

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COMMITTEE ROOM - COUNCIL OFFICES,
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 25
SEPTEMBER 2018 at 7.30 pm**

Present: Councillor A Dean (Chairman)
Councillors R Chambers, J Davey, P Davies, S Harris,
G LeCount, M Lemon and B Light

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director – Corporate Services), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Officer), S Payne (Planning Policy – Project Manager), J Snares (Housing Strategy and Operations Manager) and A Webb (Director of Finance and Corporate Services).

Also Present: Councillors S Barker (Cabinet Member for Environmental Services), S Howell (Cabinet Member for Finance and Administration) and J Redfern (Cabinet Member for Housing).

SC8 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Asker, G Barker and Oliver.

SC9 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 May 2018 were signed and approved as a correct record subject to the following amendment to the resolution of minute S7:

RESOLVED to ***recommend to Cabinet*** the following draft proposals:

- 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 fifth consecutive year.
- ii. The Council continues to protect Vulnerable and Disabled Residents and Carers on a low income.
- iii. The empty homes premium is increased from 50% to 100% after 2 years of non-occupancy.

SC10 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Committee noted the updated Forward Plan.

SC11 **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2018-19**

The Committee considered the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2018-19 and the suggested topics list.

Members discussed the suggested topic 'Review of the Cabinet System' which had been on the potential scrutiny programme for two years but had yet to be added to the formal programme. Concerns were raised that this project would be resource intensive and could not be carried out in 2018. Furthermore, 2019 was an election year and Members discussed whether it would be appropriate for this Committee to put forward an item that would be addressed by a new Council.

A motion was proposed and seconded to formally add this item to the work programme for 2019.

The motion was defeated.

SC12 **STREET SERVICES UPDATE**

The Cabinet Member for Environmental Services presented the report to the Committee.

Members noted that the recycling rate had fallen and residual waste had increased in the past two years. In part, this was attributed to housing growth in the district. An action plan for waste education and awareness was being implemented to discourage littering, increase participation in the Council's recycling services and to help reduce contamination levels. Directing education at school age children was seen as an effective strategy in changing attitudes towards waste disposal and culture, although there was a consensus that a wide-ranging campaign would also be helpful.

To increase recycling rates and minimise residual waste, Members suggested engaging with the public by using the following methods:

- Engaging with the retail sector to encourage more sustainable commercial waste practices and the reduction of littering e.g. providing fewer disposable cups or using recyclable plastic packaging. Businesses who had signed up to the Saffron Walden BID were cited as potential partners.
- Clarifying the Household Waste list to minimise the potential of fly tipping.
- To canvass the opinion of the Youth Council with regards to educational schemes directed at children and schools.
- To include information relating to recycling on the Housing trailer that visited developments across the district.
- To include information relating to recycling in the Tenants' Newsletter.
- To increase the presence of littering and recycling campaigns such as the 'Campaign for a Cleaner Essex'.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING SCRUTINY REPORT

The Chairman moved item 10 forward in proceedings for the benefit of those present.

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report to the Committee. She said whilst there was much work to be done on the Council's affordable housing policy, the findings of the Affordable Housing Discussion Group were a good starting point and should be taken into account in the forthcoming review of the Council's Housing Strategy.

Members discussed the content of the report.

In response to a Member question, the Project Manager - Planning Policy said the proposed Affordable Housing Policy would be referenced in the Local Plan. The Local Plan aspired to include 40% affordable housing in the proposed garden communities but what had yet to be decided upon was the eligibility criteria for these affordable properties. He said this was the opportunity for Members to comment on the policy and he asked Members to contact him if they had any questions.

The Housing Strategy and Operations Manager said the Discussion group had agreed to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation measure of housing affordability. This defined affordable housing costs as being less than 35% of household income. She said the real question was not how to define 'affordable' but how to deliver homes at such a cost, and it would be for Members to decide upon what affordable housing model would be used.

