

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES,
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 2 MARCH
2023 at 7.00 pm**

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

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director - Corporate Services and Monitoring Officer), B Brown (Assistant Director - Environmental Services), P Holt (Chief Executive), A Knight (Assistant Director - Business and Change Management), V Reed (Climate Change Lead Officer) and C Shanley-Grozavu (Democratic Services Officer)

Also Present: Councillors A Coote (Portfolio Holder for Housing), L Pepper (Portfolio Holder for the Environment and Green Issues; Equalities) and N Reeve (Portfolio Holder for the Economy, Investment and Corporate Strategy)

SC51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

There were no declarations of interest.

SC52 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record.

SC53 RESPONSES OF THE EXECUTIVE TO REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE

There were none.

**SC54 CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN
RELATION TO CALL IN OF A DECISION**

There were none.

**SC55 ECONOMIC RECOVERY DELIVERY PLAN - YEAR 3 PLAN AND YEAR 2
UPDATE**

The Portfolio Holder for the Economy, Investment and Corporate Strategy provided an update on the progress of the Year Two Economic Recovery Delivery Plan, as well as the proposed Year Three Delivery Plan for 2023/24. Within his introduction, he highlighted two additional government schemes which

had launched during Year Two; the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). These had subsequently delayed the delivery of the Year Two recovery plan initiatives due to the reorganisation of staff resources.

Members discussed the report, and the following was noted:

- There was concern regarding the lack of transparency around staffing at the Council and members requested that they be notified of all movers and leavers in their regular news bulletin.
- Members felt that there needed to be more acknowledgement and PR from the Council for local businesses, especially those outside of Saffron Walden.
- A recent study which ranked Uttlesford as 307th out of 309 English districts for entrepreneurial activity was based on data that had been drawn from limited companies. Members were disappointed by these findings, given the above average proportion of residents in self-employment.
- The Council continued to work towards providing a cardboard recycling service for commercial customers and the Waste Recycling Officers was looking into it in line with the Government's Waste Strategy.
- The Uttlesford Community Travel had recently received further funding from the Rural England Community Fund. The Portfolio Holder for the Economy, Investment and Corporate Strategy was keen to expand the provision of rural transport in the district, including the extension of DigiGo to Stansted.
- The Economic Development team were collaborating with the Local Plan team to solve known issues in the district's town centres, including on the upcoming Master Planning exercises.

In discussion around the additional grant funding, it was highlighted that UDC had received £1m from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund; a baseline allocation which many neighbouring authorities also obtained. On the other hand, the Council had received the largest allocation of the Rural England Prosperity Fund in Essex in recognition of the level of rurality in the district. Due to a two-week bidding window, some organisations had missed out on the initial funding from the UKSPF, however the next round which would take place next year would have an eight to ten week window. The process itself was streamlined and guidance was available to any interested party.

The Chief Executive outlined that, moving forward, the Council were looking to co-ordinate the various streams, including their own economic development funding. For example, Voluntary Support Grants would look to be allocated in a four-yearly process, rather than year-to-year, to provide organisations with longer financial certainty. He also hoped to change the culture around "bidding" by removing the competitive nature and encouraging joint partnerships.

The committee commended the Economic Development Team and Councillor Reeve for their ongoing work.

The report was noted.

The Portfolio Holder for the Environment and Green Issues presented the progress report on the implementation of the Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP). She highlighted the actions that were due to be completed during the financial year April 2022-March 2023 and beyond; of the 38 actions, nine were marked as complete, and seven were delayed in commencing.

It was confirmed that the Climate Change Lead Officer was undertaking a review of the CCAP including achievements to date, issues and risks, and lessons learnt. A revised plan for 2023/24 would be brought to the Scrutiny Committee at the early stages of development.

Members discussed the progress report, and the following was noted:

- Officers were unable to confirm the number of properties within the Uttlesford housing stock without an Energy Performance Certificate, however the Council had commissioned their own study in order to obtain accurate data..
- There was a disparity in the number of households which had measures installed under the Sustainable Warmth (LAD3/HUG1) government grant scheme and the number of properties which had been referred, due to a green skills shortage. Furthermore, the grants only allowed nine months to allocate, assess and implement which impacted the number of residents it could reach.
- The team had recently expanded, and new members of staff were from the area with local knowledge.
- They would be reviewing the plans to ensure that actions were realistically achievable.
- Members suggested partnership with the Highways Panel in creating or improve pavement to link communities together.
- To date, £600k had been committed or spent in the Climate Change Budget. The Portfolio Holder for the Environment and Green Issues had produced a table which outlined the allocation of budget, along with other items considered for funding, such as the Fritch Way and the incoming Ecology Officer. It was agreed that this would be circulated.

Members discussed the need to address the issue of transport, given the high rate of car dependency and pollution generated by some of district's key infrastructure. Officers clarified that whilst large polluters such as Stansted Airport, the M11 and A120 were viewed as being out of the Council's scope of control, this did not mean that they could not try to influence change and the Action Plan sought to expand the choice of travel modes and encourage behaviour change. Good connectivity was key for effective active travel and several documents were being created to address this such as sustainable development guidance and the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP). These would ultimately feed into the Local Plan which was already making Climate Change a top priority and evidencing green policies through a variety of studies including biodiversity and transport.

The report was noted.

HOUSING REVIEW TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Chair provided a brief introduction to the scoping report for a scrutiny review into the Council's housing management. He said that whilst this was a review for the next Scrutiny Committee to conduct and address, culpability for the failings in the housing function lay with the previous and current administrations, as well as the committee, for not asking enough questions.

Following the Chair's introduction, the Chief Executive explained that the report was from officers and that the Portfolio Holder for Housing had not advised on how the portfolio should be scrutinised. He highlighted issues around timing; addressing the housing function was still ongoing and would not be historic by the time the new committee met in June so members may want to consider starting the review later in order to have hindsight. The Scrutiny process was intensive, and the housing revenue account did not have the funding to bring in independent experts, so members should think carefully about the resources which officers would have and whether it would be appropriate to divert them from fixing the current problems.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing addressed the committee in support of the proposed review. He said that he had been misled on a number of occasions to believe that there were no issues in the management of the Council's housing. However, on obtaining comparable data from five other local authorities in the area, he found that the housing stock was worse than UDC's neighbours, with an underspend of 28% over the last 10 years and the average property aged 54 years old. He hoped that the Committee would look at how it had happened and how the Council could move forward.

Members welcomed the review and highlighted that it needed to be both forwards and backwards looking. They emphasised the need for clear terms of reference and to find best practice examples to draw upon when making their resolutions.

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking the committee for their work and individual contributions. He also thanked the lead officer, Richard Auty.

The Committee gave thanks to Councillor Gregory for chairing and the added value that this had given to the work of the Council.

Meeting ended at 20:38