

COUNCIL held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 9 APRIL 2019 at 7.30 pm

Present: Councillor L Wells (Chairman)
Councillors H Asker, S Barker, A Dean, P Fairhurst, M Foley, A Gerard, N Hargreaves, G LeCount, P Lees, M Lemon, B Light, J Loughlin, E Oliver and G Sell

Officers in attendance: A Bochel (Democratic Services Officer), D French (Chief Executive), R Harborough (Director - Public Services), E Smith (Solicitor) and A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services)

Public Speakers: M Everett and A Frater

C79 PUBLIC SPEAKING

Martyn Everett and Andrew Frater spoke on library services in Uttlesford. Summaries of their statements are appended to these minutes.

C80 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Artus, Davey, Felton, John Freeman, Richard Freeman, Jones and Lodge.

Councillor Fairhurst declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Saffron Walden Town Council.

C81 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Gerard noted that Councillor Fairhurst had spoken in detail about the investment strategy at the previous meeting and that the minutes reflect this. Subject to this change, the minutes of the previous meeting were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The following paragraph was subsequently added to Minute Item C72:

Councillor Fairhurst said the difficult situation the Council was being put in should not be a licence to speculate. There was a need for prudent investment and the current Investment Strategy did not meet the standards necessary for such a strategy. An investment committee was needed to assess important issues. He was happy to hear the Council was going to discuss this.

C82 NOTICE OF MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR LIGHT

The Chairman moved this item forward in the agenda as it had been deferred from the last meeting.

Councillor Light presented the motion on library services in Uttlesford. She said the statistics used by Essex County Council to justify cuts to services was flawed. Savings generated by closing Stansted and Thaxted libraries was only £12000, and the data failed to take into account use of libraries as social community spaces. Councillors should consider young families, the elderly, students, those with no access to computers and those who attend events in libraries. Libraries were at the heart of communities and should be invested in.

Councillor Rolfe proposed an amendment to the motion, as included in a published supplementary pack. He was on record that no library would close in Uttlesford. The District Council did not run libraries, but would work with Essex County Council to ensure libraries in the district stayed open. Discussions about this were ongoing. Essex County Council had not announced the outcome of the consultation so the motion was premature.

Some Members voiced the opinion that the proposed cuts to library services should be condemned.

Councillor Sell said Stansted and Thaxted libraries should be retained under the county network.

Councillor Rolfe said Essex County Council's consultation was a due diligence process which it should not be criticised for. Councillor S Barker said the two authorities could not work together if they were at loggerheads.

Councillor Asker said Saffron Walden had taken over services from Uttlesford District Council, and it was possible that Uttlesford District Council could take over services from Essex County Council.

RESOLVED to amend the motion as follows:

This Council recognises that libraries make a significant contribution to education, well-being and community activities. Any library closures or reductions in services could potentially affect the well-being of children and young families, the elderly, the unemployed and other vulnerable groups and increase their social isolation.

At the December Council meeting, it was "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" and we will continue to do this.

A recorded vote was taken on the amendment to the motion:

For the amendment: Councillors G Barker, S Barker, Chambers, Davies, Farthing, Gordon, Hicks, Howell, Knight, Lemon, Mills, Oliver, Ranger, Redfern, Rolfe, Ryles, Wells

Against the amendment: Councillors Asker, Dean, Fairhurst, Foley, Gerard, Hargreaves, LeCount, Lees, Light, Morris, Sell

Abstain: Councillor Loughlin

Councillor Rolfe said it would be difficult to make decisions on whether Stansted and Thaxted libraries could remain part of the county network and be staffed by professionals without awaiting the results of Essex County Council's consultation and further discussion with the County Council.

RESOLVED to approve the amended motion.

C83

ADDRESS FROM MEMBERS OF THE YOUTH COUNCIL

The Chairman invited Members of the Youth Council to provide an update on their progress and forthcoming plans.

The Chairman of the Youth Council said significant progress had been made in lots of different areas. A new working group on environment and ecology had been established at the last meeting. This was one of the issues that young people felt most strongly about. 4 new councillors had also joined from Foresthall School.

The Chairman of the Youth Council's Housing Working Group said the group had conducted a seminar to survey young people's opinions on housing in Uttlesford. The report from this seminar could be viewed by councillors in the Member's library. The group was also working with the Council's Local Plan Project Manager to increase youth involvement in the housing process, and were looking to develop an app to canvass opinions of young people on housing. The group was additionally looking to place young people on community forums attached to the development boards of the two proposed garden communities.

The Chairman of the Youth Council's Constitution Work said the group had been working to ensure the Constitution was best suited to the Youth Council's needs. Major changes included removing deputies, adding recognition of contribution and reviewing the Youth Council's election system. The changes needed to be finalised and reviewed with the Assistant Director – Governance and Legal and then brought to a Council meeting.

The Chairman of the Mental Health Working Group said the group was focusing on preventative action. It was collaborating with a local theatre company, developing a performance targeting year 6 students to educate them about maintaining positive mental wellbeing in the transition from primary to secondary school.