The Chairman tabled an alternative recommendation to that which was in the report. The Committee accepted this recommendation.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Committee notes the findings and work to date of the Scrutiny Committee Affordable Housing Discussion Group and considers that this is work still in progress. The committee recommends that the work be continued and, in due course, is considered when refreshing the Uttlesford Housing Strategy and in the delivery stages of Garden Communities.

The committee notes in particular the following interim ideas from the report:

(i). Changes to the eligibility criteria of the allocations policy and the creation of a new 'Intermediate' Housing Register. All existing employees within Uttlesford District on permanent contracts would be eligible for the Council's 'Intermediate' Housing Register and associated affordable housing, providing the household can evidence that they cannot afford (even with tax credits) private rented housing because it costs more than 35% (gross) of their total weekly household income, but could afford the weekly rental at truly affordable levels at Local Housing Authority rates or

at rates available from a Community Land Trust or similar scheme, ideally avoiding the need for Housing Benefit.

(ii). Adopt the term truly affordable homes to distinguish future home delivery that meets local income criteria and achieves home availability that equates to costs that are equivalent to traditional social provision or cheaper.

(iii). In the case of the two Garden Communities that adjoin the district boundary, then consideration could be given to enable permanent employees working within the immediate vicinity (still to be defined) access to the truly affordable housing provision.

(iv). The council could consider allowing under-occupation for families with opposite sex children below the age of 10. The question of the “Bedroom Tax” would be relevant, though this impediment could be circumvented by providing homes from a Community Land Trust.

(v). Investigate and deliver alternative intermediate home ownership products such as Community Land Trust homes not delivered by HA partners. For example, models that link housing costs to local median income with a resale covenant in place to be delivered permanently in this way and therefore, to be truly affordable in perpetuity and available by avoiding Right to Buy mechanisms.

(vi). Adopt strategies and policies that are adaptable over time to meet changing employment and social circumstances so that the best truly affordable objectives can be maintained. To achieve this, put in place mechanisms that monitor over time changes in housing need, economic circumstances and required housing mix.

The Chairman said he would be in contact with Officers to assist in taking this work forward.

SC14 **CENTRE FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY - ACTION PLAN**

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services presented the report to the Committee. As there were implications for both Scrutiny and Cabinet Members, a meeting would take place to discuss implementation of the Action Plan in the near future.

Members discussed the content of the Action Plan.

In response to a question from Councillor Light, the Assistant Director – Corporate Services said the Corporate Management Team monitored the Scrutiny work programme to provide oversight. He said this had been approved by the Scrutiny Committee at a previous meeting.

The Chairman said he and Councillor G Barker would be meeting with relevant Officers to ensure the recommendations of the CfPS were realised.

RESOLVED that the Committee endorses the approach and actions proposed in the action plan to address the points raised by the CfPS.

SC15 **INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Administration introduced the report on the Council's Investment Strategy.

In response to a question from Councillor LeCount, the Director of Corporate and Financial Services said the largest piece of land the Council owned was large enough to build fourteen houses. With regards to purchasing land for the building of market houses, he said they were not ruling out the option but there were high risks involved.

The Chairman asked whether the Council had a risk register relating to its investments.

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services said there was a risk register for Chesterford Research Park and a similar approach would be taken for other acquisitions.

In response to a question regarding the risks to the Council's investment following Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Administration said reserves were in place and a covenant of tenancy had been agreed to safeguard the Council's position. He added that the tenants were not overly concerned as they were research, rather than manufacturing, companies and would not be adversely impacted by a withdrawal from the customs union. In general, he said, good progress had been made and the park was attracting new tenants.

The Chairman said he had asked for feedback from the non-executive directors of Aspire on the progress and risks of the Council's investment at Chesterford Research Park. This feedback would be brought to Members at a future committee meeting.

In response to a Member question, the Cabinet member for Finance and Administration said there were no imminent investment opportunities but the Council were on the look-out. He said as soon as something was found that was compliant with the Council's Investment Strategy, it would be brought before Members for approval.

The meeting ended at 9.35pm.