

CABINET held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 13 JUNE 2024 at 7.00 pm

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

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive) and A Knight (Director of Business Performance and People), S Lewin (Economic Development Manager) and S Russell (Interim Strategic Director Housing, Health and Communities)

Also present: Councillors J Moran (Conservative Group Leader), R Pavitt (Uttlesford Independent Group Leader) and G Sell (Liberal Democrat Group Leader); N Gregory (Chair of Scrutiny Committee)

CAB1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillor Coote. There were no declarations of interest.

CAB2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a correct record.

CAB3 QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS FROM NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)

There were no questions or statements from non-executive members of the Council.

CAB4 CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (STANDING ITEM)

Councillor Gregory presented a report on the Scrutiny Committee's activity since the previous Cabinet meeting. He said a number of important issues had been scrutinized, including Housing matters, and the Committee had received an impressive presentation from the Interim Director of Property. He said the committee had received satisfactory answers to its questions and the issue would be revisited later in the year. In addition, the Committee had considered the Economic Recovery Plan and, although there were concerns regarding engagement with hard to reach groups, the report had been commended. Finally, an update on the Local Plan process had been considered; he said there would be a delay to the Regulation 19 decision due to General Election on 4 July and the rules regarding the pre-election period.

CAB5 REPORT OF DELEGATED DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET MEMBERS (STANDING ITEM)

The following delegated decisions were noted:

[Response to Government's Open consultation Night flight restrictions: Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports from October 2025 – 20 May 2024](#)
[Domestic Abuse Housing Navigator Grant Agreement – 14 May 2024](#)

CAB6 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.

CAB7 ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN 2021 - 2024

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report regarding the Economic Recovery Plan 2021-2024, which summarised the outcomes of the three year Economic Recovery Plan that had initially been set-up to support the recovery of the local economy following the impact of the Pandemic. The plan then evolved to include support for the cost of living crisis that had affected local businesses and organisations, with direct impacts such as high inflation, high utility costs and the indirect impact of households with less available income to spend on non-essentials. He commended the work of officers on the Economic Recovery Plan and asked Cabinet to note the report.

Members discussed the report and commended the work of the Economic Development team. There was agreement that this work should not be “undersold” by members and it was benefitting local businesses.

In response to a member question, the Leader said businesses who had applied to the Council's support schemes were monitored to ascertain whether the support had been of benefit.

The report was noted.

CAB8 MODERN SLAVERY STATEMENT

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report regarding the Modern Slavery Statement, which set out the statutory requirements that organisations had to have in place to ensure that illegal practices were not happening within their supply chains. The Council was committed to undertaking a preventative

approach to modern slavery and human trafficking within its corporate responsibilities and activities, and the publication of the Annual Statement highlighted the activities undertaken to address this issue. He proposed approval of the Modern Slavery Statement attached at Appendix A.

Members discussed the report and there was a consensus that modern slavery could happen anywhere and it was important to be alert to the “red flags” that could indicate a person was employed under illegal circumstances and report these issues to the police.

In response to a member question relating to a proactive policy on Modern slavery, the Director of Business Performance and People said the Statement was primarily in relation to the procurement process and to ensure council suppliers were adhering to the law.

Councillor Sutton seconded approval of the Modern Slavery Statement.

RESOLVED to to approve the Modern Slavery Statement for the year 2024/25, as set out in Appendix A to the report.

CAB9 CORPORATE CORE INDICATORS - QUARTER 4 2023/24

The Leader presented the report on Corporate Core Indicators for Quarter 4 2023/24, she said performance trends had been highlighted and analysed to identify where improvement might be needed when comparing against other ‘statistical nearest neighbour’ authorities. She added that benchmarking data was not available for quarter 4, so quarter 3 data had been used for comparison purposes instead. She asked members to note the report.

Councillor Moran said he had concerns surrounding the fire safety, mould and re-let performance indicators as there had been no improvement since the previous quarter.

In response, the Leader said she did not find these statistics acceptable but the new housing contract specification would establish new indicator targets and improve turnaround, which would address these issues.

Councillor Hargreaves said he was impressed with the performance indicator for the percentage of calls answered.

In response to a question regarding the percentage of appeals upheld for major planning applications, Councillor Evans said the council was unlikely to be brought out of planning designation while the statistic was above 10%. However, he said this was at the discretion of the Planning Inspectorate.

In response to a question regarding employees leaving the council in their first year, the Chief Executive said there was a danger in assessing percentages when dealing with small numbers, and the reasons for leaving were not always bad for the organization.

The Director of Business Performance and People said the Council would try and appeal to younger professionals via development opportunities in order to compete with higher London salaries.

In response to a question regarding waste performance indicators, Councillor Reeve said an emerging county-wide Essex Waste Strategy would be considered at Council later in the year, which would attempt to change behaviours in terms of improving recycling rates.

The Leader confirmed that these statistics could be published on the website.

The report was noted.

CAB10 CABINET COMMITTEE AND OUTSIDE BODY APPOINTMENTS 2024/25

The Leader took items 11 to 13 en bloc, which were all related related to member appointments. She asked that members who sit on outside Bodies produce a short annual report in future years. The Leader proposed approval of these appointments; Councillor Hargreaves seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED to approve [Cabinet Committee](#) and [Outside Bodies](#) appointments for 2024/25 as set out in the report.

CAB11 CABINET WORKING GROUP APPOINTMENTS AND TERMS OF REFERENCE 2024/25

RESOLVED to approve [Cabinet Working Group](#) appointments and terms of reference for 2024/25 as set out in the report.

CAB12 JOINT COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS NEPP AND WEST ESSEX WELLBEING JOINT COMMITTEE 2024/25

RESOLVED to approve appointments to Joint Committees:

North Essex Parking Partnership:
Cllr N Hargreaves
Substitute Member: Cllr N Reeve

West Essex Wellbeing Joint Committee:
Cllrs M Tayler and M Sutton

CAB13 HOUSING PROCUREMENT PROJECT PLAN

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report regarding the Housing Procurement Project Plan in the absence of the Portfolio Holder for Housing. He commended

the plan and noted that there had been no slippage. He asked Cabinet to note the report.

Councillor Sell said he had been impressed by the quality assurances given by the Interim Director of Property, who was leading on the project.

The report was noted.

CAB14 **HOUSING CONTRACT SPECIFICATION**

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report regarding Housing Contract Specification, which provided the detailed technical specification for the procurement of property maintenance services, following the Cabinet decision on 18th April to adopt a mixed economy model for these services.

In response to a question from Councillor Pavitt regarding the anticipated contract value on page 86, the Chief Executive confirmed that the figures should read £8million per annum, £40million over the initial term of the contract and £80million over the maximum term of the contract.

Councillor Moran said the document was well structured and he was pleased the Council was moving towards best value. However, this process would require robust contract management and he would ensure his group scrutinised the process.

Councillor Reeve proposed approval of the recommendations set out in the report; this was seconded by Councillor Sutton.

RESOLVED to:

- I. Members approve the detailed technical specifications (Appendix A) as set out in this report for the procurement of property maintenance services, for the main element of the mixed economy model, covering:
 - a. Reactive Repairs specification
 - b. Voids specification
 - c. Capital Investment Programme specification
- II. Members delegate authority to the Interim Director of Property in consultation with the Interim Strategic Director, Housing, Health and Communities, the Chief Executive, the Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services with the relevant portfolio holders (Housing and Finance), to make any minor modifications to the specifications as may be required based on feedback from stakeholders or procurement advisors.
- III. Members delegate authority to the Interim Director of Property in consultation with the Interim Strategic Director, Housing, Health and Communities, the Chief Executive, the Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services with the relevant portfolio holders (Housing and Finance) commence procurement activities according to the specifications, managing the processes through to contractor appointment, mobilisation and ultimately service go-live on 1st April 2025.

- IV. Members note that a further report will be brought to Cabinet in October 2024 to approve the recommended contractors and mobilisation plans prior to the new mixed economy model going live

CAB15 SELF-ASSESSMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE HOUSING OMBUDSMAN'S COMPLAINTS HANDLING CODE

The Interim Director of Housing presented the report regarding the self-assessment of compliance with Housing Ombudsman Complaints Handling Code. The report updated Cabinet on the Council's self-assessment against the Statutory Complaints Handling Code as issued by the Housing Ombudsman in February 2024 and requested Cabinet to approve the Council's submission to the Housing Ombudsman as required to meet the statutory obligation. She said there were a number of areas which the Council would improve on in order to be compliant with the Code, such as updated training, member and stakeholder briefings and a formalised approach to processing complaints.

In response to a question regarding sanctions for non-compliance, the Interim Director of Housing said there were a range of sanctions available to the Housing Ombudsman, and she was aware of cases where compensation had been prescribed in the region of £20,000. She added that the Social Housing Regulator also had the power to sanction landlords.

Councillor Sutton proposed approval of the recommendations set out in the report; this was duly seconded by Councillor Hargreaves.

RESOLVED to review and ratify the self-assessment document (Appendix 1) for submission to the Housing Ombudsman.

CAB16 APPOINTMENT OF MEMBER RESPONSIBLE FOR COMPLAINTS

The Leader spoke to the report regarding the appointment of a lead member responsible for complaints. As well as this being a statutory obligation under the Complaints Handling Code issued by the Housing Ombudsman in 2024, the report proposed that the remit be extended to include all Council complaints.

She proposed that Councillor Coote be appointed as the Member Responsible for Complaints; this was seconded by Councillor Reeve.

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Coote as the Member Responsible for Complaints.

The meeting ended at 8.40pm.