

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 3 APRIL 2012**

Present: Councillor E Godwin – Chairman.
Councillors G Barker, P Davies, I Evans, and D Morson.

Also present: Councillors J Ketteridge – Leader
Councillors S Barker – Executive Member for Environment and
R Chambers – Executive Member for Finance.

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director Corporate Services),
R Dobson (Democratic Services Officer), R Millership (Assistant
Director Housing and Environment), J Snares (Housing Needs and
Landlord Services Manager), A Taylor (Assistant Director Planning
and Building Control) and V Taylor (Business Improvement and
Performance Officer).

SC51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Howell, E Oliver and
J Rich.

*Councillor Godwin declared a personal interest as a member of the Local
Development Framework Working Group.*

*Councillor S Barker declared a personal interest as a member of Essex
County Council, the Essex Fire Authority and LDF Working Group.*

*Councillor Chambers declared a personal interest as a member of Essex
County Council and the Essex Fire Authority.*

*Councillor Ketteridge declared a personal interest as chairman of the LDF
Working Group.*

SC52 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2012 were received and
signed as a correct record.

SC53 MATTERS ARISING

(i) Minute SC37 – Police Estate Reform

Councillor Davies suggested that the Committee should scrutinise the police
reforms soon after they had conducted their own review of the changes,
which was to be within six months.

(ii) Minute SC50 – infrastructure to support waste collection

Councillor Morson asked for an update on the provision of a workshop and procurement of vehicles for waste collection. Councillor S Barker replied that these arrangements were on course.

The Chairman asked about progress of the green waste scheme.

Councillor S Barker said 2,100 bins and explanatory leaflets had been distributed in the south of the district this week, that the north area would receive bins next week, and that so far she had had no queries.

The Chairman said she had received some queries regarding missing bins, and also some people had reported that despite registering an interest they had heard nothing further. Councillor S Barker asked that specific queries be forwarded to her. She explained that a paper was going to Cabinet regarding areas which were impractical to access and that the County Council had agreed to accept a small amount of green waste from these areas.

SC54 CONSIDERATION OF MATTERS REFERRED IN RELATION TO CALL-IN

There were no matters referred for call-in.

SC55 RESPONSES OF THE EXECUTIVE TO REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE

There were no matters requiring responses from the Executive.

SC56 LEADER'S FORWARD PLAN

The Chairman suggested that this item be considered at the same time as the item dealing with a work programme for future meetings.

**SC57 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: GREATER ESSEX
DEMOGRAPHIC FORECASTS**

Councillor Ketteridge introduced the item and summarised the background to the report which was to go to Cabinet this week, setting out a new figure for housing numbers.

The Committee considered the report, which would invite Cabinet to note demographic forecasts and to confirm the economic scenario as the appropriate forecast for the preparation of a new Uttlesford Local Plan. The report concluded that the economic led scenario was a robust basis on which to base the core strategy for the district's new development plan.

Members discussed the report in detail. It was noted that the exclusion from the figures of homes for which there already existed planning permission gave a figure of 3,300 houses to be built over the next fifteen years.

Councillor G Barker declared a personal interest in that he was married to the Portfolio Holder for the Environment. He commented on the complexity and length of the report prepared by consultants.

The Assistant Director of Planning and Building Control said that it was because of the complexity of the data that a high-calibre consultant had been instructed, as it was important to provide robust statistics and analysis upon which to base conclusions.

Councillor G Barker said the report contained specific charts relating to a number of different authorities and asked whether the Council could be assured that the study would be confirmed as reliable by government.

The Assistant Director of Planning and Building Control said this was a forecasting model owned by the East of England LGA, so was owned by councils. The figures were based on those produced by the Office for National Statistics and updates from the Department for Communities and Local Government, so the data it used was relied upon by government.

Councillor Morson asked when results would be available from the consultation with this district's residents.

Councillor S Barker said that the responses would be considered at a meeting of the LDF Working Group on 5 April. The initial report and consultation responses had been made available to members and had been tabled.

The Chairman asked a question about in-commuting and commuting out to London. Officers explained that the percentage rate for these figures had been kept as a constant in the report.

The Chairman said the Committee's biggest concern was that the Council's reasoning had a sound basis.

AGREED unanimously to endorse the report to be submitted to Cabinet.

SC58

DAY CENTRES

The Committee considered a report on day centres which would go forward to Cabinet on 5 April. The report set out details of the transfer of maintenance responsibilities for the Stansted Day Centre to Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council, which owned the asset. Stansted Day Centre retained 100% of its lettings income and the report also considered extending this arrangement to the other day centres in the district.

The Assistant Director for Housing and Environment explained that the management agreements had been updated in March. She referred Members to the details given in the report regarding transfer arrangements of Stansted day centre to Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council; proposals for the day centres to keep donations and lettings income, and a proposal for

renegotiation of the reimbursement of salaries for the cooks at Takeley and Thaxted day centres. Regarding the retention by day centres of lettings income, the Assistant Director for Housing and Environment said this was an important step forward in providing an incentive to the day centres to be more productive and in promoting their lunch clubs to a new clientele. She said the Council had already been approached by Caremark about the possibility of using some of the buildings as respite care day centres. Dunmow Day Centre had agreed to progress with a pilot scheme for this initiative, following which it could be taken on by the other centres.

Regarding the renegotiation of the arrangements under which the cooks at Takeley and Thaxted were employed, it had been agreed that the new arrangements would be subject to a three year sliding scale to address any concern that the income of these day centres would not immediately be sufficient to meet such costs.

Councillor Chambers said he was happy with the proposals.

Members discussed the report, commenting on the pattern of use of the day centres, the alterations which would be required to the management agreements, and the co-ordination of management of the centres. The Assistant Director for Housing and Environment said officers were providing the day centres with support in areas such as health and safety and food hygiene. Councillor Morson asked that Members' thanks be conveyed to officers for providing this support.

The Assistant Director for Housing and Environment reported that Councillor Redfern would like to invite two Members to be 'buddies' or champions for day centres to help them take more initiatives and to be more commercial.

In reply to a question, officers assured members that management agreements included reference to safeguarding vulnerable adults and that day centre staff received training in this area.

The Chairman expressed a preference that the day centres should aim to become more user-friendly, rather than turn into commercial enterprises. She thanked all officers involved, and in particular Mrs Shephard-Lewis for the support she had given to day centres.

AGREED to endorse the recommendations in the report.

SC59

SCOPING REPORT ON REVIEW OF HOMELESSNESS

The Committee considered a brief report setting out the potential scope of a review of homelessness to be considered at the meeting in June. Members asked questions regarding the Council's policy regarding the frequency of rough sleeper counts, and regarding the written strategy document. The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager explained that there was no longer an obligation on the Council to conduct a rough sleeper count, but that

in the past the number of rough sleepers in this district had been zero. She said the strategy was due to be re-written this year and would form a single document with the housing strategy. Councillor Morson felt a shorter document would be an improvement.

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said figures for those presenting as homeless had increased this year, compared to the previous year. Members wished to know about the level of increases, the implications for the service, and how the Council worked with its neighbouring authorities.

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said the Council was a member of the Gateway group, which comprised a fairly disparate group of local authorities, including Suffolk Coastal, Colchester, Ipswich and Mid Suffolk. Funding of £362,000 was available to the Gateway member authorities for rough sleeping initiatives, and whilst the disparate mix of authorities posed certain challenges for finding suitable schemes, officers hoped to ensure this Council could also benefit from this sum.

The Chairman noted that this money was not available to help families who found themselves homeless. The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said that a sum of £30K had been made available to the council by the Department for Communities and Local Government, 'Homelessness Repossession fund' which was not ring-fenced, with an expectation that it would be used for families facing repossession. She offered to bring to the Committee more detailed information on the work the department was doing to help families in this situation and to help people avoid having to make homelessness applications. She said she had approached the Citizens' Advice Bureau regarding the possibility of funding debt advice using some of the money available.

Councillor S Barker commented that bed and breakfast accommodation was very expensive, and asked whether it was feasible to establish whether private home-owners with spare annexes or unoccupied houses might be willing to take in a young person who had been thrown out of the family home.

Councillor G Barker said that whilst Uttlesford did not have a problem with rough sleepers, he was aware of several cases of 'sofa surfers', or those who lived in cars or in sheds, and there was therefore a great unmet need in the district.

The Housing Needs and Landlord Services Manager said the statistics were the tip of the iceberg, and there were many who did not come under priority need status. Identifying those in need of help depended on the definition of the homelessness problem.

The Chairman said scrutiny of the entire homelessness options service would be useful to ensure the right approach was being taken.

The question of an option to place young people in private accommodation rather than bed and breakfast was discussed further, and reference made to conducting risk assessments which might rule out such an option. Members discussed options available to 16 and 17 year old applicants for temporary accommodation. Officers explained that the first priority for these applicants was to try to get them back home.

Members referred to the benefits review due to take place, under which many people would lose benefits. As a Council it was important to agree which groups should receive subsidy, and to look in particular at how families would finance themselves. Officers gave an explanation of the limited types of accommodation available in Uttlesford. The opportunity afforded by the new National Planning Framework to building new housing was mentioned, in the context of analysing demand from the housing list.

SC60

LEADER'S FORWARD PLAN, SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2011/12 REVIEW AND 2012/13 PLAN

It was noted that the Leader's Forward Plan would in future be a standing item on this Committee's agenda to enable Members to identify what they wished to consider in advance.

Regarding the review of outside bodies which had been the subject of scrutiny during the year 2011/12, Members expressed some concern as to whether much was achieved in the absence of any sanction. It was important that the Committee's time should be used only for areas where it could make a difference. Presentations to the Committee had tended to be generic, and it was not clear how to measure the impact of the scrutiny the Committee was conducting. Whilst initially presentations were useful, once they had taken place it was more helpful to have a more focused approach, and to invite people to appear again before the Committee.

Officers advised that the introduction of scoping reports would enable people attending before the Committee to be given advance notice of which areas were of interest to the Committee so that they could prepare their replies in some depth.

Members considered the following areas should be brought back for review: ambulance cover in rural areas; GP provision and the future of the PCT; and police station closures. It was noted the Committee was required to consider the upkeep of Bridge End Gardens under the terms of the agreement with Saffron Walden Town Council, but it was agreed that an update could be circulated to Members by email.

Regarding internal services scrutinised in 2011/12, Members noted progress had been made on Day Centres as explained earlier this evening. Areas which the Committee wished to revisit were the waste strategy; car parking charges; 2012/13 General Fund Budget; 2012/13 HRA Budget; 2012/13 Capital Budget.

Regarding areas potentially suitable for review, the Chairman commented that due to the change of governance of the Council it was important for scrutiny to be pro-active. She suggested the Cabinet system itself should be the subject of a review, including a questionnaire to all Members.

Members were interested in future scrutiny of airport fly parking; an update on the Revenues and Benefits Partnership and allocation of the New Homes Bonus Jubilee Fund. Regarding this item, Members noted the item was to be dealt with by Cabinet on 10 May and questioned the governance process for distributing this money. Officers advised on the timing of meetings and it was suggested that the Cabinet Member for Finance should be invited to attend the Committee to answer questions about the New Homes Bonus allocation.

SC61

SCRUTINY CALL-IN PROCESS REVIEW

Councillor Morson, as Chairman of the Constitution Working Group, gave an update on the issue of scrutiny call-in which had been considered at the meeting on 9 February 2012. Prior to the change to a cabinet system, call-in was available to any three Members; under the cabinet system call-in was limited to three Members of the Scrutiny Committee. It was felt by some Members that this process was rather restrictive, and the suggestion had been put forward to revert to the previous arrangement. However, the meeting had been informed that this model was once which most authorities had adopted, and all Members could lobby Scrutiny Committee Members. The feeling of the majority of the Working Group was therefore to leave the call-in process as it was, but to keep it under review.

Councillor Evans said she supported a wider scrutiny call-in process.

Officers suggested reviewing the way in which the current process worked by monitoring the number of call-ins and attempted call-ins.

Councillor Morson said that following this review, if it was the view of the Committee that this issue should again be considered by the Constitution Working Group, that the Committee's conclusion would give him a mandate to raise it again. He suggested that this monitoring should be incorporated into the general review of the governance of the Council which had been suggested.

Officers agreed to obtain advice on the constitutional position regarding a review and questionnaire on the Cabinet system and to provide an update at the next meeting.

The meeting ended at 9.30pm.