

CABINET held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 2023 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor P Lees (Chair)
Councillors J Evans, N Hargreaves, N Reeve and M Sutton

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager), D Hermitage (Strategic Director of Planning), A Knight (Director of Business Performance and People) and A Webb (Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services)

Also present: R Haynes

CAB25 PUBLIC SPEAKING

Mr Haynes spoke in a personal capacity regarding item 9 – Conservation Area, Smiths Green. A summary of his statement has been appended to these minutes.

CAB26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillor Coote and Councillors Gregory (Chair of Scrutiny) and Pavitt (Leader of the Uttlesford Independents).

CAB27 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meetings held on 29 June and 23 August 2023 were approved as correct records.

CAB28 QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS FROM NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)

There were no questions or statements from non-executive members.

CAB29 REPORT OF DELEGATED DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET MEMBERS (STANDING ITEM)

The Leader reported the delegated decision relating to the [Little Canfield Car Park Works](#) published on 19 October 2023.

CAB30 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.

CAB31 CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (STANDING ITEM)

No reports were considered from overview or scrutiny committees.

CAB32 CONSERVATION AREA SMITHS GREEN

The Leader indicated that she would be rearranging agenda items for the benefit of the public and officers present and proceeded with item 9.

The Principal Website Officer presented the report regarding the proposed Conservation Area at Smiths Green, Takeley. He said a Heritage Assessment and Audit was commissioned in 2022 by Takeley Parish Council as part of their Neighbourhood Plan process. This assessment highlighted the potential to designate Smiths Green as a Conservation Area and Takeley Parish Council commissioned Place Services in 2023 to undertake a conservation area appraisal of Smiths Green. The appraisal recommended the designation of a conservation area and identified the proposed conservation area boundary. The parish council considered the appraisal a worthwhile document which would likely strengthen the control of development and officers to request the designation of a conservation area at Smiths Green. As the local planning authority, the Council was required to carry out a public consultation on the proposed conservation area, which included holding a public meeting in Takeley. He recommended that Cabinet approve the designation as set out in the report.

Councillor Evans proposed approval of the recommendation; this was seconded by Councillor Sutton.

The Leader read out a statement from Councillor Bagnall, ward member for Takeley, praising the work of Takeley Parish Council, Place Services and the Development Management team, and for the impressive presentation recently held in the Community Centre. He supported the designation.

Members discussed the designation and commended the proposal.

In response to a question from Councillor Reeve, the principal Website Officer said the boundary had been recommended by Place Services and “lesser quality” areas that did not meet the necessary criteria for a conservation area had been excluded from the designation.

The Leader confirmed that the parish council was wholly behind the scheme.

The proposal was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED:

- I. That the Smiths Green Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan be approved and used to assist in the process of determining planning applications and for implementing management proposals.
- II. That the Smiths Green Conservation Area be formally designated.

CAB33 CORPORATE PLAN

The Leader presented the report regarding the Corporate Plan, which outlined the Council's vision and priorities over the next four years. She said the Corporate Plan had been streamlined and set out measurable delivery targets in order to provide focus. In addition, a new priority had been included which focused on rural-specific initiatives and working patterns, both across council services and more broadly across partner agencies. She said Cabinet would monitor progress on a quarterly basis and the Corporate Plan would be considered by Council in February, which would include the updates requested by the Scrutiny Committee. She proposed approval of the Corporate Plan, and commended Councillor Reeve for his previous work on the Plan.

Councillor Reeve seconded the proposal. He said this Plan would provide focus on the Council's key priorities.

The Corporate Plan was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to approve the Corporate Plan.

CAB34 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME PROPOSALS - 2024/25

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report regarding the Local Council Tax Support Scheme proposals for 2024/25 and said that Uttlesford had administered the scheme with the lowest percentage contribution requirement of any authority in Essex for ten years. He said there was a requirement to annually review the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) Scheme in order to propose changes to the scheme for the following financial year. The decision made, even if no change were proposed, would then be consulted upon before a decision is taken at Full Council in December on the final scheme for the following financial year. He said the consultation had run from 3 July to 4 September 2023 and the Council had received the highest number of responses in comparison to previous years. In total, 70 responses had been received, which gave a 46% increase on the number of responses received in 2022. Furthermore, 62.8% had supported the proposals. He also highlighted the Exceptional Hardship Fund and Cost of Living Support which had been setup to support residents suffering from extreme financial hardship. He proposed approval of the recommendations set out in the report.

