

COUNCIL held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2018 at 7.30 pm

Present: Councillor L Wells (Chairman)
Councillors K Artus, H Asker, G Barker, S Barker, R Chambers, J Davey, P Davies, A Dean, P Fairhurst, T Farthing, M Felton, M Foley, J Freeman, R Freeman, A Gerard, T Goddard, N Hargreaves, S Harris, E Hicks, S Howell, D Jones, P Lees, M Lemon, J Lodge, A Mills, S Morris, E Oliver, V Ranger, J Redfern, H Rolfe and G Sell

Officers in attendance: R Dobson (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager), D French (Chief Executive), R Harborough (Director - Public Services), S Pugh (Assistant Director - Governance and Legal) and A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services)

Also present: Steph Grace, Melissa Challinor (members of the Independent Remuneration Panel) and Diane Drury (shadow panel member).

C40 PUBLIC SPEAKING

Daniel Brett and Maureen Caton made statements, summaries of which are appended to these minutes.

C41 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gordon, Knight, LeCount, Light, Loughlin and Ryles.

Councillors Fairhurst and R Freeman declared a non – pecuniary interest as members of Saffron Walden Town Council.

Councillor S Barker declared a pecuniary interest in relation to the item on Local Council Tax Scheme proposals, and a disclosable pecuniary interest in relation to the notice of motion of library services, for which she had dispensation.

Councillor G Barker declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in relation to the same item, in that he was the spouse of Councillor S Barker, for which he also had dispensation.

The Chairman said it should be noted that Aisha Anjum had resigned as a councillor. The resignation had no effect on political balance and due to the timing of the resignation, there would be no by election.

Councillor Lodge, as the leader of the Residents for Uttlesford group, said former Councillor Anjum had been unwell during pregnancy, but had now given birth.

The Chairman asked that the good wishes of all Members be passed on to former Councillor Anjum and her family.

C42

PROPOSALS FOR MEMBERS' SCHEME OF ALLOWANCES 2019/20

Steph Grace, the Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel introduced the Panel's report on a review of the Members' Scheme of Allowances and recommendations for 2019/20. She thanked officers for their support and said the Panel had adopted the principles that allowances and expenses should be reasonable, equitable and economical. She described the main recommendations in the report and the reasons for them. She referred to the discussions with those Members who had attended before the Panel to give their views and the need for Members to receive training and support in use of the Council's electronic payment system. She said whilst a suggestion from Councillor Artus regarding a review of the work arising from appointments to outside bodies could not be addressed this year due to time constraints, it would be included in next year's review. She concluded by saying the participation of councillors was central to the Council's work, and she urged councillors to use their scheme of allowances well.

Councillor Rolfe proposed the recommendations. He thanked all members of the Panel for their work in reviewing the scheme of allowances, and said he respected the view of what was an independent body. The Panel had recommended the basic allowance to be increased by 1%, which was below inflation and less than the increase for officers, and said that the basic allowance must not diverge from the rate of inflation.

Councillor Chambers seconded the recommendations.

Councillor R Freeman said money was almost an irrelevance to the role of a councillor. He objected to the statement in the report that an attendance allowance would be impractical, which seemed to indicate an attitude of lacking the motivation to set up such an allowance. He did not claim expenses, as he found the software system irksome.

Councillor Gerard thanked the Panel for listening to his views last year and this year, regarding recognition for the hard work of Substitute Members of Planning Committee.

Councillor Morris said she would, as she had done for the past three years, vote against the recommendations, because she did not agree with councillors giving themselves a pay rise in the context of climate change and austerity.

Councillor Lees agreed with that view, whilst acknowledging that Members worked hard.

Councillor Redfern said this report was a good piece of work. She said elected representatives in this area tended to be from an older demographic. Being a councillor cost money, and whilst most current Members were fortunate, not everyone was able to afford considering taking on this role. It was important that

the basic allowance did not become out of kilter with the rate of inflation or staff pay awards, so as not to deter potential members of the Council.

The recommendations were carried by 26 in favour, 4 against and 1 abstention.

RESOLVED that the Council adopts:

a. the recommended scheme of allowances for the year 2019/20 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, effectively increasing the current level of basic allowance and all existing special responsibility allowances (SRAs) by 1%.

b. an additional SRA for Planning Committee substitute members who attend at least 25% of Planning Committee meetings in that capacity throughout the municipal year.

c. a revised scheme of expenses for the Carer's Allowance which abolishes the maximum rate that can be claimed for care costs.

MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE SCHEME 2019/20

Allowance	Amount
Basic Allowance	£5202.51
Chairman of the Council	£4162.01 + civic expenses
Vice Chairman of the Council	£2081
Leader of the Council	£12746.15
Deputy Leader of the Council	£6763.26
Portfolio Holders	£6243.01
Overview/Scrutiny and Ordinary Committee Chairmen	£3641.76
Chairman of Licensing and Environmental Health Committee	£3901.88
Members of Licensing and Environmental Health Committee	£240.13 (to be paid in a municipal year when at least ten meetings of the Committee take place in a purely regulatory capacity; a payment will be made to members attending at least 50% of those meetings).

Chairman of Planning Committee	£3901.88
Members of Planning Committee	£480.26
Substitute members of the Planning Committee	£120.06 (to be paid in a municipal year when a substitute member of the Planning Committee has attended at least 25% of meetings of that committee, such allowance to be exempt from the provision that only one SRA may be claimed at any one time).
Chairman of Standards Committee	£2081
Main opposition group leader	£3641.76
Other opposition group leader	£2081
Independent representatives on the Standards Committee	£520.25
Panel members of Independent Remuneration Panel	£520.25

C43 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

To consider the minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2018 were received and signed by the Chairman, subject to an amendment to be made following a check of the recording of the meeting. Following such investigation having been undertaken, the following amendment was made at Minute C35, third paragraph:

To substitute the following:

“in May 2017 there had been a contested vote, at which there had been a ballot. At the meeting there was a request for a recorded vote, which trumped a ballot”

with:

“in May 2017 there had been a contested vote, and a ballot had been arranged. However, there had been a call for a recorded vote, which currently trumps a ballot.”

C44 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman gave an account of her recent engagements, which had included attendance at a Michaelmas concert and a networking evening on behalf of St Clare's Hospice. The Hospice was dependent solely on donations, and the event had been intended to raise awareness of the charity's work. Amongst other events she had attended the Remembrance Day and Armistice Parade in Saffron Walden, which had been a fitting tribute to the fallen.

C45 REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader presented his report, which was included in the agenda papers.

He referred to the recent Local Strategic Partnership assembly; the importance of the role played by the Digital Zone in combating loneliness, and supporting health and wellbeing.

Councillor Rolfe said he had also attended the Uttlesford Business Breakfast, at which there had been discussion of initiatives to implement “clean tech” and a presentation on the potential for renewable energy in new and existing communities. He had attended the Essex Health and Wellbeing Board meeting in November, which worked to drive forward the public health and prevention of illness agenda, saving money and improving the experience and outcomes for patients.

Councillor Rolfe said the Council would do its best to support the District's libraries. Finally, he said he had taken out a judicial review against the Council to ensure that key community payments were fulfilled.

C46 REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Councillor S Barker presented her report as the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services. She had recently attended a trip to Eddington, and, in terms of recycling, had found it interesting to see that underground containers were used. Whilst not suited to retro-fitting existing dwellings, such methods were of great interest for new communities.

C47 REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Councillor Ranger presented his report as the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Partnerships. He drew attention to the launch of the Dunmow Dementia Café and plans for the launch of a similar facility in Saffron Walden.

C48 REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In the absence of Councillor Ryles, Members noted the report of the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, which was included in the agenda papers.

C49 REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

Councillor Howell referred Members to his report, as included in the agenda papers.

C50 REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING

Councillor Redfern presented her report, referring in particular to delivery of affordable housing, and to the opening of the redeveloped sheltered housing scheme at Reynolds Court. Members watched a short video, featuring a number of the tenants expressing great satisfaction with their new accommodation at Reynolds Court. Councillor Redfern invited any Member who wished to visit the scheme to do so.

Councillors Gerard and Hargreaves congratulated Councillor Redfern on the opening of the scheme.

C51 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN (UP TO 15 MINUTES)

Councillor Sell thanked Councillor S Barker for the work now being carried out by the Waste Strategy Panel. Regarding his motion on the consultation on library services in Uttlesford, he said he understood a date was yet to be arranged for Councillor Rolfe to visit Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council.

Councillor Rolfe said a date to attend Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council would indeed be arranged, at which he would be joined by Councillor Felton.

