

COUNCIL held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2025 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor M Foley (Chair)
Councillors A Armstrong, G Bagnall, S Barker, N Church, A Coote, C Criscione, J Davey, A Dean, B Donald, G Driscoll, J Emanuel, J Evans, C Fiddy, R Freeman, R Gooding, N Gregory, N Hargreaves, R Haynes, P Lees, M Lemon, J Loughlin, T Loveday, S Luck, C Martin, D McBirnie, J Moran, E Oliver, R Pavitt, A Reeve, G Sell, R Silcock, M Sutton and M Tayler

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager) and N Katevu (Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal Services)

Also present: Warrant Officer Class 2 L Bernard, Lieutenant Colonel R Hewitt and Major S Marsh (The 35 Engineer Regiment - Explosive Ordnance Disposal)

C63 MINUTE'S SILENCE

The Chair opened the meeting and announced the recent passing of former Councillor Robert Chambers. Councillor Chambers had served on the Council from 1980 until 2019 and represented the ward of Wenden Lofts and, from May 2015, the ward of Littlebury, Chesterford and Wenden Lofts. He had held a number of prominent positions in office, including Cabinet Member for Finance and Chair of the Licensing and Environmental Health Committee. He was also Leader of the Council on two occasions.

Councillor Barker praised the long-standing public service of Councillor Chambers and his dedication to the district and his ward of Wenden Lofts, or, as Councillor Chambers used to call it, "God's Little Acre." She said he would be sorely missed and expressed sympathy to all of Councillor Chamber's family and friends.

Councillor Sell expressed his condolences and said Councillor Chambers was a fellow member who he enjoyed a good-humoured working relationship. He said Councillor Chambers held the distinction of being the longest serving member of Uttlesford District Council. He shared his sympathy for all family and friends.

The Chair called for a minute's silence.

A minute's silence was held.

The Chair invited Councillor Pavitt to speak following a fatal fire in Elmdon.

Councillor Pavitt said a fire had taken place in Elmdon which had resulted in the tragic death of Mrs. Sheila Jones. Mrs. Jones was the parish clerk for Elmdon, Duddenhoe End and Wenden Lofts Parish Council and was a “true gem” of the community. She had been active in various groups across the village, and her experience, advice and contribution had been vital to the parish council. This was a huge and sad loss for all concerned, and he expressed condolences on behalf of the Council to her family.

C64 FREEDOM OF THE DISTRICT

The Leader was invited to welcome the 35 Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal), who had been granted Freedom of the District at the meeting in December. She thanked Lieutenant Colonel Robert Hewitt, Major Steve Marsh and Warrant Officer Class 2 Luke Bernard for attending the meeting on behalf of the Regiment.

Councillor McBirnie said he was delighted that the Council had granted Freedom of the District to the 35 Engineer Regiment. He said support had come from all members, demonstrating the warmth of feeling for the Regiment, and the decision to grant freedom of the district would strengthen the ties that bound the local community with the forces stationed at Carver Barracks.

Lieutenant Colonel Robert Hewitt addressed the meeting and thanked the Council for awarding Freedom of the District to the 35 Engineer Regiment. He personally thanked Councillors McBirnie, Foley and Lees and the Chief Executive and Communities Manager for their work leading to the award. He said this was a prestigious moment as it was the first time in the Regiment’s history that it had been based in the UK and also the first time the Regiment had been awarded Freedom of the District. He said this meant a huge amount to all concerned and that the area now felt like home for the 35 Engineer Regiment.

C65 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ahmed, Asker, Coletta, Neil Reeve and Regan.

Councillors Foley, Gooding and Barker each declared an other registrable interest in respect of Item 12 - Member Motion regarding Essex County Council elections, as members of Essex County Council.

Councillor Silcock declared a pecuniary interest in respect of Item 8 – Business Rates Discretionary Relief Policy, as a beneficiary of the policy.

C66 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meetings held on 17 December and 8 January were approved as correct records.

C67

CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair updated the Council on his recent engagements and civic activities.

He highlighted his attendance at the 'I Am More' art exhibition, which was organised by a local food bank and community association. The exhibition featured personal stories of individuals who had relied on food banks, aiming to challenge stigma around seeking financial assistance. The Chair noted that the exhibition would tour local libraries and churches in future.

The Chair thanked those that would attend the Council's fundraising quiz night, which had sold out quickly. He said plans were being made for another event before the end of his term in May.

C68

REPORTS FROM THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Leader was invited to provide a report to Council and she confirmed that regular meetings with Essex Leaders and Chief Executives were ongoing to discuss the implications of the Local Government reorganisation. She highlighted her efforts to work collaboratively with leaders from all political groups to ensure a unified approach in order to achieve what was best for the district.

In other matters, the Leader was pleased to announce that the Mortimer's Gate issue had been resolved, with the Council allocating £250,000 to rectify previous issues. This had reduced the Council's financial liability to £135,000, which was less than expected.

Councillor Freeman commended the Council for addressing the Mortimer's Gate issue despite legal advice suggesting otherwise. He said the Council had acted fairly and in line with public expectations.

Councillor Moran praised Essex County Council's Children's Services for receiving an "Outstanding" rating. The Leader acknowledged this achievement and credited the work of multiple councils in attaining high service standards.

In response to a question regarding parish councils and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), Councillor Evans said he would be willing to meet with local councils to discuss matters related to CIL.

In response to a question regarding housing issues at Manor Road, Stansted Mountfitchet, Councillor Coote said he was always happy to meet and discuss issues with residents. He added that the Council had listened to the experts and had brought in specialists to address the problem. He would meet with local members to further discuss the issue.

C69

MATTERS RECEIVED ABOUT JOINT ARRANGEMENTS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

There were no matters received.

C70 PROPOSED 2025/26 LICENSE FEES FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE DRIVERS, VEHICLES AND OPERATORS

The Chair invited Councillor Armstrong to present two reports on the recommendation of the Licensing and Environmental Health Committee.

Councillor Armstrong spoke to the first report regarding proposals for 2025/26 license fees for Hackney Carriage and private hire drivers, vehicles and operators. He said the changes were necessary to reflect inflation and operational costs. He proposed approval of the recommendation set-out in the report.

This was seconded by Councillor Driscoll.

The Chair took the item to a vote; it was unanimously approved.

RESOLVED to approve the fees proposed in Appendix 1 of the report to take effect from 1 April 2025.

C71 REVIEW OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARE TARIFF

Councillor Loveday entered the meeting at 7.40pm.

Councillor Armstrong presented the report regarding a review of Hackney Carriage Fare Tariffs, which stated that the Council, as the Licensing Authority, was required to set the maximum fare tariff rates for Hackney Carriage Vehicles licensed by the Council for journeys within the district. He said the Council had received a formal business case for a proposed increase to the existing rates and it was now for the Council to approve or reject the proposals. If approved by Council, the proposed fare tariffs would be subject to public consultation. He proposed approval of the increases, as per the recommendations set-out in the report.

Councillor Driscoll seconded the proposal.

Members discussed the proposal and concerns were raised that Uttlesford fares were already one of the highest in Essex. However, there was also agreement that operators and drivers were struggling with costs themselves and there was a need to make such operations economically viable.

Councillor Driscoll was invited as seconder to speak. He said these fares did not relate to private hire vehicle but Hackney Carriages, and the rise would bring fares back in line with inflation. He said drivers were residents of the district too and needed to make ends meet. He urged members to support the proposal and allow the increase to be opened to public consultation.

RESOLVED:

- I. That Council approves the proposed rate increases, and;
- II. That Council approve the commencement of a statutory public consultation of the proposed fare chart structure, should 2.1 be approved.

C72

PAY POLICY

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report regarding the Council's Pay Policy and said there was a requirement under the Localism Act 2011 for councils to publish an annual Pay Policy Statement, which set out the pay and remuneration of its employees for the forthcoming year. He said he was pleased to see there was no significant gender pay gap at the Council and proposed approval of the recommendations set out in the report.

Councillor Coote, who sat on the Local Joint Panel (LJP) which discussed employment matters, seconded the proposal.

As set out in the recommendations of the report, the Chair asked Council whether they wished to debate the issue now, or wait until further information was available.

RESOLVED to debate the Pay Policy Statement at the meeting held on 25 February 2025.

Councillor Criscione said he was also a member of the LJP and the proposals were reasonable. He urged members to support the recommendation.

The Chair took the recommendations to a vote.

RESOLVED to:

- I. Approve the Pay Policy Statement
- II. Give delegated authority to the Director – Business Performance and People to update the Pay Policy Statement and associated documents with:
 - a. Pay multiple and average salary figures as at 31 March 2025.
 - b. Revised salary information once the 2025/26 national pay award is agreed.

C73

BUSINESS RATES DISCRETIONARY RELIEF POLICY

Councillor Silcock recused himself and left the room for this item at 7.54pm.

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report regarding Business Rates Discretionary Relief Policy, which proposed changes to the Policy, including a reduction in retail, hospitality, and leisure relief from 75% to 40%, and the

removal of business rate relief for private schools, impacting three institutions in the district. He proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

Councillor Fiddy seconded the proposals.

Councillor Barker requested that the Council proactively notify affected schools in the district to allow them time to adjust.

Members discussed the impact on the hospitality sector and some warned that reducing hospitality relief could have economic effects, particularly on those in the wider supply chain.

The Chair took the proposals to a vote.

RESOLVED:

- I. 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. 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. 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. Council to end Local Newspaper Relief in line with Central Government policy.

C74

CORPORATE PLAN

Councillor Silcock re-entered the room at 8.05pm.

The Leader presented the report regarding the Corporate Plan, which outlined the Council's strategic priorities for the year ahead, although she said the document had been drafted before the Local Government Reorganisation announcement. She highlighted a number of priorities, such as the decarbonisation of Council housing stock, improvements in waste collection services, the implementation of new housing repairs contracts, and the examination of the Local Plan and adoption of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). She proposed approval of the Corporate Plan.

Councillor Emanuel commended the Corporate Plan and seconded the proposal.

Councillor Sell said this was better than previous versions of the Corporate Plan but it still could be improved.

In response to a question regarding recycling, the Leader said £200k had been put aside of the Extended Producer Responsibility Grant of £1.453m, in order to drive higher recycling rates and lower levels of waste production.

The Leader was invited to summarise following the debate. She said the Corporate Plan has been considered by both Scrutiny and Cabinet and had been available for comment since the beginning of February. She said she welcomed constructive criticism but not political point scoring, and that members could achieve a lot together if they truly collaborated.

RESOLVED to approve the Corporate Plan 2023-2027.

C75

BUDGET 2025/26

Councillor Hargreaves presented the Budget proposals for 2025/26. He highlighted a number of headlines from the report, including the 2.99% increase in Council Tax, which equated to an annual increase of £5.28 for Band D properties, the use of £850,000 in reserves in order to balance the budget, the financial impact of government funding reductions and local government reorganisation costs, and the investments in social housing decarbonisation and new Council homes. He concluded by saying that despite the financial challenges faced by the Council, the Council would be fully solvent following the process of local government reorganisation. He proposed approval of the recommendations set out in the report.

Councillor Emanuel seconded the proposals.

Members discussed the proposals and concerns were raised regarding the long-term sustainability of local government financing, particularly in light of local government reorganisation. Questions were also raised in respect of the increase to garden waste collection fees, although it was confirmed that discounts were available to those on benefits. However, investment in local council housing was welcomed.

Councillor Hargreaves was given right of reply and said the definitive solution on Local Authority financing would need to come from central Government, as these financial issues were faced by councils across the country.

