

CABINET held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 11 JANUARY 2022 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor N Hargreaves (Chair)
Councillors M Sutton, A Armstrong, J Evans, R Freeman,
L Pepper and N Reeve

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), B Brown (Assistant Director - Environmental Services), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager), C Fiddy (Climate Change Project Officer), A Knight (Assistant Director - Resources) and A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services)

Also present: Councillors M Caton (Liberal Democrat Group Leader) N Gregory (Chair of Scrutiny Committee), V Isham (Green Group Leader) and P Lees (Residents for Uttlesford Group Leader).

CAB68 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lees, who attended the meeting via Zoom as she was self-isolating. Councillor Hargreaves as Deputy Leader chaired the meeting in her absence.

CAB69 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 December were approved as a true and correct record, subject to the following correction being applied to the third paragraph of CAB65:

The word 'conversation' to be replaced with 'conservation'.

"Councillor Gregory said he sensed frustration from residents regarding the conservation role played by Place Services when the Council determined planning applications."

CAB70 QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS FROM NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)

In response to a question from Councillor Caton regarding the First Homes Scheme and whether protecting affordable rental homes at the expense of shared ownership properties was formal policy, the Chair said a written answer would be provided.

CAB71 CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

COMMITTEES (STANDING ITEM)

Councillor Gregory provided a report on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee. He updated Cabinet on the meeting held before Christmas where the Climate Change Action Plan and Local Plan process were considered. He said the Committee were impressed with the management of the Local Plan and commended the report presented to the Committee, and were reassured by comments from the Leader stating that the Local Plan process was fully funded. Special praise was reserved to Stephen Miles and Simon Payne for their excellent work in managing the process. He thanked the Portfolio Holder for Green Issues and the Climate Change Officer for their work on the Climate Change Action Plan; the Committee had been delighted to recommend the Plan to Cabinet for approval.

CAB72 REPORT OF DELEGATED DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET MEMBERS (STANDING ITEM)

Cabinet noted the Executive decision 'Application for Designation: Hatfield Heath Neighbourhood Development Plan Area' published on 20 December 2021.

CAB73 REPORT ON ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE DETERMINED BY THE ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE AND LOCAL HERITAGE LIST COMMITTEE (STANDING ITEM)

There were no decisions to report.

CAB74 CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN

Councillor Pepper presented the report regarding the Climate Change Action Plan, which set out details on how the Council would deliver on the commitments it had made through the Climate Change Strategy. The document was "live" and would evolve as actions and goals progressed. The Council would take action in areas within its own control, such as applying for £900,000 in funding and administering grants to low income households in order to make their homes more energy efficient, utilising retrofit programmes and insulating council homes, but would also embrace a wider leadership role on climate change issues in the community. Furthermore, planning, economic and transport strategies would dovetail with the Action Plan; by way of example, work was being undertaken on a Cycling Strategy. Over 570 responses had been received in relation to a bio-diversity survey and mapping exercise, and there was potential for the mapping tool to be used by other district councils in Essex. The Action Plan had 37 specific action points, with various target dates for completion, and would be monitored in real time. The Plan was ambitious and there were large scale projects to complete. She thanked all those who had worked on the Plan but reserved special praise for the Climate Change Officer, Councillor Pavitt and Edward Gildea for their contributions to the Plan.

Councillor Evans commended the Action Plan. He said there would be ongoing coordination between the Portfolio Holders for Planning and Green Issues, and that the Local Plan would specifically incorporate the relevant climate change policies, via a supplementary planning document, adopted by the Council.

In response to a question from Councillor Caton regarding the energy efficiency grants for lower income households in the district and the number that this would assist, the Chief Executive said the grants were up to £10,000 each and the Council were aiming to apply for as many as possible. He said a minimum of 90 households would be assisted by these grants but work was ongoing to secure more funding with the aim of helping 150 households. Discussions were also continuing on how best to identify households who would most benefit from these grants.

In response to a further question from Councillor Caton regarding why this had not been included in the Action Plan, the Climate Change Officer said the Plan was a live document and at the point of publication the funding application had not yet been approved. This would be incorporated into the Plan as it evolved.

Councillor Armstrong seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED to adopt the Climate Change Action Plan and note progress on the actions therein.

CAB75 BUDGET 2021/22 FORECAST OUTTURN QUARTER 2

The Chair presented the Budget 2021/22 Forecast Outturn Quarter 2 report to Cabinet, which detailed the financial performance of the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, Treasury Management and the Capital Programme. He highlighted the variances to the General Fund resulting in a overspend of £648,000 and the continuing work arising from the pandemic. Furthermore, he outlined the change to General Fund reserves with the primary movement being the £3,130,000 due to the business rate reliefs awarded. He referred to the position on the Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme, where he highlighted the £78,271,000 overspend relating to commercial investments, and that the £1,727,000 slippage for Walden Place had been reallocated to support the purchase of affordable homes to meet the Council's right to buy requirements. He noted the terms of borrowing and interest rates outlined in the Treasury Management section. He proposed the recommendation set out in the report.

Councillor Jones had registered to speak on the item and was invited to address Cabinet. He said the report showed that there was an underspend of £200,000 for the Local Highways Panel and that in the previous two financial years the Council had made an additional £100,000 available to the Highways Panel. He said there were projects in the district that would benefit from such funding but the reality was that the Highways Authority had not requested this additional funding in the previous two years. He said the minutes of the Highways Panel meeting on 5 July 2021 showed that the matter had been discussed and members had been informed that due to timing and limited resources it would be

difficult to implement additional highways schemes. However, the foundations could be put in place for further schemes in 2022/23. While he appreciated that the budget would be set by Council in February, he asked Cabinet to consider recommending additional funding for the Highways Panel in 2022/23.

In response, the Chair said this matter was being considered along with all other budgetary requests as part of the budget setting process that would be considered by Full Council. He said concerns remained that the funding which had previously been made available had gone unutilised, although it would be in the interest of residents if further highway projects could be undertaken in the district.

Councillor Isham asked a series of detailed questions regarding changes to the CIPFA Code and what impact this would have on the Council's Commercial Strategy.

The questions were as follows:

- What would the possible revisions to the CIPFA Code mean for the Council's longer-term investments and to what extent would the Commercial Investment Strategy be impacted?
- Had the UDC borrowing been prudent investments in terms of CPFA guidelines?
- Had UDC investments departed from the guidance and code?
- If yes, were Cabinet, the Investment Board and all Members fully informed of the Council's departure from the guidance and code? Were all the groups mentioned, fully aware of the implications and risks of departure from the guidance and code? Were all members aware of any legal advice available regarding departure from the code and where could this be found?
- What was the scale of risk and worst-case loss that could result if the Council were required to unwind these investments or even reschedule borrowing terms as a result of CIPFA changes?

The Chair undertook to provide written answers. Councillor Isham agreed to submit the questions in written form.

In response to a question from Councillor Caton regarding investment key performance indicators, the Chair said these were published as part 2 reports and circulated with members of the Investment Board. He said any member could request to attend the Investment Board but the figures were not public for commercial reasons.

In response to a question from Councillor Caton regarding the Council taking a long term bond, the Chair said at this point the matter was in abeyance.

In response to a question from Councillor Caton relating to the accounting of Little Canfield Business Park and why it did not show in the report, the Director of Finance and Corporate Services said it was a timing issue and it would appear in future reports.

Councillor Armstrong seconded the recommendation in the report.

RESOLVED to:

I. Note the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme forecast outturn positions

II. Approve the updated use of reserves and requested slippage for the Capital Programme.

CAB76 TREASURY MANAGEMENT - MID YEAR REVIEW 2021/22

The Chair presented the Treasury Management mid-year review 2021/22 report to Cabinet, which provided an update on current Treasury Activities and other factors that could influence or affect the financial market. He referred to the paper attached at Appendix A which had been compiled with the support of the council's external treasury advisors Arlingclose Ltd. Specifically, he highlighted the Investment Limits (table 7) and noted non-compliance with the Strategy regarding the 'banks (unsecured) limit'. This was due to large payments being received after the external investment deadline had closed.

The report was noted.

CAB77 REPORT TO APPROVE A NEW FORWARD PLAN 2021/22 – 2025/26 FOR SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

Councillor Armstrong presented the report regarding Saffron Walden Museum's Forward Plan for 2021/22 – 2025/26. He said approval for the Plan was required in order for the Museum to apply for funding. He proposed approval of the Forward Plan and encouraged members to support the Museum.

Councillor Evans said this warranted support and asked for Members to promote the Museum in their own Wards. Furthermore, he was encouraged by the proposal for outreach programmes in all parts of the district.

Councillor Freeman reiterated this support and commended the Museum.

In response to a question from the Chair regarding the net figures in the report, Councillor Armstrong confirmed that the VAT would be recovered via the Council.

Councillor Freeman seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED:

I. To approve the Forward Plan 2022-26 for Saffron Walden Museum.

II. That the Forward Plan is reviewed and updated annually, as the Museum's development plans progress in conjunction with grant applications and other fund-raising activity.

CAB78 NORTH ESSEX PARKING PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT 2022

Councillor Freeman presented the report regarding the North Essex Parking Partnership Agreement 2022. He said the current agreement, which had been in place since 2011, would end in March 2022 and the Council had a choice as to whether they wanted to continue to opt-in to the agreement. He said the Partnership had increased the efficiency of parking services, in terms of both on-street and off-street parking, across the County and proposed the continuation of the arrangement as recommended in the report.

Councillor Reeve seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED to:

I. Continue as a Partner with NEPP as per the new agreement and remain a member of the Joint Committee

II. To continue its arrangement with NEPP for the delivery of the off-street parking services via a new Service Level Agreement

III. Cllr Richard Freeman, Portfolio Holder for Council and Public Services and the Assistant Director of Resources have delegated authority to finalise the Partnership Agreement and the Service Level Agreement for all parking services.

CAB79 APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES OF CABINET

The Chair said there were a number of appointments to be determined and proposed taking Items 13, 14 and 15 en bloc. He proposed approval of the appointments as set out in the agenda papers.

Councillor Armstrong seconded the proposal.

In response to a question from Councillor Isham regarding a change to Local Plan Leadership Group membership, the Chair asked for a request to be submitted after the meeting in order for it to be considered against the Group's terms of reference.

RESOLVED:

I. To appoint Councillor Sutton in place of Councillor Day on the Assets of Community Value and Local Heritage List Committee and Voluntary Support Grants Committee.

II. To appoint Councillor Reeve in place of Councillor Lodge on Voluntary Support Grants Committee.

CAB80 APPOINTMENTS TO CABINET WORKING GROUPS

RESOLVED:

- I. To appoint Councillor Lodge in place of Councillor Lees on the Local Plan Leadership Group.
- II. To appoint Councillor Sutton in place of Councillor Day on the Community Services Working Group.

CAB81 APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

RESOLVED to:

- I. Appoint Councillor Sutton to the Community Safety Partnership
- II. Appoint Councillor Sutton to the Crawley Prize Endowment
- III. Appoint Councillor Sutton to the Essex County Traveller Unit
- IV. Appoint Councillor Sutton to the Uttlesford Youth Strategy Group
- V. Appoint Councillor Lees to the Local Strategic Partnership.

The meeting was closed at 8.30pm.