

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES,
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 23
NOVEMBER 2021 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)
Councillors G Driscoll, V Isham, R Jones, P Lavelle, G LeCount,
G Sell, G Smith (non-voting) and J De Vries.

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director - Corporate Services), B Brown
(Assistant Director - Environmental Services), T Coleman
(Interim Director of Planning), C Edwards (Democratic Services
Officer), C Fiddy (Climate Change Project Officer), P Holt (Chief
Executive), L Howells (Business Support Officer), J Reynolds
(Assistant Director - Legal and Governance), J Walsh (Planning
Transformation Lead) and A Webb (Director - Finance and
Corporate Services).

Also in attendance: Councillor J Evans (Portfolio Holder for Planning and the Local
Plan), Councillor Pepper (Portfolio Holder for Environment and
Green Issues), Councillor N Reeve (Portfolio Holder for
Economy and Investment).

Public Speakers: S Watson, N McCahill and Councillor Luck

SC31 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Chair said that there were two items which were subject to the exclusion of the press and public, the Stansted Airport Task and Finish Group which included matters of costs with Manchester Airport Group and public speaking in respect of Debden Village Hall, as proceedings had been issued by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust.

The Chief Executive said that in order for the task and finish group looking into the Stansted Airport Appeal Review to have the full level of detail required for them to reach clear conclusions and learning outcomes, and for the review to go ahead straight away, there were sensitivities around the on-going process of settling costs with the airport.

In regards to the Debden Village Hall matter, he said a legal process was underway following the letter from the Armed Forces Covenant Trust and therefore, in order to allow public speakers to be heard by the Committee, it was important that the details did not prejudice the legal dispute.

The Chair proposed the exclusion of the public and press and Councillor Le Count seconded the motion.

AGREED that in consideration of items containing exempt information within the meaning of section 1001 and paragraphs 5 & 3 part 1, Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings and information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

SC32 PUBLIC SPEAKERS

Stephanie Watson, Chair of Debden Parish Council, Nicola McCahill, and District Councillor Stewart Luck gave statements to the Committee in regard to the Debden Village Hall and the funds provided by the Armed Forces Covenant Trust to build the new hall, which the Trust had now asked to be returned. They were disappointed that the Trust had issued legal proceedings and asked for Uttlesford District Council's support to avoid this process and costly legal fees and to help mediate so that this issue could be resolved.

In response to a question from Councillor Driscoll, Ms McCahill said there were no conditions within the grant funding that the money had to be used within a certain timescale.

In response to a query from Councillor Lavelle the Chair said that Scrutiny Committee were providing a forum as the speakers had been unable to speak at the recent Full Council meeting.

The Chief Executive said there was no dispute between Uttlesford District Council (UDC) and Debden Parish Council.

Councillor Sell suggested that the Local Member of Parliament (MP) was asked to get involved and to mediate between the parties.

The Chief Executive said that whilst he could not give any assurances about how the dispute would ultimately be settled, he hoped that there were alternative dispute resolutions that could be used and said the involvement of the Local MP was a good idea.

SC33 STANSTED AIRPORT APPEAL REVIEW

Councillor LeCount said that the task and finish group had been set up, and on the advice of the Assistant Director Governance and Legal and Monitoring Officer there would be an independent panel which would consist of two legal experts who would scope the works and would report back to the task and finish group on a regular basis.

The task and finish group would not be able to determine the content of the review and would be limited to discussions regarding progress.

He said the panel would be in place within the next 2 weeks and the process would be finished by spring next year.

In response to a question from Councillor Driscoll, he confirmed that the panel would also include the Assistant Director Governance and Legal and Monitoring Officer.

SC34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillors Coote and Criscione. The Chair had agreed that Councillor Smith could attend the meeting in place of Councillor Criscione as the official substitute was not available. He would not be able to vote but could contribute to the meeting.

SC35 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2021 were approved.

SC36 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Councillor Driscoll raised the change of car parking tariffs to encourage people to shop locally and said he hoped they would be reduced or taken away completely.

The Chair said there were some issues raised at the Governance, Audit and Performance Committee about the Housing Strategy, but this was being dealt with by that Committee.

SC37 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Assistant Director - Corporate Services said that there was one amendment to the work programme, the next update of the Planning Review would come to the February meeting instead of March.

SC38 CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN

Councillor Pepper presented the Climate Change Action Plan and said that they had worked hard to come up with a strong joined up framework, focusing on issues within the Council's control and working alongside key stakeholders.

A detailed list of actions to date had been provided which helped to feed into the core objective to reduce the carbon emissions of the district.

She said that the actions provided bold solutions for renewable energy, sustainable transport, walking and cycling as well as enhancing, protecting, and restoring the biodiversity within UDC.

She highlighted some examples of progress to date: -

- A cycle strategy for UDC including walking and cycling infrastructure using money from S106 funding was underway.
- A grant had been obtained to retrofit houses of low-income families.
- Awaiting confirmation of a further energy grant of just under £1m.
- A biodiversity study had been completed to map environmentally important areas and this would identify projects for funding.

She suggested that as it was a live document that a 6 monthly progress report was produced.

The Members thanked Officers and Councillor Pepper for their hard work in producing the document.

In response to a question from Councillor Jones, the Climate Change Project Officer said that it was not possible to change all the current fleet of bin lorries to reduce their carbon footprint. She said that there would need to be some carbon offsetting until such time that the fleet could sensibly be upgraded.

