

CABINET held at ZOOM - [HTTPS://ZOOM.US/](https://zoom.us/), on TUESDAY, 20 OCTOBER 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor J Lodge (Chair)
Councillors A Armstrong, C Day, D Eke, J Evans, R Freeman,
N Hargreaves, P Lees, L Pepper and N Reeve

Officers in attendance: L Browne (Monitoring Officer), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager), R Harborough (Director - Public Services) and A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services)

Also present: C Criscione (Uttlesford Conservative Party Group Leader), N Gregory (Chair of the Scrutiny Committee), B Light (Green Party Group Leader), R Pavitt (Uttlesford Independents' Group Leader) and M Tayler (Thaxted and the Eastons Independents' Party Group Leader)

CAB37 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from the Chief Executive and Councillor Dean (Uttlesford Liberal Democrats' Group Leader).

CAB38 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2020 were approved as a true and correct record.

CAB39 QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS FROM NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)

The Leader said he had received written questions from Councillor Dean, who had sent his apologies for the meeting. He said the questions would be dealt with during the relevant items.

CAB40 CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (STANDING ITEM)

Councillor Gregory said it had been a busy period for the Scrutiny Committee since the previous Cabinet meeting in September. He spoke on matters which related to the Local Plan, as well as other areas of council work. He raised the following issues:

- The National Audit Office report relating to the commercial investments of Local Authorities. He said it had been an illuminating exercise, particularly in demonstrating bad practice and "how not to do things". UDC were a model of probity and he

thanked Councillor Caton for his effective presentation to the Committee.

- The Medium Term Financial Strategy had been met with a unanimous vote of thanks for the impressive work of the finance team, who had achieved a fantastic turnaround in the Council's finances.
- A worthwhile discussion had taken place regarding the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan (CPDP). He said the Portfolio Holder for the Economy and Corporate Strategy should consider the implementation of performance and success indicators to ensure a positive direction of travel. The Committee looked forward to seeing further progress but the CPDP was on sound foundations.
- In regards to Local Plan Scrutiny, all of the recommendations that had been presented at the meeting on 7 October had been endorsed by the Committee unanimously.
- He asked Cabinet to ensure due attention was paid to communicating and consulting relevant organisations that reflect the interests across the district, such as parish and town councils.
- The Committee were impressed with the arrangements regarding project management of the Local Plan. Regular monitor meetings had been put in place with the Project Manager and Councillor LeCount.
- The Committee remained concerned regarding governance arrangements surrounding the Local Plan. The nature of the project sponsors were of particular concern. Councillor Evans had promised an update note on the matter.
- The pre-scrutiny roles of Councillor Criscione and Councillor Coote had been established to look into Local Plan issues. This had proved to be successful, as problems could be ironed out before they became an issue.

The Leader thanked the Chair of Scrutiny and the said the Committee's input was helpful to the Administration. He added that the Local Plan process was now picking up pace and the time it had taken to get the right structure had proven worthwhile.

CAB41 REPORT OF DELEGATED DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET MEMBERS (STANDING ITEM)

Cabinet noted the delegated decision relating to Changes to the Planning System Consultation – published on 1 October 2020.

CAB42 REPORT ON ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE DETERMINED BY THE ASSETS OF COMMUNITY VALUE AND LOCAL HERITAGE LIST COMMITTEE (STANDING ITEM)

There had been no reports submitted in relation to Assets of Community Value (AoCV), although the Leader noted the fact that the Railway Arms public house in Saffron Walden had been purchased by a local community group.

CAB43 CABINET APPOINTMENTS: WORKING GROUPS

Cabinet considered the appointments of Councillors Armstrong and Freeman to the MMWG.

RESOLVED to appoint Councillors Armstrong and Freeman to the Museum Management Working Group.

CAB44 CABINET APPOINTMENTS: OUTSIDE BODIES

Cabinet considered the appointments of Councillors Lodge and Day to the Crawley Prize Endowment Charity, and Councillor Reeve to the Saffron Walden Business Improvement District (SWBID).

RESOLVED to:

- To appoint Councillor Reeve to the Saffron Walden Business Improvement District (SW BID).
- To appoint Councillors Day and Lodge to the Crawley Prize Endowment charity.

CAB45 REVISED CORPORATE PLAN DELIVERY PLAN 2020/21

Councillor Reeve summarised the report regarding the revised Corporate Plan Delivery Plan (CPDP). He said much time had been spent on the CPDP and it had been considered by the Scrutiny Committee a number of times. He asked Cabinet to approve this iteration of the CPDP.

In response to a comment from Councillor Day, the Director – Public Services said the document would be updated to include the correct portfolio holder titles for each Cabinet Member.

RESOLVED to approve the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan attached as Enclosure 1 to the report.

CAB46 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY - MID YEAR UPDATE

Councillor Hargreaves summarised the report which provided an updated financial position for the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The report had also been considered by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting in September. He said it had been a particularly difficult year to forecast, due to the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's services and finances. All losses incurred due to the non payment of Council Tax and Business Rates were expected to be managed by the Council and no additional financial support was expected. He spoke on the Business Recovery Fund and the emergency reserves set aside in the event that the Covid-19 situation took another turn for the worse. He drew Cabinet's attention to the Council's reliance on investment income, and highlighted the Investment Income Protection Reserve that had been established

in case of any tenant failure at any one of the commercial assets. He said council tax, regardless of the income generated via commercial investments, would always be a vital income stream for local authorities. It was important that the Council diversified its income and that residents had a stake in the services provided to the local community.

In response to a question from Councillor Criscione regarding Covid-19 funding issued by Government, the Director – Finance and Corporate Services said there were two methodologies to calculate the income that would be received and details would be circulated with Members once the Council had been sent this information.

In response to a question from Councillor Criscione regarding a Council Tax freeze, Councillor Hargreaves said he was happy to discuss this another time but the Uttlesford precept was already low and the previous increase had amounted to an average of £5 extra per annum. He added that UDC had the most generous Local Council Tax Support scheme in Essex for those who could not afford to pay.

In response to a comment from Councillor Criscione, Councillor Lees said a new initiative on domestic abuse had been rolled out by Essex County Council and Essex Police and the Council would look into whether funding was available from a district perspective.

The Leader apologised as he had received an email from Councillor Dean regarding the CPDP considered during the previous item. He read the email which expressed disappointment that the CPDP did not differ from the version presented at the previous Scrutiny meeting, despite his questions and suggested improvements. The Leader thanked Councillor Dean for his comments.

Councillor Armstrong thanked Councillor Hargreaves and the financial team for their hard-work in improving the Council's finances. Due to their hard-work, he said he was delighted to announce that £150,000 would be made available for the Saffron Walden Sports Pitch Project. He said this was subject to due diligence and the MTFs being approved at Full Council.

The Leader said the resident groups behind the project had raised significant monies through their own fundraising efforts and the project had been led by the great efforts of boys and girls football teams in the town.

Councillor Hargreaves said the grant had been awarded to Saffron Walden as the project team had submitted a very impressive application. He said guidance would be issued on how to apply for such grants in due course.

RESOLVED to recommend to Council the mid-year updated Medium Term Financial Strategy for approval.

Councillor Pepper presented the report on the Council's revised Equalities Policy. She thanked the Communities team for their great work in producing the policy. She said the Equalities Act of 2010 had established the single public sector duty which ensured no protected group faced discrimination in their place of work. She said the Council's aim was to ensure that the workforce was representative and compliant with legislation. The policy was "live" and could be updated at anytime, and revisions would need to be applied following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

Councillor Lees said she was impressed with the Policy and was encouraged it would change with the times. She thanked Councillor Pepper and the officers for putting forward a comprehensive Policy.

RESOLVED to recommend that Council adopts the amended Uttlesford Equality Policy published in September 2020

CAB48 **LOCAL PLAN REPORTS (ITEMS 12 TO 16)**

The Leader invited Councillor Evans to present items 12 - 15 to Cabinet as they were all related to planning and the Local Plan. Councillor Eke would introduce item 16 as the relevant Portfolio Holder for Infrastructure. The Leader proposed taking all remaining recommendations as a single vote at the end of the presentations. Cabinet agreed.

Councillor Evans said it was important to acknowledge the input of the late Councillor Storah in these reports in his capacity as Chair of the Local Plan Leadership Group. He also thanked Councillor Gregory and the Scrutiny Committee for their remarks as a critical friend; the reports had benefitted from the scrutiny provided by the committee.

The Local Development Scheme

Councillor Evans presented the report on the Local Development scheme. He said this was a very important document as it underpinned the Council's approach to the Local Plan process, including timetables and consultations. He said adjustments to the Scheme were likely, in part due to the current Government consultation on the Planning White Paper, and the document would be updated to reflect real practice.

In response to a question from Councillor Freeman regarding energy efficiency, Councillor Evans said the Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) in relation to energy efficiency would be looked at.

Councillor Freeman thanked Councillor Evans and said such SPDs were important as, in the absence of a Local Plan, they set out planning standards which developers were obliged to follow. He offered his assistance on the matter.

Councillor Pepper said there was an interim climate planning document that would also cover the energy sector.

In response to a question from Councillor Lees, Councillor Evans said there was no reason to assume that the Local Plan timetable would slip due to the Government's consultation on the Planning White Paper. He said he would liaise with Councillor LeCount who was monitoring progress.

Community Engagement Strategy

Councillor Evans said this was an updated version of a previously considered document, and the Strategy had taken into account the comments of the Scrutiny Committee. It set-out the nine themes on which the community could comment. He said the messages in the Strategy would need to be frequently communicated to the public and parish and town councils.

Councillor Criscione said the one area in which the Strategy fell short was deliverability of the Local Plan. He referenced the Essex Developers Group as an organisation which could advise on the issue of deliverability.

In response to a question from Councillor Lees regarding parish involvement in the Community Forum, Councillor Evans said the Town and Parish Council Forum already existed and it would not be appropriate for local councils to be involved in the additional Community Forum as this would duplicate their participation.

Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

Councillor Evans said the SCI, which explained how the Council would involve the community in the Local Plan process, had been thoroughly considered by the LPLG and costs had now been budgeted for. He said the document would be shared widely with organisations in the district, and he would be looking to disseminate the information through as many channels as possible.

Councillor Day said it was clear from the peer review advice that the Council needed to engage with as many people as possible over the Local Plan, and that parish and town councils would play an important role in disseminating this information to the local community. Young people would be directly impacted by the Local Plan but had historically not engaged with such public conversations. He said he was working with officers to reach out to young people in order to encourage this engagement. He concluded by saying a tremendous amount of work had been going on and strong foundations had been laid to move forward with a sound Local Plan.

Project Initiation Document (PID)

Councillor Evans said the PID set-out how the Local Plan would be managed by the Council. He said twelve people had been assigned specific roles and a large body of talent had been assembled. He concluded by saying costs were substantial and it was vital that the Council ensured that this represented best value.

Strategic Infrastructure Group (SIG)

Councillor Eke, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, introduced the report regarding the establishment of the Strategic Infrastructure Group (SIG). He said infrastructure had played its part in the failure of the previous Local Plan, and highlighted the lack of transport links as an example. The Council could not afford to let this happen again. The SIG would play a crucial role in linking with neighbouring authorities and strategic partners in order to identify key infrastructure projects and to deliver on time. He asked Cabinet to approve the recommendation.

In response to a question from Councillor Reeve, Councillor Eke said reference to the Council's own targets in relation to sustainable growth would be looked at.

In response to a question from Councillor Reeve regarding the feasibility of developing significant infrastructure, Councillor Eke said the thinking around infrastructure projects was in an advanced stage but funding such projects was a problem. Future proofing infrastructure was also something that needed to be taken into consideration.

Councillor Criscione said it was around the issue of infrastructure that the majority of Local Plans failed. He said the Council should keep the emphasis on developers to provide infrastructure, and contributions to infrastructure projects should be demanded if developers wished to build in the district.

Councillor Eke agreed and said that developers must also be held to account in terms of the infrastructure that they had promised to deliver but had failed to do so.

Councillor Freeman said developers could not "buy planning permissions" by contributing to infrastructure projects. He said Uttlesford required a "masterplan" for developers to make such demands.

The Leader read an email from Councillor Dean containing three questions relating to the Local Plan items:

Why is next Monday's Local Plan Leadership Group agenda silent on items that would directly help to deliver a new Local Plan?

Is it correct that items to progress the Plan have been pulled from next week's LPLG agenda owing to Members' reluctance to go public with consultations that would include a Call for Development Sites?

What action does the Cabinet intend to take to ensure the creation of a new Local Plan moving forward with discernible progress in the immediate future?

Councillor Gregory said the same questions had been raised by Councillor Criscione the previous night and he was awaiting a response from Councillor Evans and the Assistant Director - Planning. He asked that Councillor Dean wait for that response.

Councillor Lees said the reason why an agenda item had been removed from the next LPLG agenda was because a workshop had been held and questions had been raised which required addressing. This would not cause a delay in the

Local Plan process and it was better that informed, rather than rushed, decisions were made.

Councillor Criscione said the questions were valid but it was unreasonable to expect a response when the questions were posed 90 minutes before the meeting began.

The Leader called on Cabinet to vote on the recommendations set-out in the reports for items 12 to 16.

RESOLVED to adopt the Local Development Scheme.

RESOLVED to approve the draft document in order for it to be published alongside the Statement of Community Involvement to enable people to provide comment.

RESOLVED to approve the Statement of Community Involvement for consultation.

RESOLVED to adopt the Project Initiation Document (PID) for the Local Plan.

RESOLVED:

1. To endorse the proposed Terms of Reference attached as Appendix 1 to this report and the Leader be requested to issue the appropriate invitations for members to join the Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Group in accordance with this report.
2. That officers be instructed to make arrangements to support the establishment of the Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Group, and supporting Officer Group, with inaugural meetings to take place as soon as the memberships of the Groups have been finalised.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm.