

CABINET held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 2 DECEMBER 2021 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor J Lodge (Chair)
Councillors J Evans, R Freeman, N Hargreaves, P Lees and L Pepper

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager), P Lock (Housing Enabling and Development Officer), R Millership (Assistant Director - Housing, Health and Communities) and A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services)

Also present: Councillors M Caton (Liberal Democrat Group Leader) and N Gregory (Chair of Scrutiny Committee)

CAB62 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Day and Armstrong.

CAB63 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 November were approved as a true and correct record.

CAB64 QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS FROM NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)

The Democratic Services Manager read out a question on behalf of Councillor Barker regarding the Council's contribution to the Local Highways Panel for 2022-23 and 2023-24 and whether Cabinet could make a decision in December.

In response, Councillor Lees said this was a budgetary decision and would be reserved for Full Council during the budget setting process in February. She said highways was important but it was not good practice to make such a decision in isolation of other budgetary considerations.

Councillor Hargreaves asked for the County Council to look at the operation and governance of Highways; he said he knew of instances where money had been provided but schemes had not been delivered. He said the money had to be well spent.

CAB65 CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (STANDING ITEM)

Councillor Gregory provided a report on behalf of the scrutiny Committee. He reported on two items that had been taken in Part 2, the Stansted Airport Task and Finish Group and the Debden Village Hall matter, and he thanked the Chief Executive for engaging with the Committee. He praised Councillor Reeve and the Business Support Officer for their excellent work on economic development and the precise reports provided to Scrutiny. He also praised the detail included in the Planning Review update report, although he did say there was a perception that it was more difficult to gain planning permission for individuals, as opposed to developers, in respect of listed buildings, even those that were not visible at street level. He said the Committee had been disappointed with the Climate Change Action Plan and there was an imbalance between aspirational targets and deliverability, a lack of prioritisation and a lack of smart targets. He said he appreciated the complexity of the subject but looked forward to seeing a revised Plan before Christmas. He asked that Scrutiny's comments on detail and specificity be taken into account.

In response to Councillor Gregory's point on planning permission and listed buildings, Councillor Hargreaves said it did not matter whether a listed building could be seen from the street; the most important consideration would be conservation of the building itself.

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

Councillor Evans said Place Services were agents and provided advice to officers on heritage assets and the relevant regulations. He said he would look into the matter and report back to Councillor Gregory.

Councillor Lees said the Administration was very grateful for Councillor Pepper's determination and passion in the Council's work tackling climate change. She had a difficult task as the Green Issues portfolio was new and would take time to be established.

Councillor Gregory said the Committee had often praised the work of this Administration but there were also times when Cabinet had to listen to Scrutiny and take its critical advice into account.

CAB66 HOUSING STRATEGY

Councillor Lees presented the report regarding the proposed Housing Strategy 2021-2026, which outlined how the Council would move forward in respect of housing until a new Local Plan was established in Uttlesford. There had been a period of public consultation, as well as consultation with all Members, interested stakeholders, as well as relevant officers across the council. It had also been considered and unanimously endorsed by the Housing Board at its previous meeting. Councillor Lees proposed approval of the Strategy and thanked the Assistant Director – Housing, Health and Communities and her team for their excellent work.

In response to a question from Councillor Freeman, Councillor Lees said the associated Action Plan would contain metrics and figures.

Councillor Freeman said this was an opportunity to improve building standards.

In response to a question from Councillor Caton regarding the First Homes scheme and whether this would lead to a reduction of 3-bedroom houses available for shared ownership, the Housing Enabling and Development Officer said the Council was protecting affordable rented homes in light of the First Homes scheme and this would impact on the number of shared ownership homes delivered. In mitigation, the majority of shared-ownership homes that would be built in future should be 3-bedroom houses.

In response to a question regarding whether the re-modelling of the three sheltered schemes would result in a net gain in terms of the number of properties, the Housing Enabling and Development Officer said he would check the figures and advise Councillor Caton after the meeting.

Councillor Caton said he was disappointed. A new Local Plan would not be adopted for four years and a number of recommendations arising from the ARK consultation report, such as the Council setting up a company in order to build more social housing, had not been adopted.

Councillor Lees said the Council was committed to building more council housing but an affordable and sustainable approach was required. The Strategy stated that work was ongoing on the Housing Revenue Account and such metrics would be contained in the Action Plan.

Councillor Hargreaves said a good example of re-modelling was the work carried out at Reynolds Court, Newport, where the number of units available was increased. In terms of the number of council houses built, he said a vital consideration was the need for decent land to build upon. He said all members and the third tier councils had a role in identifying land for council housing.

Councillor Caton said if the Administration was serious about building council housing, then money would need to be borrowed.

The Leader said the Council was hamstrung by central government rules; they would borrow where possible in order to build council housing.

Councillor Evans raised the point of 'retrofitting'; across the county, he said 800,000 homes required works on insulation and the like. He commended the authors of the Strategy for its readability and the clarity of the document.

RESOLVED to approve for adoption the Housing Strategy 2021-2026.

CAB67 CAR PARKING CHRISTMAS INCENTIVES

Councillor Freeman presented the report, which outlined the Council's approach to car parking incentives over the Christmas period. He stated that for several

years there had been a Christmas car parking promotion in all Council managed pay and display car parks, except for Fairycroft car park in Saffron Walden. The free parking incentive proposed was to support the vitality and viability of the town and village centres, increasing footfall, during the quieter periods between Christmas and New Year. Therefore, this year it was recommended that free car parking was offered in all car parks except for Fairycroft, for the period between Christmas and New Year - December 25th 2021 to January 3rd 2022 inclusive.

The Leader said that publicity of the scheme would be important if footfall was to be increased during this typically quiet period for town and village centres.

RESOLVED to approve free parking in all car parks, with the exception of Fairycroft car park, between Saturday December 25th 2021 and Monday 3rd January 2022 inclusive.

The meeting was closed at 8.05pm.