

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30pm on 20 June 2017**

Present: Councillor A Dean (Chairman)
Councillors G Barker, R Chambers, P Davies, M Felton, A Gerard,
S Harris, G LeCount, E Oliver and L Wells.

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director - Corporate Services), P
Evans (Leisure and Performance Manager), B Ferguson,
(Democratic Services Officer), G Glenday (Assistant Director -
Planning), A Knight (Assistant Director - Resources) and A Webb
(Director - Finance and Corporate Services).

SC1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillors Asker, Lemon and Light. Councillor Gerard was acting as a substitute for Councillor Light. Councillor Wells was acting as substitute for Councillor Lemon.

SC2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 April 2017 were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

SC3 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Members received the latest version of the Cabinet Forward Plan.

The Chairman asked a question about a request from Aspire regarding Newnham Building refurbishment funds. The Director - Finance and Corporate Services said it was agreed to refurbish this building when the contract was drawn-up.

Councillor Gerard asked how the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP), scheduled for Cabinet in October, would be scrutinised before the Local Plan went to consultation. The Assistant Director - Planning said there would be a further consultation stage commencing in January 2018, and that the Local Plan would be revised prior to this to include AQAP. In response to a question from Councillor Gerard, he confirmed that the Scrutiny Committee would have the opportunity to scrutinise AQAP. The Chairman agreed that it was important to have the AQAP brought to the Scrutiny Committee and it should be included in the Work Programme.

SC4 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The committee received its work programme for 2017-18.

In response to a question from Councillor Felton, The Assistant Director of Planning said he would discuss with the legal team to ascertain if the Street Naming and Numbering Policy could be brought forward from September. Currently, a review was being undertaken into neighbouring authorities' procedures for neighbouring and numbering streets, to ascertain the best way forward. Councillor Felton asked if any information could be passed to Parish Councils; the Chairman said the Assistant Director of Planning could provide a written update for members to use when talking to parish councils. The Chairman, in response to questions from Councillors Harris and Davies, said there was time to revise the Work Programme and resolve actions that had yet to be addressed. Councillor Davies mentioned the Health and Wellbeing strategy specifically. The Chairman said if members sent in issues that they felt were still unresolved, work could be done outside of this committee to get them back on track.

The Assistant Director of Corporate Services suggested that the Member/Public Engagement item could now be taken off the Work Programme as a new Public Engagement Working Group had been established and progress would be tracked through the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan. This was agreed.

SC5

LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT (LCTS) SCHEME 2018/19

The Assistant Director - Resources presented her report to the committee, setting out the draft proposals for the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme before it was put forward to public consultation.

There would be a continuation of the Council's LCTS scheme, particularly with regards to the retention of the 12.5% contribution rate and the priority of protecting vulnerable and disabled people within the district. The main departure was the proposed withdrawal of the discretionary Parish and Town grant funding in 2017-18.

Councillors Barker and Chambers both expressed support for the scheme, saying it was right to continue to protect the most vulnerable people in the district.

In response to a question from Councillor Gerard, the Chairman said the withdrawal of Parish and Town funding would essentially make parishes responsible for their own income.

RESOLVED - to recommend to Cabinet that it approves the draft proposals set-out in the report.

SC6

BUDGET AND LCTS CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY REPORT

The Assistant Director -Corporate Services explained that his report summarised the methodology used to conduct the Budget and LCTS consultations with the public.

He said that the majority of consultations took one of two approaches; Corporate or Service based. Since 2015, UDC had taken the service-based approach to questions, as members of the public were more likely to respond to questions relating to services they could identify with.

The following methods were used when consulting residents and local businesses over the budget:

- Telephone surveys of 500 residents
- Online consultation open to all residents
- Paper questionnaires in libraries and UDC customer service points
- Through the Council's Citizens' Panel
- A dedicated business focussed version of the consultation available online, details of which were circulated through the Uttlesford Business Database
- Direct contact at business networking events

With regards to the LCTS consultation, the following methods were used:

- Distributed as an insert within the Uttlesford Life magazine and including a prepaid return envelope
- Made available as an online consultation
- Made available as paper questionnaires in libraries and UDC customer service points.

The approach to the next public consultation would be the same as the previous year, with the only change being that the budget consultation would be included in addition to the LCTS consultation, in the September issue of the Uttlesford Life magazine. Residents would have the option of completing one or both of the forms and could return both in a single pre-paid envelope. This change had been driven by the high response rate for the LCTS consultation in previous years, using the same method. The favourable response rate compared to neighbouring authorities was also stated, with UDC having received 1,115 responses, in comparison to Braintree, which only received 257 returns.

The Chairman asked if officers received further information on why a consultee answered in a particular way as, for instance, an individual could be rating a service which they had never used. Councillor Barker asked if text boxes were placed by questions, so consultees could explain what had informed their answer. The Assistant Director - Corporate Services said no, as 'free text' commentary on surveys were difficult to evaluate and fit into an evidence based narrative.

Councillor LeCount asked if the public received any feedback from UDC following a consultation, regarding how the Council responded to the public's answers. The Assistant Director- Corporate Services said the 500 residents on the Citizen's Panel all received a summary of the survey, and all members of the public could find the results on the UDC website's Consultation page. Councillor Harris added that member newsletters and press releases were also used to distribute such findings to parishes and local residents.

In response to a question from Councillor Wells, the Assistant Director - Corporate Services said the turnout was small but greatly exceeded that of

neighbouring authorities. The quality was also higher, as demographic profiles were taken into account. Councillor Harris said an incentive could be used to increase participation. Councillor LeCount said the turnout reported was an expected response rate, validating the council's approach to such surveys.

The committee noted that a response rate of 1% would be considered good for such consultations.

Councillor Barker asked if a solution had been reached regarding the technological shift away from landlines, where the vast majority of surveys were carried out. The Assistant Director - Corporate Services said this was an ongoing problem as the telephone lists available were all for landlines. Going forward, face to face interviews were being considered.

SC62

THE UTTLESFORD LOCAL PLAN PROCESS

The Assistant Director - Planning presented his report to members regarding the Scrutiny Committee's formal role in the Local Plan process. He said the Scrutiny Committee had an important role to play in monitoring the Local Plan, particularly with regards to ensuring that the plan had met all statutory requirements before being formally adopted. He suggested that the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) be commissioned to assist the Scrutiny Committee in reviewing the Local Plan process, prior to the publication of the Regulation 19 draft.

Councillor Gerard proposed that each member could scrutinise the allocation numbers in their own ward, to ensure the statistics stated were correct, which would help move the Local Plan forward. The Chairman felt that this was something that could be done outside of the Committee, as members could deal directly with officers and would not need to wait for formal approval from the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Barker disagreed with the Terms of Reference set out in the report and asked how the committee could assess the Local Plan without the technical expertise provided at the Planning Policy Working Group (PPWG). He suggested giving this role to PAS, who had the expertise and resources to scrutinise the plan effectively and in good time.

Councillor Harris asked how the committee could take on the responsibility of ensuring the Local Plan met all statutory requirements, when the PPWG had yet to do so, despite being established to ensure the Local Plan was robust. She said it was very late in the process to bring the issue to Scrutiny.

The Chairman said input was certainly required from the PAS and suggested that they attend the committee to provide expertise and guidance. He added that the Local Plan, the culmination of years of work, could not be thrown out due to a technicality.

Councillors Harris and Chambers said the Scrutiny Committee could call in any aspect of the Local Plan at any time, and there was no need to adopt new terms of reference as outlined in the report.

RESOLVED that the Terms of Reference outlined in the report were rejected.

The meeting ended at 8.50pm.