



## Public Document Pack

# Uttlesford District Council

Chief Executive: Peter Holt

## SUPPLEMENTARY PACK

### Council

**Date:** Tuesday, 10th October, 2023  
**Time:** 7.00 pm  
**Venue:** Council Chamber - Council Offices, London Road, Saffron Walden, CB11 4ER

**Chairman:** Councillor G Driscoll  
**Members:** Councillors M Ahmed, A Armstrong, H Asker, G Bagnall, S Barker, N Church, M Coletta, A Coote, C Criscione, J Davey, A Dean, B Donald, J Emanuel, J Evans, C Fiddy, M Foley (Vice-Chair), R Freeman, R Gooding, N Gregory, N Hargreaves, R Haynes, P Lees, M Lemon, J Loughlin, T Loveday, S Luck, C Martin, D McBirnie, J Moran, E Oliver, R Pavitt, A Reeve, N Reeve, B Regan, G Sell, R Silcock, M Sutton and M Tayler

### ITEMS WITH SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION PART 1

#### Open to Public and Press

**4 Reports from the Leader and Members of the Executive 3 - 6**

To receive matters of report from the Leader and members of the Executive.

Reports have been received for supplementary publication from the:

- Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Economy
- Portfolio Holder for Housing

**10 Member Motion: Cost of Living Crisis 7 - 9**

To consider the member motion regarding the Cost of Living Crisis as submitted by Councillor Fiddy.

- Amendment to motion as submitted by Councillor Barker.



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Chief Executive: Peter Holt

**For information about this meeting please contact Democratic Services**

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## **General Enquiries**

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## **Councillor Arthur Coote – Portfolio Holder for Housing**

**Report to Full Council: 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

### **General Summary**

#### **Repairs and Maintenance**

Firstly, in asset management, UDC have been continuing to work with UNSL to agree the capital works programme for this year and next. We are still awaiting data from them to identify if any works on the proposed plan have been accounted for in last years works in progress. UNSL have promised this data by the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2023. We have a sign off process in place for capital works that are urgent, so we do not delay services to tenants, however our overall programme has not yet commenced, which is delaying our compliance with the Decent Homes Standard.

UDC have procured damp and mould contractors to complete the mould washes on our severe and moderate cases as UNSL had not been able to procure them within the timescales that UDC requested for the mould washes and remedial works to have taken place, which was for all sever cases to have been completed by the end of September. Letters are starting to go to tenants advising them that ICE and NCC (the two contractors) will be making appointments to visit and complete works. This work is being supervised by our Safer Homes Officer.

Void turnaround times remains at an average of 55 days against a benchmark average of 20 days. We are working at a granular level with UNSL to work through the 'key to key' stages but lack of in-house resources and an inability to source contractors quickly to cover the work is the reason that voids are taking longer to complete. A positive is that the standard of void properties has improved.

Since June we have revised our gas servicing and electrical check access procedure, bringing forward stages of the process with UNSL contractors and requiring the Housing Management team to intervene at an earlier stage where there are missed appointments or no contact. We have also engaged the use of injunctions to gain access to complete the checks and any remedial works that are identified, having completed 5 with 4 more in the legal process. This approach has meant that we have been able to access properties and identify property conditions issues and vulnerability that we were not previously aware of and for the housing officers to work with residents to address any issues.

You will note that there has been media attention in relation to reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC). Whilst it's use is not widespread in social housing; we have identified 3 sheltered schemes and 600 properties that were built during the period that RAAC was used. We have completed a desktop investigation and we started visual inspections last week to identify if we have any properties that we believe will need

specialist investigation. To date, we do not but will continue our visual inspections over the next two weeks.

UDC have agreed with Norse Group Ltd and UNSL that it is necessary to re-negotiate the terms of the existing Service Level Agreement and the Share Holder Agreement that exists between all parties. Heads of Terms were issued to UNSL by UDC on the 29<sup>th</sup> October 2023, requiring information and setting out expectations around the process, with key milestones. Decisions linked to the re-negotiation will require the oversight and approval of Housing Board and Cabinet at various stages before the commencement of possible remobilisation activities.

An update on the errors made in setting rents for the past two years, a letter has been sent to all tenants affected and rebates have all been issued. CMT will be signing off a new procedure, putting in lines of defence to tighten up the governance, so that all rent changes and rents for new homes or those which are calculated when a home is re-let, are checked by senior, qualified officers before being finalised. A new Rent Setting Policy is currently in draft and an internal audit is scheduled for November for added assurance.

