

**CABINET held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2025 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), N Brown (Head of Development Management & Enforcement) B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager), N Katevu (Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer), V Reed (Climate Change Lead Project Officer) and G Robinson (Interim Director of Finance, Revenues and Benefits)

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

**CAB89 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies were received from Councillor Coote.

There were no declarations of interest.

**CAB90 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 January were approved as an accurate record.

**CAB91 QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS FROM NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)**

Councillor Moran expressed condolences to anyone affected by the fire that had occurred in Elmdon the previous week. He asked Councillor Gregory to pass on members' condolences as he was attending Elmdon Parish Council later that evening. He also wished to express thanks to the emergency service workers who attended the incident.

The Leader agreed that it would be appropriate and added that a letter to those affected in Elmdon was in the process of being written.

Councillor Gregory thanked Councillor Moran for his comments and assured him that he would be passing on members' condolences at the Elmdon Parish Council meeting.

**CAB92 CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (STANDING ITEM)**

Councillor Gregory provided an update on the activity of the Scrutiny Committee since the previous Cabinet meeting.

He said that Scrutiny Committee had met once and had considered a number of important issues, including the Corporate Plan and Budget proposals. Firstly, the Corporate Plan was well-developed with clear milestones and performance indicators and there were a number of deadlines coming up in September, June and October for which Cabinet would receive updates in due course. He also said that Scrutiny's role in the budget setting process was to determine whether it had been conducted in an efficient and detailed manner and he commended the finance team and Councillor Hargreaves for their work. However, he said there was uncertainty in relation to some financial issues, such as the sale of Council investment assets and local government reform.

In other areas, Councillor Gregory said he had been impressed with the robustness of the voluntary sector grant process, which was on the agenda this evening. However, he had concerns regarding the community safety partnerships and looked forward to these issues coming to Scrutiny in the next few months. These issues had come into sharp relief following the tragic events in Elmdon and he noted the concerns of residents over emergency service response times. He had attempted to get direct answers from the fire service regarding this, but at the time of the meeting, had been unsuccessful. He stated his intent to take these concerns to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner should he not receive answers in the next days.

In response to a question over the status of the North Essex Parking Partnership, the Leader said she had offered a workshop on this topic and the discussion around this was ongoing. Councillor Hargreaves said this issue had been raised before at Scrutiny and had asked for a detailed document outlining what the issues were, but this document had not been received.

In response to a comment from Councillor Sell, Councillor Gregory said there was no reason to adjust due and proper processing in response to a high volume of emails from a member of the public, although they retained the right to communicate with the Council. This had been made clear to a member of the public at the beginning of the week who had frequently been contacting members regarding issues at Manor Road in Stansted.

**CAB93 REPORT OF DELEGATED DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET MEMBERS (STANDING ITEM)**

There were no delegated decisions to report.

**CAB94 REVOCATION OF ARTICLE 4 DIRECTION - FRIARS LANE HATFIELD HEATH**

Councillor Evans presented the report regarding the removal of an Article 4 Direction at Friars Lane, Hatfield Heath, and expressed thanks to the Development Manager for attending the meeting. He said the Article 4 Direction

in question was no longer required and the landowner had requested its removal.

Councillor Evans proposed the recommendation set-out in the report; this was duly seconded by Councillor Hargreaves.

RESOLVED that the removal of the Article 4 Direction defined as Friars Lane (off Chelmsford Road), Hatfield Heath be CONFIRMED.

#### CAB95 **ACHIEVING OUTCOMES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR – COMMUNITY SUPPORT GRANTS**

Councillor Sutton presented the Voluntary Sector – Community Grants report. She said that the evaluation panels were made up of officers, councillors and members of partner agencies, such as Essex County Council (ECC), and she commended the work of officers in administering the new scheme, which now provided three years, rather than one year, grant funding.

In response to questions from members, Councillor Sutton said there were 6-7 members on each panel, as opposed to the previous 4 member panels. She added that applications were referred to other channels if they did not fit the relevant criteria for this grant funding.

The Leader commented that grants had previously been administered by members and that she thought it was better to have panels consisting of a wider variety of individuals, including experts. She also noted that some applicants had been awarded one-off funding.

Councillor Sell said that he was a member of Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council and advised its committee on Uttlesford Community Travel. He welcomed the three year, as opposed to annual, settlement as he felt it provided security. He stressed that grants from bodies such as the Council were important, citing the example of Touchpoint which had started in Stansted and had gone on to serve other areas in the district.

Councillor Sutton proposed the recommendations in the report; this was seconded by Councillor Reeve.

RESOLVED:

- i. To note the evaluation and selection process that has been undertaken to determine the successful projects in this funding round.
- ii. To approve the list of successful projects agreed by the selection panel as listed in [Appendix 2](#).

#### CAB96 **ZERO CARBON COMMUNITIES GRANT FUND**

Councillor Reeve presented the report on Zero Carbon Grant Funding. He said a significant sum of money had been allocated to climate change activities and of that allocation £125,000 would be spent on the zero-carbon communities fund for 2025/26 as agreed previously by Cabinet. He noted that having built on the success of the first two rounds, the applications were positive and exceeded the amount of funding available. He said that the grants allocated ranged between £3,000 and £20,000 and many of the grants awarded not only covered carbon reduction projects, but also focussed on community engagement work, bio-diversity and Water and River Projects. He expressed thanks to officers, in particular the Climate Change Lead Project Officer, for the work carried out in preparation of the grant scheme. He said both successful and non-successful applications would be invited to take part in the new Sustainable Uttlesford group going forward.

Councillor Moran said that it might be helpful to provide information on unsuccessful applications in future to provide a clearer picture of the selection criteria for potential applicants.

Councillor Reeve proposed approval of the recommendations set out in the report; Councillor Evans seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED:

- I. To note the evaluation and selection process that has been undertaken to determine the successful projects in this funding round.
- II. To approve the list of successful projects agreed by the selection panel as listed in [Appendix 2](#) attached to the report.
- III. To note that the following applications will receive grant funding from the Climate reserve ringfenced water/river project fund, Appendix 2 no. 9, 15 and 16.

## CAB97 **BUSINESS RATES DISCRETIONARY RELIEF POLICY**

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report on the Business Rates Discretionary Relief Policy, which the Council was required to review and approve on an annual basis. This included mandatory and discretionary reliefs. He highlighted that the Business Rates Relief Policy for 2025/26 has been reviewed to preclude private schools from consideration of Hardship Relief following confirmation from central Government that the removal of mandatory rates relief for private schools was to come into effect from 01 April 2025. However, he added that although the Business Rates Relief Policy had been reviewed to preclude private schools, it was recommended to delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer to make any additional amendments necessary as it was possible there would be some exceptions to the preclusion e.g. schools which catered to special needs.

Councillor Evans stated that Felsted School was in his ward and he had relayed the expected changes to the Parish Council. He said the school was the second largest employer in the district with over 600 employees and a great number of his constituents had children attending the school. He had asked officers to write

to the bursar at the school to ensure the application of this policy was understood in advance.

Councillor Sell commented that the Council had little choice in this matter. Some smaller private schools were finding it difficult, and he had heard reports of some potentially closing. He noted they were an important stimulus to the economy, particularly of Felsted and the surrounding areas.

Councillor Moran noted the Plymouth Brethren in the area tended to use schools in Bedfordshire that best reflected their religious beliefs. He cited this as an example that the Council choosing to fund schools may not benefit a significant number of people. He noted that this had been included in the Government's manifesto.

Councillor Hargreaves proposed the recommendations outlined in the report; this was seconded by Councillor Reeve.

**RESOLVED:**

- I. That Cabinet agrees and requests Council to approve that the Business Rates Relief Policy for 2025/26 is amended to prevent Private Schools from applying for assistance in anticipation of the changes to the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The recommended policy can be found in Appendix A.
- II. That Cabinet agrees and requests Council to delegate authority to the Council's Section 151 Officer to make any additional amendments as necessary to ensure the definition of Private Schools aligns with that Act once such amendments come into force.
- III. That Cabinet agrees and requests Council to reduce the relief percentage within the policy for Retail, Hospitality and Leisure sector for 2025/26 from 75% to 40% as a result of changes to Central Government policy.
- IV. That Cabinet agrees and requests Council to end Local Newspaper Relief in line with Central Government policy.

**CAB98 CORPORATE PLAN**

The Leader presented the report on the Corporate Plan, which had been considered at Scrutiny earlier in February and would be forwarded to Council later in the month, subject to Cabinet's recommendation. She said that much of the Corporate Plan had been written before the announcement of local government reorganisation but it was the opinion of the officers involved that the plan was on track to hit its targets. She expressed thanks to the officers involved, in particular the Director of Corporate Services.

The Leader proposed the recommendations as set out in the report; the proposal was seconded by Councillor Sutton.

RESOLVED that the Corporate Plan 2023-2027 is recommended to Council for approval.

## CAB99 BUDGET 2025/26

Councillor Hargreaves spoke to the Budget report, which had been considered at Scrutiny, and said some minor alterations noted at Scrutiny Committee would be made before full Council. He said the key proposals were a 2.99% rise to council tax, which would enable the Council to continue to provide the services while minimising the use of reserves and balancing the budget. Furthermore, the Council had made approximately £2.5m of savings in its Blueprint Uttlesford project, without negatively affecting services. He said the MTFs showed the reduction in government funding would result in a £5.4m cut; this represented a shift of funding away from rural areas to urban areas of deprivation. Overall, he said the budget was prudent and had been prepared for the worst-case scenario. In relation to the local government reorganisation, a number of reserves had been earmarked and it was recommended that authority be delegated to the Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer to draw from these reserves as required as there was a need to be flexible. He noted the Government had mandated but were not funding the reorganisation.