The Chairman and other Members congratulated the working group on their confident presentation and informative reports. Members noted that setting up the Youth Council had been a very worthwhile and positive achievement.

C84 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman said she had attended events including dinners and concerts. Dinners helped to raise money for charity, while concerts celebrated and showcased young and upcoming talent in the District. She had attended the Essex Child and Wellbeing Awards, celebrating and recognising the steps schools were taking to promote and nurture healthy lifestyles in young people. She had also attended the Queen's Award Service for Voluntary Services and the High Sheriff's Awards, both of which highlighted the wealth of inspirational individuals who gave their time to provide help and services that were needed across the district.

C85 REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Councillor Howard Rolfe, the Leader of the Council, presented his report.

He thanked the following resigning councillors for their work: Councillors Farthing, John Freeman, Goddard, Harris, Hicks, Howell, Mills and Morris. He also extended his thanks to Councillor Anjum who had resigned her position earlier in the municipal year. Their contribution was a huge reflection for what could be achieved in public life and was invaluable to society.

He said the Council had had a fantastic year, and highlighted the following:

- The Council was in great shape financially. The Council had taken action to mitigate further cuts to local government funding.
- The Local Plan was submitted before the deadline for raising the number of dwellings to be built.
- The Council had received a £750000 grant to continue work on garden communities, and this was a recognition of the good work the Council was doing.
- The Council had created over 350 social and affordable homes.
- The opening of Harlow College had been a huge success.
- The Youth Council was an excellent means of enhancing the democratic process amongst young people.

C86 REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Councillor Ranger, the Portfolio Holder for Communities and Partnerships, presented the report. He highlighted the following:

- He wanted to extend his thanks to all those in the teams he had worked with at the Council. It had been a privilege to work with them.
- In Uttlesford, there was a largely unsung community of volunteers who helped to maintain the quality of life that residents had in the district and

to give a helping hand up to those less able to cope. The Council had made grant funds of over £500000 in the previous year. He thanked the Council's finance team, Councillor Howell, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Administration, and Councillor Chambers, the previous post holder, without whom these funds might not be available.

- There was a grave danger that a great deal of stress was being placed upon young people if their concerns about future prospects were ignored. He was pleased to see young people involved in planning for the future including the new communities.

C87 REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Councillor Ryles, the Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, presented the report.

He highlighted that on 26 March, the first Gigaclear cabinet became live allowing properties in Birchanger to benefit from ultra-fast broadband. This was the first step to making the district fully digital. The work of Superfast Essex and the Economic Development team was to be applauded.

C88 REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Councillor Susan Barker, the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services, presented the report. She highlighted the following:

- She thanked volunteers for their effort in litter-picking throughout the district. The Council had also enhanced its teams in-house.
- The Council had been awarded grants to enhance green space and clean up streets.
- The bin collection had come back in-house and the collection rate had been improved.
- A new post had been created of Section 106 Monitoring Officer in order to follow up on section 106 commitments.

C89 REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Councillor Howell said as this was his last meeting, he was pleased to be making a positive report. He highlighted the following:

- The Council had now for ten consecutive years received an unqualified opinion on its statement of accounts. A positive statement was also received from the External Auditors relating to the council's use of resources and value for money for the eighth consecutive year.
- The performance of the Benefits Subsidy Audit had been exemplary.
- The contribution from Aspire (CRP) Ltd was progressing well.
- A request for planning permission was submitted and approved for further works to the ruins of Saffron Walden Castle to allow for public access.
- The performance indicators for the portfolio were strong.

- He was delighted to be handing over a budget in surplus and finances significantly enhanced from where they were when he first became a councillor. He thanked his predecessor in the role, Councillor Chambers, the Director – Finance and Corporate Services, the Assistant Directors – Finance, Corporate Services and Facilities, the Revenues Manager, the Benefits Manager, the Finance Manager and their teams.

C90

REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING

The Portfolio Holder for Housing presented the report. She highlighted the following points:

- It was important to get the message out that the Council was doing well at delivering good quality affordable housing. This year in addition to the council's own development programme that delivered 43 properties, a further 309 new build affordable properties have been completed by registered providers. This was well above the council's annual target of 100 properties.
- The council has been working with L&Q and Essex County Council for the successful delivery of district's first Independent Living Scheme, Cornell Court, in Saffron Walden.
- L&Q, UDC and ECC were working together on the successful delivery of new learning disabilities scheme in Saffron Walden. The scheme was completed in November 2018.
- The redevelopment of Reynolds Court was delivered on time and on budget. This project had attracted Homes England grant funding.
- The re-modelling of Hatherley Court in Saffron Walden commenced in May 2017 and was taking shape.
- The council continued to ensure that right to buy receipts were spent, in accordance with the agreement with the government, on the council's own development programme and were not returned to government.
- Thanks were extended to the Tenant's Forum, the Housing Team and the Environmental Health Manager (Protection).

C91

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

Councillor Light thanked all Members for their work throughout the term of the Council and extended a personal thank you to Councillor Hicks for making her feel welcome in her early days as a councillor.

Councillor Hargreaves asked why the report of the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Administration did not mention that in March 2018, Aspire was technically insolvent, and why the loss was not shown in UDC's accounts.

In response to this question, Councillor Howell said he could not provide an immediate response in detail, but that the Council had discussed the matter with its accountants and followed correct procedure.

In response to a question from Councillor Gerard, the Chief Executive said she would respond by email to all Members regarding whether publishing the planning decision on Stansted Airport would be a breach of purdah. Councillor Rolfe said a delay in publishing the decision would amount to politicising a planning decision. He added that UDC would not submit to bullying tactics by pressure groups and would meet any threat of judicial review. The Planning Committee had determined the application and had delegated authorisation of the agreement to officers. The Planning Committee report set out fully what a section 106 agreement would need to address. The content of the report had been subject to extensive consultation with statutory consultees, external experts and Counsel (Q.C.). He emphasised that this was not a political decision and that the Council was under a legal obligation to determine the planning application.

Councillor Dean said he had ten signatures from Members to call an extraordinary Council meeting to discuss delaying the publication of the Stansted Airport decision. This list was handed to the Chairman. The Chairman said diaries were being co-ordinated to arrange an extraordinary meeting.

Councillor Dean asked whether Councillor S Barker could look into progress on a pedestrian crossing at Lower Street, Stansted. Councillor S Barker said she would be happy to deal with this.

Councillor Knight said she had come across boundary infringements on new housing, but she was struggling to find an authority to take responsibility for this. She asked if someone could look into this.

C92 MATTERS REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

Councillor Chambers, the Chairman of the Licensing and Environmental Health Committee, presented the report, which was to inform Council of the unanimous decision taken by the Committee on 20th March 2019 to endorse all of the proposed changes to UDC Taxi Licensing Policies. Council was now being asked to endorse these changes.

In response to a Member question, Councillor Chambers said the Committee's key aim was to protect members of the public. Currently the Council was doing the statutory minimum for checks on licensed taxi drivers. The new policy would ensure the Council implemented best practice.

RESOLVED that the proposals and documents recommended in the policy be adopted by Uttlesford District Council.

C93 INVESTMENT STEERING GROUP

The Portfolio Holder – Finance and Administration presented the report. The report was the result of a request by Council on the establishment of a group to support the Council as it implemented its investment strategy. He noted that the

report recommended Members agree to the establishment of such a group while leaving decisions about the detail to be left for the new administration.

Councillor Fairhurst said this report was the beginning of due process on the investment strategy. The Council was still far from where it needed to be, but was beginning to deal with many important things. However, the report did make premature assumptions about the skills of officers and the Investment Strategy Group.

RESOLVED to endorse the Executive Decision, taken by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Administration to establish an Investment Steering Group as a Working Group of Cabinet.

C94 GOVERNANCE, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

Councillor Oliver, the Chairman of the Governance, Audit and Performance Committee, presented the report. The Constitution required the Chairman of the Committee to report annually to Full Council. The report summarised the key work of the Committee in the 2018/19 municipal year.

C95 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

Councillor Dean, the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, presented the report. The Constitution required the Chairman of the Committee to report annually to Full Council. The report summarised the key work of the Committee in the 2018/19 municipal year.

He highlighted the work the committee was doing on the Council's affordable housing policy and on reviewing the process for dealing with major planning applications and the need to put the Memorandum of Understanding between the Executive and Scrutiny into practice. He thanked the Assistant Director – Corporate Services and the Scrutiny Officer for their work.

Members agreed to extend the meeting time beyond two hours.

C96 CORPORATE PLAN DELIVERY PLAN PROGRESS REPORT ANNUAL REPORT

The Leader of the Council presented the report which set out progress against the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan between January and March. The Corporate Plan had been agreed by Council at its meeting on 22 February 2018, refreshed the underpinning evidence for the four priorities:

- Promote thriving, safe and healthy communities
- Protect and enhance heritage and character
- Support sustainable business growth

- Maintain a financially sound and effective Council

C97

COMMITTEE TIMETABLE

The Chairman presented the committee timetable for the upcoming year. This item had been deferred from the previous meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.35.

Minute Item 1

Public Speaking

Summary of statement by Andrew Frater:

Mr Frater said he was speaking in support of Councillor Light's motion on libraries. He thanked the District Council for offering financial support to Thaxted Library. This was welcome to the parish council and residents. The District Council's administration should take every opportunity to oppose removal of access to the wider national library network. He asked that the District Council's commitment to Thaxted Library be extended past 2019.

Summary of statement by Martyn Everett:

Mr Everett said he had worked for 28 years in public libraries, 3 years in a university library and 15 years in the library voluntary sector. He supported Councillor Light's motion on libraries. Funding cuts had seen cuts in opening hours, staffing and books available. The results of this had been severe, with the number of readers and items borrowed having fallen. Essex County Council had substantial reserves and did not need to cut library services. It had a duty to provide libraries for everyone, but closing 44 would remove library access to a third of its users. It would however not meet its statutory duty to provide libraries.