For the purposes of the Council Tax Resolution, the Chair said a recorded vote would be taken in order to satisfy regulations and the Constitution.

The vote was carried 23 for, 5 against with 6 abstentions:

COUNCILLOR	FOR/AGAINST/ABSTAIN
Cllr Armstrong	For
Cllr Bagnall	For

COUNCILLOR	FOR/AGAINST/ABSTAIN
Cllr Barker	Abstain
Cllr Church	Against
Cllr Coote	For
Cllr Criscione	Against
Cllr Davey	Against
Cllr Dean	For
Cllr Donald	For
Cllr Driscoll	For
Cllr Emanuel	For
Cllr Evans	For
Cllr Fiddy	For
Cllr Freeman	For
Cllr Gooding	Against
Cllr Gregory	For
Cllr Hargreaves	For
Cllr Haynes	For
Cllr Lees	For
Cllr Lemon	Abstain
Cllr Loughlin	For
Cllr Loveday	Abstain
Cllr Luck	For
Cllr Martin	Abstain
Cllr McBirnie	For

COUNCILLOR	FOR/AGAINST/ABSTAIN
Cllr Moran	Against
Cllr Oliver	Abstain
Cllr Pavitt	For
Cllr Alex Reeve	For
Cllr Sell	For
Cllr Silcock	For
Cllr Sutton	For
Cllr Tayler	For
Chair (Cllr Foley)	Abstain

RESOLVED:

- i. To note the key risks and assumptions set out at paragraph in the Medium Term Financial Strategy detailed on page 9
- ii. To approve the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 to 2029/30 on page 11
- iii. 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 on page 16.
- iv. 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 on page 17.
- v. To approve the Council Tax requirement for 2025/26 of £7.381m on page 17.
- vi. That Council approves the implementation of a second homes council tax premium of 100% from 1 April 2025 on page 17.
- vii. 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 on page 17.
- viii. To agree the revenue growth bids as detailed on page 19.
- ix. To approve the General Fund budget as detailed on page 20.
- x. To delegate to the Section 151 Officer to approve upto a maximum of £250k in year budget growth to General Fund Housing subject to approval at Cabinet as per page 8.

- xi. 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 on page 29.
- xii. 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 on page 30.
- xiii. To approve the Housing Revenue Account Budget as detailed on pages 31- 33.
- xiv. 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.
- xv. To approve Capital Strategy 2025/26 on pages 34-44.
- xvi. To approve the Capital Programme 2025/26 to 2029/30 detailed on pages 44- 50
- xvii. To note and have regard to the section 25 report in Appendix A when considering the budget for 2025/26
- xviii. To approve the fees and charges schedule as set out in Appendix C
- xix. To approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2025/26 in Appendix D
- xx. To approve the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement 2025/26 detailed in Appendix E
- xxi. To approve the commercial strategy of 2025/26 detailed in Appendix F
- xxii. To approve the Ethical Investment Policy in Appendix G
- xxiii. To agree the capital growth bids as detailed on page 45
- xxiv. To note the change in the discretionary rates policy as detailed in the accompanying report.
- xxv. To approve the housing service charge increases (General Fund and HRA) in line with inflation plus 1% as per rents.

C76

FORMER WASTE SERVICES DEPOT

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report on the sale of the former Waste Depot site in Great Dunmow, which detailed the marketing of the freehold property and recommended the sale, subject to planning consent, for £1.25 million. He said the sale was expected to generate additional savings and reduce borrowing costs. He proposed approval of the recommendation.

The proposal was seconded by Councillor Armstrong.

Councillor Barker welcomed the sale but said there was no housing development in New Street, as stated in the report, and that sound planning permissions needed to be put in place.

In response to a member question, Councillor Hargreaves confirmed that planning permissions had not been discussed with Planning Officers.

RESOLVED that:

- I. Council approves the sale of the Former Waste Services Depot, New Street, Dunmow, CM6 1BT subject to Planning permission to John Catton Homes Limited in the sum of £1,250,000; and
- II. Delegation is given to the Director of Innovation and Commercialisation and the Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Economy, to complete the sale; and;
- III. The capital receipt is used to offset future borrowing requirements.

C77

MEMBER MOTION: ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL ELECTIONS

As the meeting was approaching the two-hour mark, the Chair asked for Council's consent to continue; Council consented.

Councillors Barker, Gooding and Foley recused themselves and left the room for this item at 8.57pm.

Councillor Criscione, the Vice-Chairman, took the Chair in Councillor Foley's absence.

Councillor Gregory presented his motion regarding the postponed Essex County Council Elections and said it was morally wrong for the elections to be cancelled, and that local government reorganisation would go ahead without a democratic mandate. He said councillors were accountable to the electorate and he was concerned that the elections could be postponed year-on-year and added that there was a possibility of ECC councillors being in post for up to three years without a mandate. He cited Tony Benn and said power must be returned to the people; he was shocked by this lack of accountability and asked the district's County members to resign in March 2025 and stand for re-election in May. He proposed approval of the motion.

Councillor Pavitt seconded the proposal.

Members discussed the motion and concerns were raised that the motion would only apply to the district's four members and therefore would not improve accountability in any real sense. However, the point was made by a number of members that democratic principles were being subverted and that the electorate should be given a say. Members also suggested that other councils could follow if the motion was approved, leading to more widespread elections.

Councillor Pavitt said the motion was not targeting the councillors in question; they were the people's representatives and the democratic mandate that empowered them should not be brushed aside. He urged members to support the motion.

Councillor Gregory was invited to summarise; he thanked members for the debate and said it was a principled gesture, rather than a binding motion.

However, it was right to apply moral pressure and stand up to repressive forces for local residents and in line with his democratic principles. He said he would resign as a district councillor and campaign for re-election if he was put in the same position in future. He called for a recorded vote.

The motion was carried with 20 votes for, 8 against with 3 abstentions.

COUNCILLOR	FOR/AGAINST/ABSTAIN
Cllr Armstrong	For
Cllr Bagnall	For
Cllr Church	For
Cllr Coote	For
Cllr Davey	Against
Cllr Dean	Against
Cllr Donald	Against
Cllr Driscoll	For
Cllr Emanuel	Abstain
Cllr Evans	Abstain
Cllr Fiddy	Against
Cllr Freeman	For
Cllr Gregory	For
Cllr Hargreaves	Against
Cllr Haynes	For
Cllr Lees	Against
Cllr Lemon	For
Cllr Loughlin	For
Cllr Loveday	For
Cllr Luck	For

COUNCILLOR	FOR/AGAINST/ABSTAIN
Cllr Martin	For
Cllr McBirnie	Against
Cllr Moran	For
Cllr Oliver	Against
Cllr Pavitt	For
Cllr Alex Reeve	For
Cllr Sell	For
Cllr Silcock	For
Cllr Sutton	Abstain
Cllr Tayler	For
Cllr Criscione (in the Chair)	For

RESOLVED:

This Council notes the agreement between central government, Essex County Council, Thurrock Council and Southend on Sea Council to postpone the May 2025 county council elections in Essex. This agreement undermines the democratic process and allows the exercise of power and the levying of taxation without either a mandate from the people or accountability to the people.

Accordingly, to ensure a proper mandate from our residents this Council is RESOLVED to call upon all our four county councillors representing the County Divisions within Uttlesford to resign in March 2025 and seek re-election in May 2025 through the statutory process for by-elections. We will uphold democracy, when others seek to thwart it

Councillor Foley re-entered the room and took the Chair at 9.47pm.

Councillor Foley thanked members for getting through the business on the agenda, and said the reserve meeting on 4 March was now not required. The next meeting would be the extraordinary meeting on 19 March.

The meeting was closed at 9.50pm.

