

CABINET held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 1 DECEMBER 2022 at 7.00 pm

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

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), J Etherington (Assistant Director of Finance), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager) and A Webb (Director of Finance and Corporate Services)

Also present: M Caton (Liberal Democrat and Green Alliance Group Leader), N Gregory (Chair of Scrutiny Committee) and G Smith (Conservative Party Group Leader)

CAB54 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Armstrong, Coote, Hargreaves and Pepper.

CAB55 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting on 20 October 2022 were approved as a correct record.

In response to a question from Councillor Caton regarding the oversight of the Local Plan process, Councillor Gregory said his report on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee would explain the updated oversight procedure following the joint meeting of the Local Plan Leadership Group (LPLG) and Scrutiny Committee on 10 October 2022.

CAB56 QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS FROM NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)

In response to a question from Councillor Caton regarding the questions raised in the Motion of Censure passed at the Full Council meeting on 11 October 2022, the Chief Executive said he had advised the Leader that these questions were responded to during the debate. Councillor Caton said he disagreed and asked for the issue to be revisited.

In response to a question from Councillor Smith regarding investments and the re-evaluation of assets, Councillor Reeve said a meeting of the Investment Board would be called shortly and assets would be re-evaluated.

CAB57 CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (STANDING ITEM)

Councillor Gregory provided a report on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee. He said, with reference to the Motion of Censure, that he believed the matter was resolved as Councillor Evans had answered the questions.

In regards to the Local Plan oversight process, he said Councillor Evans, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, met with Planning Policy officers every fortnight, along with the Chair and Vice Chair of the LPLG. Furthermore, they would be joined by the Chair and Vice-Chair of Scrutiny at every other meeting, with the Chair producing a summary note which would be shared with all members of LPLG and Scrutiny Committee. He said he believed the new process was “robust and responsiveness” and needed to be road tested before the oversight structure was judged.

Councillor Caton welcomed the offer to circulate a summary note to members of LPLG.

CAB58 REPORT OF DELEGATED DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET MEMBERS (STANDING ITEM)

Cabinet noted the following delegated decision taken by the Leader:

- Local Plan Leadership Group Terms of Reference and Membership – 2 November 2022.

CAB59 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.

CAB60 HEALTH & WELLBEING STRATEGY

Councillor Sutton, the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Health, Youth, Public Safety, Emergency Planning and liaison with the Police and Fire & Rescue Service, presented the Uttlesford Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2023- 2028 report.

She requested that Cabinet endorse and support the Uttlesford Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2028, to be implemented with effect from 1st January 2023, and thanked officers for the quality of their work.

Councillor Freeman seconded the recommendation.

Members commended the report.

Councillor Caton said UDC had not fought for a second pharmacy in Stansted Mountfitchet and should take a more proactive approach to pharmacy distribution in future. He said there were concerns regarding merger of surgeries in his part of the District.

The Leader said she wanted to reassure residents that there were no planned closures of Elsenham and Stansted surgeries, although mergers of backroom staff could be implemented, in accordance with Government instructions to create larger surgeries for the purposes of financial allocation. Furthermore, the Health and Wellbeing Board had taken advice from the county on the provision of pharmacies in Stansted and had been informed that protestations from UDC would not result in a change to the formula that led to local pharmacy provision.

The Leader moved to a vote. The proposal was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet endorse and support the Uttlesford Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2028, to be implemented with effect from 1st January 2023.

CAB61 BUDGET 2022/23 - QUARTER 2 FORECAST OUTTURN

The Assistant Director – Finance presented the report as Councillor Hargreaves had given his apologies.

The Director of Finance and Corporate Services highlighted the recommendation to approve HRA capital expenditure of £1.641 million on the Walden Place redevelopment project, which would be funded partly from the Capital Reserve (£614,000) with the remainder coming from the HRA revenue contributions.

Councillor Caton said he was disappointed with the current situation as the financial difficulties faced by the Council could not all be placed on external factors; the administration's decisions in relation to Stansted Airport and the long term financing of the Council's investment portfolio had left the Council worse off, which would impact on services during a cost of living crisis. Borrowing rates had increased substantially and the administration had only acted following the fallout of the "Truss mini-budget", which was contrary to the Commercial Strategy, which had been published in February.

The Leader said she was disappointed with this political grandstanding and rejected the notion that a cut or reduction in services was guaranteed at this point.

Councillor Reeve disputed Councillor Caton's statement. He said if it was not for the commercial decisions taken by the administration the Council would be "half the size it is tonight". In respect of borrowing costs, he said long terms loans were secured ten days before the "mini-budget" and rates were acceptable in comparison to the rates that followed.

Councillor Evans disagreed with Councillor Caton in respect of the Stansted Airport appeal. As had been explained, the defense of the appeal was conducted

by independent experts, they were not “creatures of the party appointing them”, but this expert evidence did not stand up to the test imposed by the Planning Inspectors, which had led to the costs being awarded against the Council. He said it was conventional for costs to follow such an event.

Councillor Gregory said the Commercial Strategy was impressive but it was not fair for the Leader to say services would not be affected. That was not known at this point. On the Stansted Airport appeal, he asked members to note the extensive documentation available from the independent review, and that culpability was shared between various stakeholders involved.

The Leader agreed with Councillor Gregory and clarified her earlier statement. She reiterated that a reduction of services was not guaranteed.

Councillor Freeman said the investment strategy had saved jobs and the Council would be in poor shape without it. He said he had voted against investments in the past but times had changed; Councils could no longer depend on the financial support of Government and had to find other means to protect services and jobs.

The Leader said that without the investment portfolio the forecasted shortfall would have been closer to £9 million.

In response to a question from Councillor Smith regarding the administration’s plans to make savings, Councillor Reeve said this was not relevant to the current item, as this was looking back to Quarter 2 of 2022/23, and members should not be double guessing the issue tonight. Councillor Evans said the planning department was looking at the level of agency staff and the cost of fees in terms of making savings going forward.

Councillor Caton took issue with the administration making political capital of the issue which had led to his statement to Cabinet.

The Leader proposed the recommendation set-out in the report, which was duly seconded by Councillor Reeve. The proposal was moved to a vote and was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to:

- I. Note the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Capital Programme forecast outturn positions
- II. Approve HRA capital expenditure of £1.641 million on the Walden Place redevelopment, to be funded partly from the Capital Reserve (£614,000) with the remainder coming from HRA revenue contributions

CAB62 TREASURY MANAGEMENT - MID YEAR REVIEW 2022/23

The Assistant Director – Finance presented the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2022/23 report, which recommended Cabinet to note the Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2022/23 set out in Appendix A.

Councillor Reeve thanked the financial team for their hard work.

The report was noted.

The meeting ended at 7.55pm.