Councillor Reeve seconded the proposals; he said it was important that details relating to the Exceptional Hardship Fund and Cost of Living Support were well advertised and asked members to “spread the word”.

In response to a question from the Leader, the Director of Business Performance and People said data relating to other local authorities would be shared later in November.

The proposals were approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to recommend Council approve the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2023/24 as set out below:

- I. The contribution rate is frozen at 12.5% for 2024/25.
- II. The Council continues to protect Pensioners, Vulnerable and Disabled Residents and their Carer’s on a low income.

CAB35 **REVENUE BID - REPORTING TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT, ENFORCEMENT, BUILDING CONTROL, ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES INCLUDING LICENSING**

Councillor Evans presented the report regarding the revenue bid for a reporting tool for the use of Development management, Building Control and Environmental services, including the Licensing department. The report stated that the Council had been approached by the IT service provider, IDOX, who had created a powerful performance tool called Idox Insights – which would ‘create rich, interactive data visualisations from multiple data sources and share important business insights that drive success/es.’ He said the system would produce efficiencies at a good cost. He proposed approval of the recommendations.

Councillor Hargreaves seconded the proposal.

The Strategic Director of Planning said the system would result in automated processes that would save time. He said the project would begin in the current financial year.

In response to a question regarding the effectiveness of the system, the Strategic Director of Planning said Uttlesford would be a “vanguard” council as this system was not yet in operation elsewhere. However, the company was longstanding and well reputed in local government.

Members commended the report. The proposal was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to approve the opportunity regarding the reporting tool and agree to the funding of £45,600 which covers a two-year period from the MTFs reserve.

CAB36 CHRISTMAS CAR PARKING INCENTIVES

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report regarding Christmas Car parking incentives. He said the Council had operated a Christmas car parking promotion for a number of years in all Council managed pay and display car parks, except for Fairycroft Road car park in Saffron Walden. He proposed approval of the recommendations set out in the report.

This was seconded by the Leader. The proposal was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to approve:

- I. Free parking from midday in Saffron Walden (excluding Fairycroft Road car park) on 17th November 2023 to coincide with the lantern parade and Christmas light switch on event.
- II. Free parking all day on Friday 24th November 2023 in Saffron Walden (excluding Fairycroft Road), Great Dunmow and Stansted Mountfitchet to encourage shoppers into the town centres on Black Friday.
- III. Free parking all day on Saturday 23rd December 2023 in Saffron Walden (excluding Fairycroft Road), Great Dunmow and Stansted to encourage last minute local shopping.

CAB37 CORPORATE CORE INDICATORS 2022/23

The Leader presented the report regarding Corporate Core indicators (CCIs) 2023/24, which would provide members with quarterly performance data and, where possible, benchmarking comparisons to other similar Local Authorities.

The Director of Business Performance and People said this was a new and evolving process and more data would be collated in future updates. She said that the benchmarking group used for comparison would be drawn from Uttlesford District Council's statistical near neighbours (SNN) as identified in the annual Financial Resilience Index produced by CIPFA (as seen in Table 11 of the report).

The report was noted.

CAB38 AUDIO VISUAL SYSTEM REPLACEMENT

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report regarding the Audio-Visual System replacement. He said the current audio-visual system in place at Saffron Walden required upgrading, and a system needed to be installed at the Little Canfield site. He said the upgrade was in line with Blueprint Uttlesford's pledge "to do things better" and CIPFA guidance relating to the modernisation of buildings and IT systems. He said the current system was fragile and not fit for purpose as the microphones were at end of life and the camera was a measure implemented

during the pandemic to enable people to see the meetings when public attendance was restricted. He proposed approval of the recommendation.

Councillor Sutton seconded the proposal; she said this would be conducive to the public watching Planning Committee meetings and hearings.

Councillor Reeve said it was a large expense but, considering the system would be in operation for ten years or more, the costs were justifiable and would prevent the frustrations that existed with the current system.

The proposal was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED for the purposes of the Audio-Visual System replacement to approve:

- I. The capital budget is increased by £50,000; and
- II. A new revenue budget is established at a full year cost of £56,088.

CAB39 QUARTER 1 FINANCIAL FORECAST - 2023/24

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report which set out the latest forecast financial performance of the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account, and capital programme, together with a summary of the Council's treasury management position and updated prudential indicators. It was based upon actual income and expenditure from April to June 2023, together with forecasts for the remainder of the financial year. He highlighted the £786,000 underspend on the General Fund but stressed that this had to be seen in the context of a budgeted General Fund deficit that would be funded from reserves, and, in relation to the capital programme, the projects relating to Little Canfield Car Park works and air quality initiatives that had now been included in the forecast for capital expenditure. He said there were also a small number of General Fund revenue and capital virements to be approved by Cabinet.

Councillor Reeve said the Council were holding their own in comparison to the finances of other local authorities; he asked the Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services what was his greatest concern in regard to the budget.

The Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services said the Housing Revenue Account was his primary concern due to the drawing down of reserves in order to balance the budget.

Councillor Hargreaves said the Council had built up sound reserves but this would not last forever. Whilst he acknowledged that the Council was in a good position compared to others it was still appropriate to be cautious in the face of economic challenges. He proposed approval of the recommendations set out in the report.

Councillor Evans duly seconded.

The proposal was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to:

- I. Note the contents of this report, in particular the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and capital programme forecast outturn positions, and updated prudential indicators;
- II. Approve the General Fund revenue virements set out at paragraph 27;
- III. Approve the General Fund capital virements set out at paragraph 41.

CAB40 **TREASURY MANAGEMENT Q1 REPORT - 2023/24**

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report regarding the Council's treasury management prudential indicators for Quarter 1. He highlighted Appendix A which had been prepared with the assistance of the Council's treasury management advisers (Arlingclose) and summarised the Council's treasury management activities for the period from 1 April to 30 June 2023. He said the largest loan was in relation to the Housing Revenue Account for the purposes of building council housing.

In response to a question from Councillor Reeve regarding interest rates, the Chief Executive said the Council's exposure to interest rates was only true of a shrinking minority of borrowing, around a third, in line with the Medium Term Financial Strategy. This would result in the selling of some assets, at which point the Council would be short-term debt free.

In response to a question from the Leader regarding investment income, Councillor Hargreaves said the figure taken in isolation did not take into account of indirect costs such as interest charges and MRP.

The report was noted.

The meeting was closed at 8.40pm.

Summary of Public Statement

R Haynes

Mr Haynes spoke in a personal capacity on Item 9 – Smiths Green Conservation Area. He said for all intents and purposes he owned a property which was located in the designated area. He quoted from the NPPF and said when a local planning authority considers a designation it should ensure that an area justifies such special status due to architectural or historic interest and that the conception of conservation was not devalued. He said he was concerned as his property was of no special interest and he did not see why it had been included. A conservation expert had confirmed this. His greatest problem with the proposal was including the yard to the rear of his property, which had no visibility with other parts of the conservation area. He had requested that this was not to be included but had been ignored.

The Principal Website Officer was invited to clarify the consultation process. He said the conservation area appraisal was conducted by Place Services for the parish council. UDC then conducted a 6-week consultation as the local planning authority but comments were sent to Place Services in order for them to advise the parish council on any proposed changes to the conservation area. He also drew attention to Historic England's response, which had not proposed any changes to the area's boundary.

The Leader permitted Mr Haynes to speak as there had been some confusion in regards to him speaking in a personal capacity at this meeting.

Mr Haynes said he had requested the exclusion of the farmyard to the rear of his property as he wanted to tidy-up the derelict buildings there, which were full of asbestos. He said he was annoyed about the response to his consultation comments, as the area in question was not a garden but a former farmyard, and this opinion was based on a professional opinion. Furthermore, he could not find the specific criteria from Place Services which justified the rejection of any changes to the proposed boundary.