

COUNCIL held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 23 APRIL 2024 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor G Driscoll (Chair)
Councillors M Ahmed, A Armstrong, H Asker, S Barker, N Church, M Coletta, A Coote, J Davey, A Dean, B Donald, J Emanuel, J Evans, C Fiddy, M Foley, R Freeman, R Gooding, N Gregory, N Hargreaves, R Haynes, P Lees, M Lemon, T Loveday, S Luck, C Martin, E Oliver, R Pavitt, A Reeve, N Reeve, B Regan, G Sell, R Silcock and M Tayler

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager), N Katevu (Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal Services) and A Webb (Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services).

C92 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bagnall, Criscione, McBirnie, Moran and Loughlin.

C93 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting on 11 March were approved as a correct record.

C94 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair listed his civic engagements since the previous meeting, including events in Rochford, Bishop's Stortford and Southend. He also held a number of quiz nights in the district on behalf of charity organisations.

C95 REPORTS FROM THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Leader updated members on an informal economic board arrangement with North Essex councils that had led to a memorandum of understanding. She said this was not part of a devolution deal, but the arrangement did allow councils to identify areas and issues on which they could work together in partnership.

The Chair asked whether there were any comments or questions on the five written Cabinet member reports which had been published.

In response to a question from Councillor Barker regarding the Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation responses, Councillor Evans said the responses

were being modulated and would be published as soon as possible. He clarified that the responses would be banded and not published "one by one".

In response to comments regarding business grants, Councillor Hargreaves said terms and conditions were applied to grant funding and the Council could claw back funding that had not been used correctly.

C96

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS (UP TO 30 MINUTES)

The Chair said he had received notice of an urgent question from Councillor Tayler regarding the withdrawal of a bus service in Thaxted. Councillor Tayler said a response from Essex County Council (ECC) had not been received following Councillor Foley's queries; he asked the Leader and Chief Executive to support the request for clarity regarding the cancellation of the bus service.

The Leader said contradictory statements had been issued by the bus company and ECC and she would write a letter on behalf of the Council seeking clarity on the matter.

Councillor Gooding said he would be happy to speak to the Leader and Chief Executive about the issue outside of the meeting.

The Chair returned to questions of clarification on responses to the written questions published with the agenda.

In response to a question of clarification from Councillor Gregory in regards to when the Council would receive monies back relating to the problems at Reynolds Court, Councillor Coote said he hoped this would be as soon as possible and he would continue to work on the matter until it was settled.

In response to a question of clarification from Councillor Sell, Councillor Evans confirmed that published papers would be attached to the Local Plan Panel agendas in future.

In response to a question of clarification from Councillor Lemon regarding the length of time it took to get through to customer services on the phone, Councillor Reeve said he acknowledged the comment and said the Council was working to improve waiting times. Councillor Barker corrected the number in the published papers to 01799 510510.

In response to a question of clarification from Councillor Silcock, Councillor Coote said the Interim Property Services Director would be in post for one year.

C97

MATTERS REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

The Chair said the Climate and Biodiversity Action Plan and the Operational Resilience Task and Finish Group report were both stand alone items on the agenda.

C98 MATTERS RECEIVED ABOUT JOINT ARRANGEMENTS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

There were no matters received regarding joint arrangements.

C99 CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

Councillor Neil Reeve presented the report regarding the Climate and Biodiversity Action Plan, which highlighted the UDC Climate Change programme achievements over the past year and outlined the proposed updated Climate Change Action plan for April 2024 to March 2025, detailing key programme priorities, activities, and measures of success. He said he was proud of the team's achievements and pointed to the de-carbonisation of council operations, air quality and sustainable transport projects and the enabling of local community groups taking action on climate change.

Councillor Fiddy commended the Action Plan; she asked whether the Portfolio Holder for the Environment had concerns over bio-diversity and whether further experts were required in relation to net gain regulations.

Councillor Sell thanked Councillor Reeve and his team for the report and for their progress to date. He said he would like to see more ambitious environmental targets in future.

