some Fundamental General Questions'.

"Does the Council want to consider the future of the Saffron Walden civic amenity site and the proposed new site in Dunmow within the scope of the review?"

RESOLVED that the above question be included within the terms of reference.

It was noted that consideration of home glass collection could be included within the Review's existing terms of reference.

**(ii) Revenue Services**

The Committee received the Terms of Reference for the Best Value Review of Revenue Services.

Members raised a number of issues with regard to payment of Council Tax, particularly that of the withdrawal of Council Tax paying-in books.

RESOLVED that the Terms of Reference be approved.

**S2.53 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee agreed that it should be up to the newly elected Committee to decide on its own work programme. However, a number of members raised some concerns about the operation of the Council's IT system. Councillor Stone said that the new digital connection would be available after 1 May and would improve the situation. However, Members considered that there were still a number of issues with the Council's communications system that should be looked at, such as the wider matter of communication with parish and town councils

RESOLVED that the Committee considers communications at its next meeting.

**S2.54 THE PROCESS FOR HANDLING MAJOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

At the last meeting, it had been agreed to hold an informal workshop to discuss the process for handling major planning applications and report back to this committee. A number of Members had attended the workshop which had been very useful and a number of lessons had been learnt. Arising from the workshop officers had circulated a list of some principles to consider when dealing with a major planning application. The Head of Planning and Building Surveying said it had become clear that with any major planning application it was essential to get controversial issues into the public domain as soon as possible. He said a subsequent meeting had been held with the Stansted Airport Planning Team to discuss the issue. Several Members of the Committee were of the view that major planning applications, like the expansion of the airport, should be decided by the Full Council. Councillor Row said that he had been very disappointed that he had not been able to represent the residents in his ward when the decision had been made to approve the recent airport application. Councillor Mrs Menell considered that an application should be treated as 'major' if it had an impact on the residents of the district as a whole.

**S2.55 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 paragraphs 1, 7, 8 and 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

S2.56 **GOLDS NURSERIES BUSINESS PARK**

The Committee received a detailed report on the background to and the current situation at the Golds Nurseries Business Park, Elsenham.

RESOLVED that officers report to the next meeting on Internal Audit Procedures.

S2.57 **LAST MEETING**

The Chairman thanked the Members of the Committee for their support during the last year. He thanked officers for their help and in particular the invaluable assistance of the Assistant Chief Executive, Tony Farrow, who would be retiring in May. He would be greatly missed and all Members of the Committee joined in wishing him all the very best for the future.

Members thanked the Chairman for the way in which he had conducted the business of the Committee.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm