

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COMMITTEE ROOM - COUNCIL OFFICES,
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 21
NOVEMBER 2017 at 7.30 pm**

Present: Councillor A Dean (Chairman)
Councillors H Asker, G Barker, R Chambers, M Felton, B Light
and E Oliver

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director – Corporate Services), A Bochel
(Democratic Services Officer), A Knight (Assistant Director –
Resources), V Taylor (Business Improvement and Performance
Officer) and A Webb (Director - Corporate and Financial
Services)

Also present: Councillor S Howell (Portfolio Holder for Finance and
Administration)

SC20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Davies, Harris, LeCount
and Lemon.

SC21 CHAIRMAN'S THANKS

The Chairman said the Business Improvement and Performance Officer would
soon be leaving Uttlesford District Council. He thanked her for her years of
service and her work on the committee.

SC22 MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS ON 25 AND 26 SEPTEMBER 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 and 26 September 2017 were received
and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following
amendments:

Minutes of 25 September, SC11: paragraphs 11 and 12 to be made one
paragraph.

Minutes of the 26 September, SC15: paragraph 4 to read:

In response to a question from Councillor Felton, the Acting Inspector said Essex
Parking Partnership were empowered to take action against pavement parking
and could issue penalties without involving the police, only where there were
parking restrictions in place.

SC23 STATUS REPORT - NOVEMBER 2017

The Chairman said he thought the extraordinary Scrutiny Committee held on 25 September had not been well-structured and he had asked officers to investigate potential improvements to the call-in procedure and the structure of meetings.

The Chairman said he had been talking to officers about training for Scrutiny Committee members in the New Year from the Centre for Public Scrutiny. He would be attending a training session in a few weeks.

SC24 **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2017-18**

For further information on the amendment to the minutes of 26 September 2017, the Chairman circulated statements from the police and the North Essex Parking Partnership regarding the power of North Essex Parking Partnership to hand out penalties for pavement parking.

The Chairman said officers would be working to bring forward a report on a potential investment strategy for the Council.

The Chairman said he had been talking to officers about producing the Cabinet Review scoping report on the programme for March. He was concerned that it would take time for a working group to complete work on this review, and so it would be better if work could begin sooner.

The Chairman said the Pride of Place project was aimed at improving the look and feel of Uttlesford. Pavement parking would be a part of this topic.

The Chairman said that with the Local Plan projected to go out to consultation next year, it would be good if the upcoming work on affordable housing could be brought forward. In response to a question from Councillor Barker, he said the topic of affordable housing had been on the work programme for some time and it was necessary for the committee to satisfy itself that the policy did not need amending.

In response to a suggestion from Councillor Light that defining what affordable housing should mean to the Council would be a good place to start, the Chairman said it was too early to be proposing terms of reference for the working group.

SC25 **BUDGET REVIEW AND CONSULTATION OUTCOMES 2018-19**

The Chairman said the Scrutiny Committee's final input on the budget would be made at the February meeting. The Assistant Director – Resources said a decision by DCLG will have been made about whether the Essex submission to be a pilot for 100% business rates pilot was successful by that time.

Members said that the second bullet point in paragraph 12 of the report should include reference to the opportunities created by the Council budget, as well as its risks.

The Chairman said officers had produced a report to provide members with a detailed overview of council housing. This report would be sent out in the next few days. The Director – Finance and Corporate Services said the Housing Revenue Account cap might be lifted.

The Assistant Director – Resources gave a summary of how the current system of business rates worked. She said she would send a briefing note round to members about this system.

Councillor Chambers entered the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor Oliver, the Assistant Director – Resources said the Council would not pay a levy on bad debt. If the Council failed to collect enough tax to collect its baseline need, it could potentially receive top-up funding from central government.

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services the response rate to this year's consultation had been very good. The team had made it easier for people to respond by including a pull-out questionnaire and a pre-paid envelope in Uttlesford Life. The Council would likely continue to use this method.

In response to a question from Councillor Dean, the Assistant Director – Corporate Services said the methodology used for presenting the responses to Question 1 was an industry-standard approach and one which was recommended by the providers of the Council's consultation software.

In response to a question from Councillor Light, the Cabinet Member – Finance and Administration said he would go through the results of the consultation to inform himself of residents' views. He needed to be sure he had listened to people living in the district before decisions were taken. However, he would also need to use his own judgement when deciding upon budget allocation.

Members said some statistics included in the report were unhelpful because of their margin for error and the way they had been presented.

Members said it was possible that the public did not see car parks as a particularly big priority because many people did not use them and because they were taken for granted. It was also difficult to tell how many people considered car parks a high priority in comparison to services which were considered to be 'key services'.

The Chairman said he was concerned that responses were skewed because a disproportionate amount of people over 55 had replied. In response, the Cabinet Member – Finance and Administration said he believed a response rate of about 250 people still gave an accurate representation of resident opinion, and that younger people could have participated if they had wanted to.

The Director – Finance and Corporate Services said one questionnaire had been sent to every household, and so it was likely that a greater amount of older people had replied because they were the homeowners.

The Cabinet Member – Finance and Administration said it was easy to try to over-analyse the figures presented.

Councillor Chambers said many of the comments made were simply people presenting a wish list to Uttlesford District Council, and some even referenced issues which the council was not in control of. Councillor Asker said there was a level of ignorance amongst some of the public about the responsibilities of different tiers of government, and education was necessary to resolve this.

The Chairman noted there had been a lower level of responses to the business consultation. Councillor Barker said this could be due to the phrasing of the questions in the consultation.

SC26 **2018/19 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME AND CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

The Chairman said it would be good to simplify the consultation for next year. At present, it appeared to be a lot of effort for little new information. Two points to note were that the number of people benefitting from the system had reduced, and people were now more supportive of protecting grants made to parish councils.

The Chairman said the highest number of comments made in response to the consultation were about social matters.

Members agreed that working age people previously on Council Tax Benefit should not have to pay more than 12.5% of the council tax bill.

The Cabinet Member – Finance and Administration said many members of the public found the questionnaire about the scheme challenging.

Councillor Light said withdrawing discretionary support grants would put some town and parish councils in a difficult situation. She asked if another source of funds for the grants could be found.

The Chairman said town and parish councils benefitted financially from the New Homes Bonus.

Councillor Barker said town and parish councils had known about the plan for the reduction and then abolition of the support grant, and so they should be prepared for the consequences of it.

The Cabinet Member – Finance and Administration said the most obvious source of funds to continue to ensure that money was invested in the community was through the grant. He did not believe the Council should be cutting the budget elsewhere.

The Chairman said the Council Tax base increased each year, and he could not see any benefit in continuing to supply the grant.

The Director – Finance and Corporate Services said the subsidiary grant amount was based on the number of Local Council Tax Scheme claimants in each town and parish.

The meeting finished at 9:20pm.