He made the following comments relating to the appendices A to K: -

- Appendix A – Section 25 Robustness of Estimates and Adequacy of Reserves 2025/26
  - The staff cost increase was budgeted at 5%. He noted the Council had previously over-budgeted in this area, but suggested it was better to have credit at the end of the year.
  - Parking charges had increased but so had public footfall.
- Appendix B – Commercial Strategy
  - The Council was in a good position as the value of investment assets was around £60 million more than external borrowing, although there was internal borrowing as well.
- Appendix C – Medium Term Financial Strategy
  - The situation had worsened between the draft budget for consultation and the final version, meaning £854,000 was needed from the Council reserves to balance the budget. He noted this position was positive considering the circumstances.
  - Inflation was predicted at 2.5% beyond 2026/27.
  - There was an error on page 125, Table 9 where the figures for New Homes Bonus and National Insurance Reimbursement should be swapped.
- Appendix D – Treasury Management
  - Interest rates were predicted to go from 4.75% to 3.75%
- Appendix E – Capital Strategy
  - The intended introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) would allow the Council to allocate appropriate funds to applications related to housing.
- Appendix I – Consultation

- He was disappointed that Climate Change was only at 45% approval rate.
- The satisfaction for bin collections was at 99%.
- Appendix K – Fees and Charges
  - Fees and charges relating to the Rose and Crown needed to be removed from the report.
  - Some charges in taxi licensing had been reduced as they were intended to be cost neutral and not turn any profit.

In response to a member question, Councillor Hargreaves said he did not know when garage rents had last been reviewed but would pass on this information outside of the meeting.

In response to a member question, Councillor Hargreaves said the budget was unable to reflect the drops in interest rates of the current year, but did reflect the overall downwards trend.

In response to a member question, the Chief Executive said the senior manager role responsible for Blueprint Uttlesford had been revised following the announcement of local government reform, and the new role would now be tasked with coordinating and implementing these reforms.

In response to a member question, the Chief Executive said he expected the total number of staff transferred to Uttlesford's employment from Norse to be slightly smaller by the end of 2025/26.

In response to questions from members, the Strategic Director for Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services said potential asset sales mentioned at Scrutiny Committee referred only to assets within the Councils investment portfolio. In addition, there would be a report at Council detailing the sale of the former Waste Depot. Councillor Hargreaves added that funds resulting from this would be used to bring down borrowings.

Members additionally commented that: -

- They were disappointed with the level of housing voids and hoped to see this reduced under the new maintenance contract.
- CIL would be of relevance to communities with neighbourhood plans and were therefore encouraged to proceed with them to take advantage.
- Members recognised that the increase in council house rent had been agreed by the Housing Board and the Tenant Panel Forum.

Councillor Hargreaves moved to propose the recommendations set out in the report; this was seconded by Councillor Reeve.

RESOLVED:

- a) To make recommendations to Council on the budget
- b) To note the consultation on the budget
- c) To note the following recommendations for Cabinet to approve to council:

- i. To note and have regard to the section 25 report in Appendix A when considering the budget for 2025/26
- ii. To approve the commercial strategy of 2025/26 detailed in Appendix B
- iii. To note the key risks and assumptions set out at paragraph in the Medium Term Financial Strategy detailed in Appendix C
- iv. To approve the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 to 2029/30 detailed in Appendix C
- v. To agree the revenue growth bids as detailed in the Appendix C paragraph 65
- vi. To approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2025/26 detailed in Appendix D
- vii. To approve Capital Strategy 2025/26 detailed in Appendix E
- viii. To approve the Capital Programme 2025/26 to 2029/30 detailed in Appendix F
- ix. To agree the capital growth bids as detailed in Appendix F
- x. To delegate to the Section 151 Officer to increase the Capital budget to match the 30 Year HRA Programme once it is approved to enable the delivery of new homes in the HRA.
- xi. To approve the Housing Revenue Account Budget as detailed in Appendix G
- xii. To approve the General Fund budget as detailed in Appendix H
- xiii. To note the Government's intent to provide forward certainty over the HRA rental increases allowed to be 1% above CPI, which is an increase of 2.7% for 2025/26. (Appendix G)
- xiv. To recommend the 2.7% increase in social housing revenue rents within the Housing Revenue Account. The average increase in HRA weekly rents would be £3.52, leading to an average weekly rent payable by council tenants of £129.61. (Appendix G)
- xv. To recommend the council tax increase of 2.99% council tax for 2025/26. The Band D equivalent (for Uttlesford's share of the bill) would be £182.02, which would be an increase of £5.28 (Appendix H).
- xvi. To note the provisional council taxbase of 40,552.16 and the continued assumption of a maximum increase in the council tax of 2.99% over the lifetime of the Medium Term Financial Plan to 2029/30 (Appendix H)
- xvii. To approve the Council Tax requirement for 2025/26 of £7.381m (Appendix H)
- xviii. To approve the fees and charges schedule as set out in Appendix K
- xix. To approve the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement 2025/26 detailed in Appendix L
- xx. To resolve that the council tax premium of 100% shall be charged to properties that have been empty and furnished for one year or more, with effect from 1 April 2025 (Appendix M).
- xxi. That Council approves the implementation of a second homes council tax premium of 100% from 1 April 2025. (Appendix M)
- xxii. To approve the Ethical Investment Policy (Appendix N)
- xxiii. To note the change in the discretionary rates policy as detailed in the accompanying report on Discretionary Rates

The meeting was closed at 8.30pm.