Councillor Dean said he had a question for Councillor Ryles as the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development. In Councillor Ryles' absence, he asked the Leader to respond. He wished to know the position regarding a commercial building which was to be built as part of the development at Walpole Meadows in Stansted. He asked for an update on the proposed use for this building, for example, could it be used for start-up businesses?

Councillor Rolfe said the building was part of the section 106 money for Walpole Farm, and was an investment opportunity. He took note of the point regarding use for start-up units, and said he would write to Councillor Dean.

Councillor Lodge asked about a report commissioned in relation to the Local Plan Regulation 19 submission, and questioned whether proper process had been followed. He referred to the recent meeting of the Planning Policy Working Group, at which he said Councillor Rolfe had stated he had not been aware of the commissioning of this report. He asked whether option 3 of that report was to be followed, and whether adequate legal advice had been obtained. Councillor Rolfe said the Council, as part of the North Essex Councils, had commissioned a sustainability appraisal, on which the Inspector had commented. In light of the comments of the Inspector, officers had advised that the Council should review its sustainability appraisal, and legal advice had been taken. He confirmed the option to be followed was the third option in the report, and, in response to further questions, said he had become aware of the report on 26 October, that the work had been reported to the PPWG, and a reasonable process had been followed.

Councillor Lodge asked on a point of order whether the account which had been given matched up with the timings reported as to when officers had commissioned the sustainability appraisal report.

The Chief Executive said as soon as the first Inspector's letter had been issued, officers had worked quickly so as to enable the recommendation to the Council meeting of 19 June to take place. Thereafter, all issues were being looked at in broad terms. The piece of work on the sustainability appraisal had been commissioned at the end of August. She apologised that the PPWG had not been made aware of this work. The legal advice taken had not been in the form of a legal opinion, but was in the format of exchanges of correspondence, which would be provided to PPWG members. She took responsibility for the fact that extra work had been carried out, and said she would provide the chronology of events.

The Chairman said that as the time for questions had exceeded the 15 minutes allowed, she would take only one more question.

Councillor Oliver asked whether the Business Improvement District company was entitled to payment of the whole levy amount where a business owner was

about to retire and where the landlord of that business owner's premises was going to sell the property.

Councillor Rolfe said he would come back to Councillor Oliver on that question. He took the opportunity to congratulate the BID team, and said the activity of business in Saffron Walden around Christmas was good.

C52 LCTS SCHEME PROPOSALS - 2019/20

Councillor Howell presented a report on the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme, which the Council was required to review each year. The report set out proposals for the following financial year, on which, even if no change was proposed, consultation had to take place. The recommendations were to set the scheme for 2019/20 on the same basis as the 2018/19 scheme, but to increase the premium applied to empty properties from 50% to 100%.

Councillor Howell thanked those who had responded to the consultation. He said the report had been considered by the Scrutiny Committee, and by Cabinet. He drew attention to the key elements of the scheme operated by the Council during the previous five years, and proposed the recommendations, noting that the first recommendation should refer to the sixth consecutive year.

Councillor Chambers said the proposals protected the vulnerable, and seconded the recommendations.

Councillor Hargreaves spoke in support of the recommendations, and was in favour of the proposed increase in the premium for empty houses.

RESOLVED:

That the Council approve the Local Council Tax Support scheme for 2019/20 and the empty homes premium as recommended at Cabinet on 29 November 2018 and set out in this report.

- I. The 2019/20 LCTS scheme is set on the same basis as the 2018/19 scheme and therefore the contribution rate is frozen for the sixth consecutive year.
- II. The Council continues to protect Vulnerable and Disabled Residents and Carer's on a low income.
- III. The premium applied to properties empty for a period of more than 2 years is increased from 50% to 100%.

C53 REVIEW OF RETURNING OFFICER'S FEES AND EXPENSES

Councillor Howell presented a report on the Returning Officer's scale of fees and expenses for use at all relevant local elections and referendums in the Uttlesford district. He said the proposals had been subject to benchmarking, and that it was important to ensure recruitment to the multiple roles required to run an

election. He proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Fairhurst.

RESOLVED that the Council:

- a. approves the scale of fees and expenses set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- b. reviews the fees and expenses every four years in the year immediately preceding the ordinary election of district and parish councillors.
- c. delegates authority to the Director of Finance and Corporate Services to increase the scales annually to reflect the local government pay award.

C54 **GAMBLING POLICY – STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES**

Councillor S Barker presented a report on the revised Statement of Principles to be applied by the Council in relation to its functions under the Gambling Act. The outcome of the consultation had been reported to the Licensing and Environmental Health Committee. She proposed the recommendations.

Councillor Chambers as Chairman of the Licensing and Environmental Health Committee seconded the report.

RESOLVED that the Council adopts the amended Gambling Act Statement of Principles attached to the report, to come into effect on 31 January 2019.

C55 **WALDEN PLACE, SAFFRON WALDEN**

Councillor Redfern presented a report providing detail on proposed redevelopment of the existing sheltered housing scheme at Walden Place. She described the current facilities and said one challenge was the fact that the heating for the flats was located inside Walden Place. Options had been considered, and the conclusion of this research was that the Council could carry out the redevelopment itself, which would enable it to retain control and enable a suitable financial return to be made. The work would be conducted in close liaison with the Conservation Officer.

Councillor Morris seconded the proposal. She said, as a ward member, she was delighted to see this work coming forward.

Councillor Fairhurst said it was critical that the conservation aspects were taken into account.

RESOLVED that the Council:

- 1 Notes the options detailed in the report to progress the proposed redevelopment of Walden Place in Saffron Walden.
- 2 Endorses Cabinet decision that the redevelopment of Walden Place is progressed as a council funded and managed project (Option 2) subject to budget availability.
- 3 Approves additional short term borrowing of £1m to finance the redevelopment of Walden Place.

C56 **COUNCILLOR KNIGHT - APPROVAL OF ABSENCE FROM MEETINGS**

Members noted with concern that Councillor Knight had been unwell for some time, and that therefore she had not been able to attend meetings on some occasions. The recommendation on the agenda would avoid Councillor Knight becoming automatically disqualified from office for any such absence during a period of six consecutive months. Councillor Ranger proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Lodge.

RESOLVED to approve the absence by reason of ill-health of Councillor Knight for the purposes of section 85(1), Local Government Act, 1972.

All members sent their good wishes to Councillor Knight for her speedy recovery.

C57 **NOTICE OF MOTION RECEIVED FROM COUNCILLOR DEAN: EXIT FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Councillor Dean presented a motion he had submitted on the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union. He said the motion comprised four elements: the impact on businesses in the District arising from current uncertainty regarding the future economic relationship with the European Union; the impact on residents especially younger generations, who wished to maintain their ability to visit, study and work in the UK and in neighbouring countries; a statement of intention to call upon the Saffron Walden Member of Parliament to work to find a way through the current uncertainties to ensure local peoples' futures would not be harmed and to call on Parliament to confirm the present will of the people by means of a "People's Vote".

Councillor Dean asked that there be a recorded vote. He said a recent local survey had indicated 86% of people now supported remaining in the European Union; that the argument put forward by some that a second referendum would be divisive was not a reason against holding another referendum, as the existing outcome was divisive; that there was a duty to explain potential harm to younger people and that people had the right to change their mind. He did not know Kemi Badenoch MP's views, but if Members agreed with this motion, the Council would be offering her a way forward.

Councillor Fairhurst seconded the motion. He said this was a complicated motion, but all agreed on the Council's wish that no harm be caused to the District's residents, and that the MP should be asked to find a deal as a way forward.

Councillor R Freeman said he supported the motion in so far as it affected residents, but that this Council had no influence over the decision, so to that extent the motion was an irrelevance. He had voted to leave the EU, but was now not sure. There were merits in setting a majority vote of two-thirds. Brexit directly affected this Council in that businesses at Chesterford Research Park depended on the free movement of people.

Councillor Artus said agreeing the deal negotiated by the Prime Minister was worse than staying in the EU. The political elite were out of touch with the people. People had already voted to leave by a greater majority than had voted for this government at the last general election. The MP had been selected to defend the UK in the global arena. A better deal was needed.

Councillor Rolfe said this matter was incredibly important. Whilst he agreed with some of what each speaker had said, the Council did not have the leverage to discuss what should be done, and Members had not been elected on a platform regarding their views on this subject. All Members were likely to have different personal opinions. He had been a remainer in 2016, and he accepted the vote had gone against him. Theresa May was in an impossible position, as finding a deal which by necessity was always going to have to be a compromise was a challenge. In his view, the deal was as good as it was going to get. If there were to be another referendum, many people would not forgive the Government. He would oppose the motion, as a remainer.

Councillor Howell said he was unhappy with the content of the motion, given the fact that there was to be a debate on the deal in Parliament next week. There was little evidence that the will of the people had changed, both sides were angry, and any accounts of a national change of opinion were anecdotal. 17.4 million people had voted, so to term another referendum a "People's Vote" was insulting. The Council should listen to the people. Councillor Fairhurst had identified the two sentences with which Members could agree. Regarding the view of Councillor R Freeman that Brexit had an impact on the science businesses in the District, this view was wrong. The tenants had indicated they were not affected by the UK exiting the European Union. They had made an investment, and in fact the chief executive of one biotech business had said if the UK were to remain in the EU, it would be the death knell of the biotech business. The EU was forcing innovative business in the UK to pay a state funding penalty, which was damaging to business. Seeking a second vote would not solve the problem.

Councillor Sell referred to a report the Leader of Tending District Council had asked officers to prepare, looking at how Brexit might impact on residents, or offer opportunities. Next week Rochford Council had included discussion of a risk register for Brexit on its Council agenda. He asked why Uttlesford District Council was not considering Brexit in a similar way.

Councillor Wells said a risk register was considered by the Council's Governance, Audit and Performance Committee.

Councillor Asker congratulated Councillor Dean on his tenacity in surveying the residents of Saffron Walden for their views on Brexit. She had been in the Republic of Ireland last week, and whilst she had originally voted to leave, she had learnt about the views of residents and businesses in Ireland who were desperate for the UK to remain. She was not sure if Uttlesford could have an impact but she was intrigued and did not mind supporting the motion.

Councillor Lodge said there were very strong views on Brexit, and he was not going to share his opinion. The matters of the Local Plan, air quality, the library service were all vital to this district and were areas on which the Council could pull levers. This matter was one in which the Council did not have any influence. He had raised various issues with the MP and had received very little response. He considered the Council would not get anywhere with this motion and he would abstain.

Councillor Chambers said the problem was that there were 33 different opinions. He asked that the vote be taken.

Councillor Fairhurst said Members supported most of the motion, and would consider an amendment. No support for this suggestion was received.

The motion as follows was put to the vote:

Council recognises that there is continued uncertainty over the UK's future economic and social relationship with the Continental members of the European Union. It does not wish to see economic harm being caused to businesses and their employees in the Uttlesford district, such as those at Chesterford Research Park and those at Stansted Airport. Council wishes no harm to be caused to residents, especially those of younger generations, who wish to maintain their ability to visit, study and work in this and neighbouring countries. Council calls upon the Saffron Walden Member of Parliament, Mrs Kemi Badenoch, to take responsibility for the future wellbeing of the people of this district by striving at Westminster to find a way through the current uncertainties over Brexit to ensure that local people's futures will not be harmed. Council also notes that recent polls suggest that public opinion in this district, as well as nationally, is shifting away from leaving the EU towards a majority of people favouring the UK retaining its membership of the European Union. Therefore, in the event that Parliament cannot reach an outcome from its current and forthcoming deliberations that will give a high confidence of maintaining or improving the wellbeing of local people, Council calls on Parliament to check again the will of the people by conducting what has become known as a People's Vote to confirm the present will of the people.

The motion failed, with nine Members voting for the motion, 15 against. Six Members abstained.

Voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Asker, Dean, Fairhurst, Foley, R Freeman, Lees, Lemon, Morris and Sell.

Against: Councillors Artus, G Barker, S Barker, Chambers, Davey, Davies, Farthing, Felton, Gerard, Hicks, Howell, Jones, Oliver, Ranger and Rolfe.

Abstain: Councillors Hargreaves, Harris, Lodge, Mills, Redfern and Wells.

The Chairman asked that Members vote on whether to continue the meeting, as the meeting was already of two hours duration.

RESOLVED to continue the meeting.

C58

NOTICE OF MOTION RECEIVED FROM COUNCILLOR SELL: LIBRARY SERVICES IN UTTLESFORD

Councillor Sell introduced the motion on notice he had submitted. The motion was as follows:

This Council asks the Cabinet member for communities and partnerships to work with Essex County Council, parish/town councils, voluntary organisations and residents to explore ways in which the library service in Uttlesford is maintained and enhanced, in light of the county council's major consultation on the proposed future strategy for the county's libraries.

Councillor Sell said libraries had been important to him throughout his life, and he would like this service to be available for future generations. He had been surprised and angered by the County Council's proposals. He agreed a review of the county's libraries was necessary, but libraries should be supported as vibrant community hubs, which was what Stansted's library was. It would be a travesty of justice if Stansted were to lose its library.

Councillor Ranger seconded the motion, and said he was happy to do so. He would be happy to attend meetings requested by parish councils with the users of the libraries at Stansted and Thaxted to consider what could be done.

Councillor Fairhurst said closing libraries came at the cost of the vulnerable, as for some people, not having access to a library meant not being able to get a qualification.

Councillor Foley said he had received a letter from a teacher in his ward, stating the closure of the library in Thaxted would deny access to a computer to people in Thaxted and the surrounding villages, in particular in terms of pre-school resources. Closing the library would discriminate against those who did not have a computer, which would mean their alternative would be to travel to Saffron Walden. Having to make a journey discriminated against those without a car, those who were old, and those who were disabled. Thaxted library was a hub, and a model use of the space and should be supported.

Councillor Fairhurst said libraries fulfilled social functions, as not only did they provide access to the sort of knowledge which once imparted stayed with one, but they were places to congregate.

Councillor Rolfe said he supported the motion, but the debated needed to be broadened as life had changed. There were big communities in Uttlesford such as Felsted and Hatfield Heath which had not got libraries, and the question of costs could not be avoided. He agreed with much of what Daniel Brett had said, although it was important to say that Children's Services in Essex were very highly rated. This was an incredibly expensive service to provide, and councils had to decide priorities. He took community hubs and libraries very seriously and the Council would do everything it could to work with the parish councils.

Councillor Lodge said all agreed on the importance of libraries, but he pledged that after May 2019 all libraries would be kept open.

The motion being put to the vote it was carried unanimously.

RESOLVED this Council asks the Cabinet member for communities and partnerships to work with Essex County Council, parish/town councils, voluntary organisations and residents to explore ways in which the library service in Uttlesford is maintained and enhanced, in light of the county council's major consultation on the proposed future strategy for the county's libraries.

C59

NOTICE OF MOTION RECEIVED FROM COUNCILLOR RANGER: DEFRA'S RESPONSE TO UTTLESFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL'S AIR QUALITY ANNUAL STATUS REPORT

Councillor Ranger explained the meaning of his proposal, which was as follows:

DEFRA's response to UDC's Air Quality Annual Status report highlights that, "after distance correction, there are now no exceedances of the annual mean objective for Nitrogen Dioxide within the Saffron Walden AQMA, or any results within 10% of objective levels at positions of relevant exposure" and goes on to state that "The recent monitoring results are extremely encouraging, and the Council should maintain the strategy outlined within the Action Plan". This council welcomes this response and will continue its work to improve further the air quality in our District.

Councillor Ranger said the report showed the Council was doing well, but that the Council was not complacent. Monitoring would continue, and the Council would upgrade the analyser at London Road to a permanent situation, and would upgrade Hill Street. At Hill Street the real-time analyser would not be replaced, but additional equipment would be deployed instead. Councillor Ranger said he was aware of Councillor Hargreaves' amendment, and invited him to consider withdrawing that amendment in light of the update he had given.

Councillor Rolfe seconded the motion.

Councillor Hargreaves said his amendment was to add wording at the end of the last sentence of the motion, as follows: “and urges the Cabinet to reinstate the council's failed monitoring equipment in order to return the air quality reporting to the more accurate local validation preferred by DEFRA.”

Councillor Hargreaves said it appeared Councillor Ranger was agreeing with his amendment, which should stand.

Officers confirmed the amendment had been uploaded to the meetings page of the website, and circulated to all members by email by the required deadline, and that printed copies were available.

Councillor Fairhurst seconded the amendment.

Councillor Ranger said the difficulty with the amendment was the requirement to reinstate failed equipment, and explained in detail the equipment which would in fact be used, which would satisfy the need to include local bias.

Councillor Gerard said he did not understand why the amendment was not welcomed, as Councillor Ranger had explained the intention.

Councillor Ranger said he would agree to alter the motion by removal of the reference to “reinstatement”, and read out the proposed motion as altered, which would omit the words “reinstate the council’s failed monitoring equipment in order to”.

Councillor Dean said it was problematic that the matter had come to a meeting of the Council when there was a high level of technical detail. There was no governance structure for this type of report. Scrutiny Committee had seen the report but at not looked at the annual report which was published in July. This was the wrong sort of motion to bring to Council and he would abstain.

The Chairman reminded Members they were debating the substantive motion. Councillor R Freeman said it was important to get the right equipment to tackle air quality monitoring, and to ensure it worked.

Councillor Lees said planning was an important part of air quality. Poor air quality was the largest risk to health in the UK, and caused 40,000 premature deaths each year, affecting the most vulnerable people disproportionately. The historic layout of Saffron Walden contributed to traffic emissions, and she urged the Council to have the correct equipment for the welfare of future generations. Councillor S Barker said the debate missed the point, as the Council welcomed the report from DEFRA. Officers should be applauded, as the overall picture was an improvement, but the Council had to keep working on monitoring air quality.

Councillor Lodge asked Councillor Ranger whether he was aware of a report commissioned by the Council by air quality experts, Global Ltd.

Councillor Ranger said he was not aware of this report.

Councillor Lodge read an extract from the report, which forecast that there would be hotspots across the district by 2023 where illegal levels of pollution would be reached. The Council was complacent, and whilst he would not oppose the motion, such complacency had to stop. The efforts made so far were sticking plasters, and real action was needed in view of the forthcoming new housing estates which would be too dangerous to implement on this analysis.

Councillor Rolfe said the Council was not complacent. The motion noted what DEFRA had said. There had been detailed explanation of the way in which the equipment would be used. It was important also to be creative and to use initiatives such as walking routes to schools, and cessation of parking in roads, as had been the case with Peaslands Road.

Councillor Lodge said, as a point of order, that parking in Peaslands Road had not stopped.

Councillor Rolfe said the condition had been set as part of development conditions.

Councillor Lodge withdrew his point of order.

Councillor S Barker proposed that the motion now be put.

Councillor Ranger summed up the reasons for his motion, as altered.

The motion being put to the vote, it was carried with one abstention.

RESOLVED:

DEFRA's response to UDC's Air Quality Annual Status report highlights that, "after distance correction, there are now no exceedances of the annual mean objective for Nitrogen Dioxide within the Saffron Walden AQMA, or any results within 10% of objective levels at positions of relevant exposure" and goes on to state that "The recent monitoring results are extremely encouraging, and the Council should maintain the strategy outlined within the Action Plan". This council welcomes this response and will continue its work to improve further the air quality in our District and urges the Cabinet to return the air quality reporting to the more accurate local validation preferred by DEFRA.

C60

ASPIRE (CRP) LTD REQUEST FOR FUNDING

Members received a presentation given by the Director of Finance and Corporate Services, and considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Administration on a request for funding in relation to Aspire (CRP) Ltd. The funding request was to enable the fitting out of a building at Chesterford Research Park. Councillor Howell explained the reasons for the exemption of the report from publication, in that commercial confidentiality had to be respected. He proposed the recommendation, which Councillor Rolfe seconded.

Members debated the matter in detail.

Councillor Fairhurst proposed deferral of the consideration of the item to give time to bring more information before the Council.

Councillor Rolfe said the report had been available for some days, and there were commercially good reasons to proceed.

The motion to defer being put to the vote, it was not carried.

The recommendation in the report was put to the vote, and carried by 21 votes to 4.

RESOLVED to agree the request for funding of Aspire (CRP) Ltd

The meeting ended at 11pm.

Summaries of public speaking statements

Daniel Brett

Daniel Brett raised the following points:

In light of Essex County Council's consultation on library services I am concerned that ECC claims diminishing use of libraries due to more use of e-books. There is a budget of £4m for such services, but since 2011 the service has been run down in the same way as Youth Services has been. Even if the services in Stansted were re-categorised as Tier 3, we would have no real library service. The consultation exercise is deeply flawed; Stansted is given a score which is the lowest level of deprivation: 1 in 4 children in Stansted South lives in poverty. More funding is given to Saffron Walden, exacerbating inequality at the expense of poor areas.

Maureen Caton

I speak as the Chairman of Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council. In 2011, discussion was started regarding a new community building which UDC agreed to fund. Residents have invested £1.2m in the Essex Hub. We consider the Tier 4 proposal for our library a complete betrayal. We have been chased for our input, there have been no communications, but have been told only via a resident. The assessment process is flawed, the deprivation levels in Stansted South are being ignored. The nearest library will be in Saffron Walden, which discriminates against those with no transport. Stansted Mountfitchet is the third largest settlement in the District. It is also forecast that primary schools will increase their number of pupils in the next 5 years, but this fact has been ignored. I would urge Members to support retaining this library and to continue working to develop it into the tourist information centre as agreed.