Councillor Coote said the "roots" planted during the previous administration were now bearing fruit in regards to progress on the Climate Change Action Plan. He said the lessons learnt regarding air quality in Saffron Walden should be applied across the district.

Councillor Alex Reeve said tackling climate change was the responsibility of everyone; if each individual did a little, a great deal could be achieved. He said experts were required in the field of botany.

The Leader said ex Councillor Pepper was the first Portfolio Holder for Climate Change at UDC and she had laid the foundations for these achievements. She thanked officers and Councillor Reeve for their hard work and added that UDC was the only Council in Essex with an ecologist.

Councillor Freeman said planning and development were areas which could have a great impact on climate change; he said planning conditions played a key role in this.

In summary, Councillor Neil Reeve said further resources were required in respect of the bio-diversity net-gain rules as he believed one ecologist was not sufficient. He also agreed that more ambitious targets would be required in

future. In conclusion, he said lessons learnt during the air quality projects would be applied across the district where appropriate.

The report was noted.

C100 **OPERATIONAL RESILIENCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP FINAL REPORT**

Councillor Donald, as the co-Chair of the Task and Finish Group, presented the report on Operational Resilience. She said the waste disruption between 24 January and 6 February was unacceptable but the response from staff and the other organisations that assisted the Council was good. The Task and Finish Group had been impressed by the openness and transparency of the Leader and Chief Executive, and a great deal of information had been published in the public domain. She said the final costings had been confirmed as £75,000. The other issue the Group had looked at more broadly was “single-points of failure” across the organisation. She said this would be an ongoing programme of work and the Group would reconvene in 3 months’ time to review the situation. She said she was hopeful that from this disappointing and difficult situation the Council would ultimately emerge stronger.

Councillor Foley asked whether it would be appropriate to build into each full Council meeting a progress update relating to the Risk Register.

Councillor Sell, a member of the Task and Finish Group, thanked members and officers for their support and openness. He said it had been a helpful exercise and lessons had been learnt. However, he said the review would have benefitted from an independent or external member and the time limit meant the review could not be as forensic as he would have liked. He still felt that there had been a lack of political leadership throughout the episode.

Councillor Fiddy said an information campaign should be conducted on sorting different types of waste products for the purposes of recycling. She said citizens in Switzerland had to pay for waste disposal and were required to recycle.

Councillor Barker said communication had been an issue throughout the disruption; she said that residents in the Rodings had not been included on a website list and therefore were left in the dark regarding their waste collections. She said it was important to build-up and maintain a local communications network between the Council and local communities.

Councillor Freeman said councillors were reliant on officers bringing issues to the surface before they became critical. He said the Risk Register should be more visible to members.

Councillor Hargreaves said Cabinet members attended scrutiny for questioning when they had a relevant matter on the agenda. He added that there was a great deal of information in the appendices attached to the report.

The Leader thanked the Task and Finish Group for their work and stressed that this project would continue. She said lessons had been learnt from this disruption and recommendations had been accepted.

Councillor Neil Reeve apologised for the disruption and said the Service would now need to perform “above and beyond” in order to restore trust. He was keeping a close eye on this matter.

In response to a question from Councillor Church, Councillor Donald confirmed that the final cost to the Council was £75,000.

In response to a question from Councillor Regan regarding Sunday collections and the resumption of normal service, the Chair said it was routine for the Service to collect waste on a Sunday if the collections had been missed during the working week.

In summary, Councillor Donald said a Risk Register would be on each council department’s agenda and some risks would remain confidential to prevent “bad actors” utilizing the information. However, the Task and Finish Group would reconvene and present an update to members in due course. In regards to communication, she said this was currently being looked into and costings were being sourced in respect of an SMS system that the Council could use to share information with residents. She concluded by saying that there had been a huge amount of information to digest but the Council would learn lessons from this disruption and the monitoring of risks would continue.

The report was noted.

The meeting ended at 8.15pm.