She said in response to an additional question from Councillor LeCount that the fleet would gradually be replaced, and she hoped that the price of electric lorries or other alternatives would come down in price.

Councillor Jones asked for the report to include the carbon offsetting figures.

Councillor Sell said that he had some concerns about the report. He said that there was only 18 months left of this administration and he did not know how much of the money could be spent in this time. He said that there were over 30 action points and no prioritisation of what to focus on first. He thought some actions were not quantifiable and there were no SMART targets or meaningful way to measure outcomes.

Councillor Pepper said that there were 3 areas of focus, transport, energy, and biodiversity. She suggested that an interim report was brought back in 6 months' time when progress could be assessed, and more detail would be available on how the money was planned to be spent.

Councillor Smith said that it had been over 2 years since the climate change emergency had been declared and some residents might wonder why it had taken so long to get the action plan in place. He said the report needed some fine tuning and to be clearer with regards to planned achievements.

Councillor Isham agreed and said the focus needed to be on instant wins and actions that were in the Council's control. He said a highly valuable way to start would be to raise awareness and educate within schools.

Councillor De Vries said that he had expected more tangible data in terms of dates and who would be responsible to deliver the actions. There needed to be key performance indicators on items that could be delivered and then a separate document containing items that would take longer to implement. He said a review in six months was not soon enough.

Councillor LeCount asked for an executive summary to be added at the start of the document to summarise what had been covered, including dates for completion. He said this would then be useful to measure how well the Council was performing.

Councillor Pepper said that the pandemic had slowed the progress of the report and some of the quick wins, for example, going into schools had just not been possible. She said that moving forward there was now a full time officer working on the report and she said that progress would happen at a faster pace.

Councillor Lavelle said that he thought it was an exceptional document and he pointed out a number of actions that had been completed: -

- heat pumps installed in 90 Council houses.
- oil boilers replaced in 80 properties.
- 280 properties had added wall insulation.
- solar panels put on 300 properties.

He said this was real action that was making a difference. He accepted that there was more to do in the future but thought it was a good start.

The Chair summarised the debate, he said that despite the pandemic the climate emergency had been declared in July 2019. He said whilst the document was comprehensive it was aspirational rather than focusing on deliverables and there was a lack of measurable commitments and how success would be quantified.

Councillor Pepper said that some achievements had been overlooked, which included: -

- an interim climate change policy that was used by all developers before submitting a planning application.
- the switch by the Council to a green tariff.
- 32 electrical charging points installed.
- roadside verges left for rewilding.
- trees and hedgerows planted.

She said that the administration was also trying to influence residents to make their own changes to their behaviour and this was all without help from Central Government. She said she would be happy to come back in March with more detailed plans of how the money would be spent.

The Chair proposed a vote on whether to remit to Cabinet, and said if Members voted against this, then a further motion for an extraordinary meeting in December would be put forward to consider the revisions made to the document.

The Assistant Director – Environmental Services said that the document could be brought back in a months' time but asked for some specifics on what the Committee wanted to be changed. The Chair suggested that Councillors Sell, Isham and De Vries provided more detailed feedback.

AGREED: That an additional Scrutiny Committee meeting would be held in December to consider revisions to the document before it was remitted to Cabinet for the January meeting.

SC39 IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE - PLANNING SERVICE REVIEW

Councillor Evans presented the report and said that he thought the document met the request for an interim statement on current, past, and future actions produced from the service review.

He said it was his intention to have the majority of the actions completed by Spring 2022 and suggested that this was brought back to the Committee at that point.

He said the additional support from the new Interim Director and Transformation Lead had brought additional experience and morale in the department was good.

The Chair welcomed the Interim Director of Planning to the meeting and thanked the Planning Transformation Lead for the amount of work and progress made to date.

Councillor Sell asked why the Enforcement Officer role was only in post for 12 months and asked how the issues discussed in the Team Leader Meeting would be dealt with.

The Interim Director of Planning said she would send some details through to Councillor Sell and said that the 12-month post was to specifically carry out the audit report and provide support to the team in setting up the recommendations that would come from the report.

The Chair said that this document had provided what the Committee had requested at the last meeting and proposed that the report was noted and accepted by the Committee, the Members agreed unanimously.

SC40 ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN DELIVERY PLAN

Councillor Reeve presented the interim report that had been requested by the Scrutiny Committee at the June meeting.

He said that there were two remaining grants being administered the Essex Business Adaptation Fund and the Additional Restrictions Grant. He said in total £15 million of COVID-19 business support had been paid out in the form of grants to local businesses.

He said that the grant administration work was decreasing and that meant the focus would be on the mainstream economic development and growth for the district as well as feeding into the economic development work within the upcoming Local Plan.

He thanked the Economic Development Team for the work that they had put in and said they had gone above and beyond to deliver the service and support local businesses.

Councillor Lavelle wanted to record his support for the team and in particular how the grants had been administered.

Councillor Sell agreed and asked if some of the feedback could be captured from businesses to encourage others to get involved.

In response to a question from Councillor Sell, Councillor Reeve said that the budget summary related to the current financial year and represented 6 months of spend so far. He said that he would expect the majority of the budget to be spent by the end of the year.

The Chair commended Councillor Reeve and the Economic Development Team for their hard and outstanding work. He proposed and the Committee agreed unanimously that the report was remitted to Cabinet.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm.