

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES,  
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 26 MAY  
2022 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)  
Councillors G Driscoll, V Isham, G LeCount, S Luck, L Pepper,  
G Sell and G Smith

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director - Corporate Services), B Brown  
(Assistant Director - Environmental Services), P Holt (Chief  
Executive), A Lindsell (Democratic Services Officer) and  
A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services)

Also in attendance: Councillors P Lees (The Leader of the Council) and R Pavitt

Public Speaker: D Hall

The Committee unanimously offered a vote of thanks to Councillor Coote for his service to the Scrutiny Committee over a number of years. The Chair wished him well with his appointment to Cabinet and the Housing Portfolio.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Luck to the Committee.

**SC1 PUBLIC SPEAKER**

Mr Hall raised concerns relating to the Planning Department. He asked for a copy of his comments to be attached to the minutes.

The Leader of the Council confirmed that the Planning Department was undergoing a transformation and that the new Director of Planning would commence work on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2022. The Leader invited Mr Hall back to discuss the Planning Department further in three months, to see what innovative changes the Director of Planning would have made.

The Chief Executive said that he expected the S106 discussions to take place with the two parishes very soon. He confirmed that he intended to fulfil his commitment.

**SC2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Criscione, Jones and De Vries.

**SC3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2022 were approved.

*The Chair agreed to hear agenda item 9 next.*

**LOCAL PLAN UPDATE**

The Chair asked the Leader a number of questions relating to the Local Plan:

- Why the delay?
- Which Members of Cabinet requested further time for consideration of the sites and evidence base? Why and when did they do so?
- What was the proximate cause of this request?
- When did concerns first arise about the Local Plan process that have given rise to this further delay?
- There have been two delays to the Local Plan, totaling eight weeks, announced since 21 March. Are any more delays anticipated? What occasioned these serial delays following eighteen months where the Local Plan had run strictly to timetable?
- Were the delays caused by staffing issues, as identified in the risk register?
- Had the loss of key personnel exacerbated the situation?
- Were there broader project management issues of which Scrutiny should be aware?
- Would the regular project management meetings with Councillor LeCount resume? If so, when? If not, why?
- What effect would this new delay have on the total budget and overall project timetable for the Local Plan?
- Would we still meet the MHCLG deadline of end 2023?
- Where would lost time be made up?
- How would the Regulation 18 consultation falling in the school summer holidays be dealt with?
- Why was potential legislation following the Levelling Up White Paper deemed relevant to the delay?

The Leader of the Council gave a verbal update on the Local Plan. She said that:

- The delay was due to the need to balance meeting key milestones alongside making the right decisions and future proofing plans.
- The first delay was a result of outside contractors
- The second delay was initiated at Chief Executive level.
- The delays were not as a result of staffing issues or change in staff.
- The MHCLG deadline would be met
- The length of the consultation would be extended by two weeks in recognition of the school holiday period
- The Regulation 18 meeting would be scheduled for 11 July 2022
- Full Council would be scheduled for 21 July 2022
- It was important to pause, reflect and ensure the correct decisions were made

The Chief Executive agreed that the vast amount of work had been done and noted the importance of getting the Local Plan right. He said that he hoped to regain most of the additional time during the remainder of the process and that the Regulation 19 milestone could potentially be at risk. It would not be published during the pre-election period. The delay was regrettable, but necessary to get the Local Plan right.

Members asked whether Central Government were content with the slips in the timetable and whether Regulation 18 would be one preferred option or would there be an alternative offer. Furthermore, Members questioned whether additional land had been put forward in the last three months and at what point would the possible eight week delay to the Regulation 19, due to purdah, create a risk for the 2023 deadline.

The Leader confirmed that Regulation 18 would be one of two options and land could be put forward at any point and it would be sensible for all options to be considered.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Government had not indicated that they were not content and the delay was not as a result of an additional big site coming forward, although further sites could be put forward. Officers constantly sought sites, conversed with major land owners and developers. Furthermore, some similarities with the last draft plan would be expected as it was the same district, geography, topography and sites in play. He said once the new Director of Planning was in situ his view on recoverability would be sought. If the Regulation 19 had to be moved to after the elections, this could be discussed with the Government at an early stage, who would likely be content if the delay was for good reasons.

Members requested a guide to identify the differences between the previous and latest versions of the draft Local Plan, which the Leader acknowledged, and agreed the importance of getting the Local Plan right. Members requested that steps were taken to make it clear to the public what would happen and when.

Councillor LeCount confirmed his role meeting regularly with the Local Plan Project Manager to ensure deadlines were met. He subsequently reported back to the Scrutiny Committee. He said that for the previous eighteen months deadlines had been met and since the Project Manager had left the Council there had been two delays. He said the Scrutiny Committee was not informed that the Project Manager had left the Council and he would like meetings reinstated with a new Project Manager.

The Chief Executive apologised and said that the meetings would be reinstated immediately.

He said that the outgoing Project Manager had carried out a number of duties, and as a result of the changes in personnel, the meetings which had been taking place so routinely had been missed.

The Chair thanked the Leader and Chief Executive for putting forward a robust and positive defense of the Council's position.

*Councillor Pavitt and Mr Hall left the meeting.*

SC3

## **RESPONSES OF THE EXECUTIVE TO REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE**

There were no matters to report.

SC4 **CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

The Plan was noted.

SC5 **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Work Programme was noted.

SC6 **CLIMATE CRISIS ACTION PLAN PROGRESS REPORT**

Councillor Pepper presented the report. She recommended that Members note progress on the implementation of the Climate Change Action Plan set out in paragraphs 15 to 16 and contained within appendix one.

She extended her thanks to the outgoing Climate Officer.

She reported that the Council has received the following Government funding:

- £1,268,000 from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for energy efficiency grants for low income household owners
- £517,000 to deliver a novel market town clean air initiative in Saffron Walden. This would potentially be a model to be rolled out to the rest of the district and be the exemplar for the rest of the country.

She provided details of the successful Littlebury Energy Awareness Day which was held 23 April 2022. The pilot project between Uttlesford District Council, Essex County Council, Littlebury Parish Council, Saffron Walden Community Energy and UKPE was underway to engage and inform Littlebury residents on insulation and other measures to prepare for the transition to decarbonisation. The learnings from this project would inform a rollout at a scale throughout the district.

She reassured Members that she continued to focus on how to achieve the best return on investments on their Climate Change Projects.

They continued to focus potential projects on the three areas:

- Emissions from transport
- Emissions from domestic energy
- Preserving and enhancing bio-diversity

Members discussed the adequacy of the resources available for the portfolio holder and the need to deliver more, and in a timely manner. They raised the need for additional Officer support and questioned whether other Councils were making more measurable progress.

Councillor Pepper said the following in response:

- The first round of funding resulted in a good number of grant referrals. Members have been asked to continue to advertise the grants
- The Principal Transport and Infrastructure Officer was investigating the provision of mobility hubs at a number of local stations.

- Ninety council owned properties had heat pumps installed
- Eighty council owned properties had oil boilers replaced
- Oil boilers had been upgraded at two of the council owned leisure centres
- Two hundred and eighty council owned properties had external wall insulation installed
- Solar panels had been installed on three hundred council owned properties
- Solar arrays installed at the Bowls Club and the Shire Hill waste depot.
- Unfortunately a solar array could not be installed at the London Road offices due to its listed building status and the orientation of the building
- Solar panels would be fitted at the Little Canfield site, alongside a water recycling vehicle cleaning system
- Cycle racks have been installed at Great Dunmow, Saffron Walden and Audley End Station
- Thirty two electric vehicle chargers have been installed, including eight at the London Road Council offices
- There were 562 responses to the bio-diversity mapping survey
- Rewilding of green verges had been undertaken throughout the summer months
- Green champions had been promoted across the district
- Sixteen new dual recycling bins have been installed
- Recycling guidance had been posted on their social media channels
- Food waste reduction was under review
- Their new interactive website would soon be launched

Councillor Sell raised concerns that only £80,500 of the £1,900,00 budget had been spent and asked Councillor Pepper whether sufficient resources had been made available to enable her to do her job.

The Chair noted the apparent disconnect between Councillor Pepper's list of work undertaken and budget spent.

Councillor Pepper acknowledged the need for the Climate Change budget to be expediently spent, balanced against the need to see the full picture to make prudent financial decisions and consider all options.

She confirmed that they were looking to employ two Climate Change Officers and an Ecology Officer to reflect the scale of the works to be undertaken to achieve their objectives.

Councillor Isham suggested the introduction of a thermometer on the side of the Council Offices to visually demonstrate the Council's CO2 reductions achievement to the public.

Councillor Pepper agreed to look into the suggested thermometer and highlighted several external issues impacting the emissions figures that were outside the Council's control, including Stansted Airport, the motorway and the majority of on-street lighting. She confirmed that the district was last on Essex County Council's scheme to upgrade to LED lighting.

Councillor Isham suggested that it would be helpful to also highlight that information to residents to help them understand the bigger picture and areas of responsibility.

Councillor LeCount commended the new housing report. He asked whether it was possible to implement a policy which commits developers of all new properties to provide solar panels, water butts, heat pumps or to be heat pump ready.

Councillor Pepper confirmed that it would form part of the emerging Local Plan and that The Future Homes Standard that demanded 80% net carbon reduction would not be in place until 2025. She hoped that the Council would push to achieve that much earlier.

Councillor Driscoll asked the Assistant Director of Environmental Services what the cost would be to decarbonise the Council's fleet.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services confirmed that there were currently no directly comparable vehicles on the market that were electrically supplied, although an electric dustcart (£400,000) was approximately double the price of a diesel twenty six tonne dustcart (£190,000). He was investigating other options relating to conversion.

Councillor Pepper said that the Climate Change Commission supported end of life, so vehicle replacement would have to wait until their expiration, meanwhile all possible avenues were being explored.

The Leader noted that Councillor Pepper was the first environmentalist Cabinet Member at the Council and acknowledged that the staffing levels may not have been initially correct in the new territory. Nonetheless, the new post, Administration, Chief Executive and Assistant Director of Environmental Services have worked tirelessly to support and move forward to fulfill the required levels to enable Councillor Pepper to continue with the next administration with the appropriate staff in place.

In response to a question from Councillor Sell, the Assistant Director of Environmental Services confirmed that the currently recycling rate was 51%, similar to four years. He explained that this was an improvement due to changes in habits such as significantly reduced physical newspaper purchases and the production of wine bottles made from thinner glass. He said that the collection of further recycling could impact environmental performance due to the need to purchase additional vehicles to facilitate it.

Councillor Pepper said that she had been investigating what could be done to improve recycling and suggested school visits and pop-up stands on market days. She also expressed the desire to look at how business recycling could be improved.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services detailed a County strategy process currently underway where the District, Boroughs and City Councils are looking at the waste management infrastructure available to Councils in Essex. It

would review resetting targets and support structures to ensure the best environmental performance could be achieved.

Councillor Luck asked whether Parish Councils support the District Council and put forward green champions, how many green champions there are and whether the necessary resources were available for them.

Councillor Pepper said that she provides a monthly report for the Town and Parish Councils to enable them to have ideas and solutions. The website that was soon to be launched would be another source of information. She suggested also creating a press release.

Councillor Luck asked whether there was man power available to go into schools to recruit young people to this cause.

The Assistant Director of Environmental Services confirmed that the Waste and Recycling Officer would fulfil this role, which was not undertaken during Covid, but was currently being reinvigorated with schools.

The Chair asked how much of the £1,800,000 external funding had been spent. Councillor Pepper resolved to find out and report back.

The Chair asked Councillor Pepper to provide a report demonstrating where funding had been spent and on what.

The Committee agreed that it was an impressive report, although further work needed to be undertaken, and agreed to commend to Cabinet.

RESOLVED: That the report be remitted to Cabinet.

#### SC7 **SPORTS PROVISION SCOPING DOCUMENT**

The Assistant Director of Corporate Services presented the document.

The document was noted.

#### SC9 **SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT**

The Assistant Director of Corporate Services presented the report. He recommended that Members approve the contents of the Scrutiny Annual Report.

The Chair praised the work of the Assistant Director of Corporate Services and Members agreed that they were fortunate to have an Officer of such diligence working with the Committee.

Councillor LeCount proposed putting the report to Full Council.

RESOLVED: To approve the Scrutiny Annual Report

*The meeting ended at 20:50.*