The Tenant Satisfaction Measure's survey will begin the week commencing 9 October, a randomly selected number of our tenants will be called by 'Acuity', the provider that we have chosen to use and who completed our test run. Results of the survey will need to be submitted to the Regulator of Social Housing. We have included details of the survey in our most recent tenant newsletter.

We have recently completed and published our Annual Housing Report. A copy has been sent to all tenants and leaseholders.

End.

**Councillor Neil Hargreaves**  
**Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Economy**  
**Full Council report – 10 October 2023**

In July I attended a Communities and Partnerships briefing at the UDC offices. This is facilitated by UDC officers and includes representatives from organisations such as the Food Bank and from Harlow College at Stansted Airport. It is a sharing of information and potential priorities, which then may inform decisions UDC takes, for example on awarding government levelling up funds, and our own Voluntary Bodies Support grants. A recurring theme is that funds tend to go to those who are most adept at applying, which may not match the balance of needs. There is also a preponderance of applications from the Saffron Walden area. All of the opportunities and schemes are put on the Member briefing emails so perhaps members can assist by promoting interest and applications. We need to put resources where needed but can in practice only respond to what is applied for.

In September I met with officers to consider applications for the latest phase of UK Shared Prosperity Fund. UDC bid for and was awarded £800k for rural economy grants, in what is a replacement for EU funding, to be spent over two years. Applications fitting the criteria included additions of solar panels on a high energy use commercial building in Thaxted, an extension building for a business restoring classic Land Rovers also including solar, and a farm diversification at Takeley involving building a clown mad house as an addition to other successful tourist attractions at the farm.

The grants also cover culture and heritage improvements, and applications are on a rolling basis, with meetings held regularly to avoid delay – government schemes are typically short term and require spending by financial year end, which may be unrealistic unless a project is at an advanced stage.

There is much in the other papers for Council about our commercial property portfolio. One of the successes has been the funding out of the income of £450k towards larger sports facilities. Over three years various grants have been awarded including for Multi use Games Areas at Dunmow and Newport, £100k each towards

projects costing around £170k. The Newport one is just completed and the Sports Committee and Parish Council are very pleased and an opening ceremony is being arranged



Other meetings include the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) in Colchester. I emailed members a while ago with an account of how it works and how schemes are approved or not, and have also met with Stansted PC on their concerns and questions. Decisions on schemes are made by the NEPP board which I will be attending in November, and I have had a prior meeting with UDC officers to take their views and NEPP office feedback on schemes. One scheme is adjacent to the recent serious accident at Takeley which featured on the TV news, including serious vandalism to cars. I think it should go on record that the police send accident reports to NEPP, and I am told that, contrary to much social media speculation, the accident had nothing to do with parked vehicles (fly or others).

Concerning fly parking, the chief executive has convened a meeting of all relevant bodies and those partners with powers and responsibilities on this matter, taking place on 2<sup>nd</sup> November and which I will chair.

Cllr Neil Hargreaves

## Amendment to Cost of Living Crisis Motion as submitted by Councillor Barker: Full Council, 10 October

### Amended Motion (red text denotes additional wording – wording to be removed has been struck through):

#### Council notes that:

- I. Inflation and rising interest rates have caused a dramatic fall in real household disposable incomes:

According to the House of Commons Library<sup>1</sup> in August 2023, the UK's annual inflation rate of 6.7% was higher than in most comparable economies.

Key drivers of inflation are food and energy prices, both of which have risen since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. Over the two years from August 2021 to August 2023 food prices rose by 28.4%. To provide context, it previously took over 13 years, from April 2008 to August 2021, for average food prices to rise by the same amount.

The Bank of England has been raising interest rates to try and get the inflation rate back to its 2% target, and as a result, the cost of mortgages and rents have risen.

Real household disposable income is the amount of money that households have available for spending after tax and social contributions (such as National Insurance Contributions) have been deducted.

The Office for Budget Responsibility reports that real disposable income is falling at the fastest rate since comparable records began, and forecasts that even by 2028 it will still be below pre-pandemic levels.

- II. Low-income households are particularly affected by rising prices:

Low-income households such as those on Universal Credit are already making savings for instance on food and heating wherever they can and have little headroom for cutting their expenditure further as prices rise. Rises in the cost of food and energy therefore have disproportionate impacts on their budgets relative to households with higher incomes.

51% of adults in Great Britain reported an increase in their cost of living in August – September 2023 compared to a month ago. Of those who reported an increase in the cost of living in this period, almost all (95%) said which was because of an increased price of food shopping, while 57% cited an increase in gas and electricity bills.

67% of those who reported a rise in the cost of living between 23 August and 3 September 2023 said they are spending less on non-essentials as a result, while

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise referenced, all data in this report is sourced from: [CBP-9428.pdf \(parliament.uk\)](#) Research Briefing 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2023 – Rising Cost of Living in the UK

45% report cutting back on essentials like food shopping and 44% reported using less energy at home.

Here in Uttlesford the Foodbank distributed 1,670 parcels in the year to March 2023 compared to 1,160 in the year before. This number would have been considerably higher had it not been for two Cost of Living payments made to low-income individuals as part of the central government emergency cost of living measures.

This provided emergency food to 4,310 individuals, 44% of these being children compared to the 3,100 who needed help the year before. It is estimated that 18% of children in Uttlesford are in low-income families, and that 7 in 10 of these are in working families.<sup>2</sup>

### III. The number of people struggling financially in Uttlesford is rising:

The Robert Wood Johnson (RWJ) model illustrates that socio-economic factors carry the most weight (40%) for determining health outcomes, highlighting the importance of this. We must therefore find ways to support our communities through these challenging and unprecedented times

The UDC Health and Wellbeing Strategy notes that Uttlesford is one of the 20% least deprived local authorities in England, however about 18% (3,272) of children live in low income families, after housing costs\* (JSNA, 2020). This figure is likely to increase with rising costs of living. Deprivation in affluent areas can be very challenging. It has been suggested that a poorer individual living in a wealthier area may have worse health than a poorer individual living in a deprived area, for example (Stafford & Marmot, 2003), although the evidence for this is not conclusive. We must, however, be mindful of this and focus efforts on areas of need within the district as part of our work to support the UK's Levelling Up agenda to reduce inequalities.

Despite ranking highly in great places to live surveys, Uttlesford has a high number of families in receipt of Universal Credit. In April this year (2023) there were 4,247 people claiming Universal Credit, for comparison in November 2021 there were 1,290 claimants.

Benefit uprating lags the wider economy. The April 2023 annual uprating took them back to the real level they were a year earlier. It is not until April 2025 that benefit rates are set to recover the ground they lost over the autumn and winter of 2021.<sup>3</sup>

The number of people on UDC's housing register rose 17% from 1,145 in September 2019 to 1,338 in June 2022.<sup>4</sup>

In Uttlesford 36.7% of households are owned with a mortgage and 14.6% of households are privately rented<sup>5</sup> which means that over 50% of households are exposed to the impacts of high interest rates on their housing costs.

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<sup>2</sup> Data provided by Uttlesford Foodbank

<sup>3</sup> [The cost of living crisis: a pre-Budget briefing | Institute for Fiscal Studies \(ifs.org.uk\)](https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/1044)

<sup>4</sup> Data provided by Uttlesford Citizens Advice

<sup>5</sup> Data provided by Uttlesford Citizens Advice



Of the 33,815 properties in Uttlesford, over half 17,259 have EPCs of D,E,F,G, the least efficient rating. These households are particularly affected by increased costs of energy.

**Council therefore resolves;**

***To reprioritise our Budget to free up additional funds to support those most in need.***

To call on the UK Government and our local Members of Parliament to effectively tackle the cost-of-living crisis facing Uttlesford families ***and those across the United Kingdom*** and act now to support them with the following specific measures;

- a) Introduce a guarantee that benefits will cover the essentials so that people don't have to resort to debt or emergency charitable support to meet their basic needs, and that deductions will never pull benefits below this level, and thereafter ensure that benefits are uprated in line with inflation.
- b) Unfreeze Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and bring Housing Benefit back in line with rents so it covers at least the cheapest 30% of private rents in every part of the country and uprate it every year to reflect changes in rents.
- c) Increase in Discretionary Housing Payment, which provides additional financial support for claimants who are in properties with rents above LHA rates
- d) Household Support Grant is allocated proportionately to District Councils in line with local needs. For example, those in receipt of Housing Benefit only were not eligible to claim the cost of living payments
- e) To ensure that New Burdens administration funding is sufficient to deliver new initiatives effectively
- f) ~~A new revised local government settlement that adequately funds local councils to protect and operate vital front line services.~~

Amendment Proposer: Councillor Barker  
Amendment Secunder: Councillor Gooding