

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES,
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 4
FEBRUARY 2020 at 7.30 pm**

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)
Councillors M Caton, A Coote, C Criscione, G Driscoll, R Jones,
G LeCount, N Reeve and G Sell

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director - Corporate Services), A Bochel
(Democratic Services Officer), D French (Chief Executive) and
A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services)

Also present: Councillors J Evans (Cabinet Member – Planning and the Local
Plan), A Gerard (Green Party Representative), N Hargreaves
(Cabinet Member – Finance and the Budget), P Lees (Deputy
Leader of the Council), J Lodge (Leader of the Council) and S
Merifield (Chair of Planning Committee)

SC35 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lavelle.

SC36 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2019 were approved and signed as a correct record.

SC37 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair said he had asked the Vice Chair to look into difficulties experienced with the audio broadcasting system during the Planning Committee meeting on 24 January. The Vice Chair said he would prepare a full report for the Committee for the March meeting.

Members nominated the following for the membership of the Major Planning Applications task and finish group: Councillors Dean, Gerard and Loughlin. This was in addition to the Vice Chair who had already been appointed as Chair of the group. The group would start its work once the Planning Advisory Service had conducted its interviews and reported back to the Committee.

SC38 CORPORATE PLAN, MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND COMMERCIAL STRATEGY

Councillors Caton and Sell said they were disappointed that the Scrutiny Committee had not had the opportunity to scrutinise the budget. It would be a strategic approach for the Committee to look over this. There had also been no

public consultation. The administration's actions were therefore lacking a degree of transparency and accountability.

The Portfolio Holder – Finance and the Budget said that a consultation had not been carried out as the administration had won the district elections with a manifesto on which the budget was based. An additional difficulty was that the government had been late providing information on this year's settlement, which meant the budget had to be prepared within less time than was normal.

The Chair said he had suggested that the Committee focus its attention on the Corporate Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Commercial Strategy in their work programme instead of the budget, because these were the documents that drove the direction of the budget. The budget would be put into the Committee's work programme for the following year.

The Chair asked for questions on each of the documents in turn. Those with answers which noted future actions are listed below.

Corporate Plan:

In response to questions from Councillor Criscione, the Leader said the action plan that was being developed would address concerns about how to measure the efficiency of council services. This would be made available shortly. The administration was enthusiastic about good governance.

In response to a Member question, the Leader said he would consult on officer time available to look into school transport issues.

In response to a Member question, the Leader said the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan would spell out the timescales that the administration hoped to achieve its goals in.

MTFS:

In response to a question from Councillor Caton, the Leader said the amount of money to be invested by the Council had increased due to the need for investment to generate a higher level of return as central government funding was reduced. The amount of return that council tax generated alone was not enough to keep up with inflation. The Director – Finance and Corporate Services said Council would need to approve the increase of allocation of resources for investment. Each investment opportunity would then be brought to Council for approval.

In response to a question from Councillor Caton, the Director – Finance and Corporate Services said the commercial protocol would be developed once two independent members of the Investment Board had been hired.

In response to a question from Councillor Caton, the Director – Finance and Corporate Services said all investments would have Key Performance Indicators. These were recommended by central government.

Commercial Strategy:

In response to a Member question, the Director - Finance and Corporate Services said the current council house programme was based on the existing business plan and housing strategy. When these were refreshed, the house building programme could be developed further.

SC39 PLANNING OBLIGATIONS AND CONDITIONS TASK GROUP

Councillor Criscione said the group's discussions had rooted out a few issues which it hoped to make recommendations on. These included:

- A developer contributions document
- Early engagement with town and parish councils
- Adoption of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)
- The importance of neighbourhood planning
- Greater focus on monitoring, intervention and enforcement

Members noted there was no disadvantage in proceeding with CIL in order to move its adoption forward quickly.

SC40 AIRPORT RELATED PARKING TASK GROUP

Councillor Caton said the group had held an initial meeting and had spoken to the Portfolio Holder for Infrastructure, Transport and Stansted Airport. They intended to research good practice elsewhere and liaise with parish councils.

SC41 MAJOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Assistant Director – Corporate Services said the Planning Advisory Service would be conducting interviews on how the Council handled major planning applications in late February. The report would hopefully be ready for the May meeting.

Councillor Gerard noted it would be useful to define what a major planning application was. At present it was anything over ten units.

The meeting ended at 9.30.