

CABINET held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 27 MARCH 2025 at 7.00 pm

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

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), D Hermitage (Strategic Director of Planning), P Honeybone (Internal Audit Manager), N Katevu (Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer), A Knight (Director of Business Performance and People) L Porteous (Director of Finance, Revenues and Benefits), J Procter (Democratic Services Officer), S Russell (Strategic Director of Housing, Environment and Communities) and A Webb (Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services)

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

CAB100 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillor Sutton.

The Leader said she would be changing the order of agenda items for the benefit of those present.

CAB101 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2025 were approved as an accurate record subject to the following amendment to the wording of CAB95 (13 February meeting):

“Councillor Sell declared an interest in that he was a member of Stansted Town Council and advised its committee on Uttlesford community travel”

Changed to:

“Councillor Sell said that he was a member of Stansted Mountfitchet Parish Council and Uttlesford District Council’s outside body representative to Uttlesford Community Travel.”

CAB102 QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS FROM NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)

No questions or statements were received.

CAB103 MATTERS REFERRED TO THE EXECUTIVE BY THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE OR BY THE COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)

There were no matters referred to the Executive by the Scrutiny Committee or by the Council.

CAB104 CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (STANDING ITEM)

Councillor Gregory stated that the Scrutiny Committee had met once since the last meeting of Cabinet and two items of significance had been discussed: the Corporate Plan and the Evolution of the Corporate Plan. He thanked the Strategic Director of Planning for his work regarding these items.

CAB105 REPORT OF DELEGATED DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET MEMBERS (STANDING ITEM)

Members noted the following delegated decisions taken by Cabinet Members since the previous Cabinet meeting:

- Stansted Airport's Sustainable Development Plan – Public Consultation as published on 3 March 2025
- Amendments to Complaints Policy (Housing) as published on 17 February 2025

CAB106 DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

The Strategic Director for Housing, Environment and Communities presented the Domestic Abuse Policy to Cabinet.

She said that it was a draft of the Council's first domestic abuse policy and set out how the Council would support any person who approached the Council feeling they were a victim of domestic abuse.

The policy met a number of regulatory and legal requirements, including:

- The adoption of the terms of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- Meeting the requirements of the Regulator of Social Housing regarding how the Council responded to domestic abuse concerns

Members commended the policy and commented that it was important to work with the police and the NHS on this issue.

In response to questions from members, the Strategic Director for Housing, Environment and Communities said: -

- All members of Council staff attended online safeguarding training. Where appropriate, this was followed by a refresher course tailored to their

responsibilities. Staff who worked closely with vulnerable people received robust training.

- All staff were entered into a cycle of training appropriate to their responsibilities but, depending on where they were in the cycle, this could show as an underperformance in training performance indicators. Housing would therefore propose amendments to these metrics.
- A fresh approach involving more online training was being taken to alleviate any lags in refresher training.
- Specialist domestic abuse training had been procured and would be rolled out to a large proportion of staff at the Council alongside safeguarding training.
- The routes to reporting domestic abuse were complex and varied as it was rare for victims to report abuse without initial support. Most cases of domestic abuse were uncovered during business-as-usual e. g. during a homelessness assessment or housing officer/repairs visit. More detailed guidelines on the routes to reporting than those outlined in the Domestic Abuse Policy would be available to relevant staff.

The Leader stated that all members should attend safeguard training and asked those present at the meeting to ensure they attended the next session.

The recommendation was proposed by the Leader and seconded by Councillor Coote.

The Strategic Director of Housing, Environment and Communities left the meeting at 7.18pm.

RESOLVED to approve the Domestic Abuse Policy attached to the report.

CAB107 ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL) FOR UTTLESFORD

Councillor Evans presented the report on the Establishment of a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for Uttlesford.

He spoke in support of the creation of a CIL charging structure but noted technical help would be required to implement this. This help was to be provided by Essex County Council (ECC) at a cost to be recovered by the scheme should it be implemented. He added: -

- The technical arrangements described in the report were necessary.
- CIL would enable a charge to be levied on developers.

The Director of Business, Performance and People left the meeting at 7.20pm.

In response to questions from members, he said town and parish councils would be kept informed of the progress of the implementation of the CIL. They would be reminded of any opportunities to take part in any schemes that may arise from the implementation.

The Strategic Director of Planning noted that residents tended not to respond to CIL consultations as they were generally of more concern to developers and had a positive effect on residents. He added that the schedule would be brought back to Cabinet in the autumn.

In response to questions from members, he said the levy could have been implemented from 2011, however there had been uncertainty under the previous Government as they had proposed changes to the scheme. The Government at the time of the meeting had announced they intended to keep the existing regulation.

The Director of Business Performance and People returned at 7.23pm.

Members welcomed the implementation of a CIL and noted that Chelmsford City Council's implementation of the levy had reportedly been a success in raising funds. They noted the importance of neighbourhood plans in communities benefitting from the levy.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Evans and seconded by Councillor Reeve.

The Strategic Director of Planning left the meeting at 7.30pm.

RESOLVED that Cabinet:

- i. Proceeds with commissioning a full CIL viability study to assess the potential for a levy to be applied to and charged upon new development in the district and provide the council with recommendations on appropriate potential CIL rates.
- ii. Agrees to use the financial and specialist support being made available through Essex County Council to develop a CIL Charging Schedule.

CAB108 Q3 FINANCE MONITOR

Councillor Hargreaves presented the Q3 Finance Report. He said the report detailed the Council's financial monitoring position as of 31 December 2024. He noted: -

- The financial positions as detailed in the report was a testament to prudent budgeting.
- Interest rates had been higher than expected throughout the year.
- The significant overspend in Environmental Services was due to new vehicles being required.
- Some costs were predictable with certainty e.g. council tax and business rates, some costs were reasonably predictable e.g. interest rates, and other costs were unpredictable e.g. the price of fuel.
- Overspending in Planning was due to challenges in filling permanent posts, although it was possible that this issue had been resolved by the time of the meeting.

- There was a resource overspend due to the Housing Benefit Subsidy gap
- The budget management was strong overall and the Council had finished the financial year close to the position budgeted.

In response to a question from a member, the Chief Executive said: -

- The Council was close to acquiring a permanent Legal Services Instructor and financial provision for this had been included in the budget for 2025/26.
- There had been a substantial reduction in spending in Planning and hoped this would soon be the case for Legal Services.

Members discussed the Council's employment of agency staff.

The Leader suggested it could be beneficial to compare the Council's employment of agency staff to that of neighbouring authorities, however noted the cost, feasibility and speed of sourcing this data should be taken into consideration. The Chief Executive said a potential report containing this data would be explored.

Councillor Hargreaves noted the inclusion of a review of consultants and agency staff in Appendix C of the Internal Audit Strategy and suggested this may be helpful to members.

The report was noted.

The Director of Finance, Revenues and Benefits and the Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services left at 7.40pm.

CAB109 CORPORATE CORE INDICATORS - QUARTER 3 2024/25

The Leader presented the Corporate Core Indicators report. She said: -

- Braintree District Council had been included as a close geographical neighbour.
- Eleven out of fifteen neighbours had published data at the time of the meeting.
- The Council was within the average benchmark.
- There had not been substantial changes from the previous presentation.
- In terms of Housing voids (CCI23), although the performance was low, the Council was the highest performer in the report.

In response to a question from a member, Councillor Coote said he was positive that average re-let times for Council properties would be reduced from 49 days to below the average of 36 days under the new maintenance contractor and that it was his intention for this figure to be improved further. He said he hoped the Council would be performing as well as any other authority in this area within 18 months of the meeting.

In response to a questions from members, the Monitoring Officer said: -

- The Democratic Services Manager had brought a report to the Audit and Standards Committee outlining a member training strategy. The report provided for the publication of member training attendance.

- Much of the required safeguarding training for members and officers was specific to local government and it was unlikely that training from previous roles would be adequate.
- Despite offering multiple times of day and repeat sessions, member training attendance could be improved.

Members discussed: -

- The importance of safeguarding training.
- The challenges that members faced in attending training, particularly by members who were employed or had other responsibilities.
- Members acknowledged the efforts of staff to make training sessions as accessible as possible for members.

The Leader commended Democratic Services for their work in organising training sessions for members.

The report was noted.

CAB110 CORPORATE CORE TARGETS 2025/26

The Leader presented the report on the Corporate Core Targets. She said there were new tenant satisfaction measurements coming in and there had been a slight decline in performance.

The Leader proposed the recommendation laid out in the report and was seconded by Councillor Evans.

RESOLVED to approve the Corporate Core Indicator targets for 2025/26 as set out in the body of the report and Appendix A.

CAB111 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND (UKSPF)

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. He said the Government were continuing the scheme from the previous year as an interim arrangement.

He noted that Uttlesford had been allocated £327,000 for 2025/26 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This fund had to be spent according to the conditions of the previous year.

Uttlesford had also been granted £244,000 from the Rural England Prosperity Fund which was the highest amount in Essex.

He drew members' attention to paragraph 20 which detailed the proposed allocation of these funds. Regarding fund allocation, he said: -

- There were four categories: support for rural communities, support for rural businesses, cultural heritage development and a digital inclusion programme.

- A focus on community spaces was intended e.g. the use of village halls and empty pubs.
- In terms of cultural heritage, the fund would be used to support tourist attraction which was a key part of the economy of Uttlesford. He noted it was intended to include town and parish councils who had typically not been engaged in the tourist economy.
- The funds would be allocated on a rolling as opposed to competitive basis.

Members commended the degree of enthusiasm from officers apparent from the report and commented: -

- The funds would benefit rural wards in particular
- They would encourage parish councils to engage with the fund allocation
- They encouraged parish councils to take a progressive and dynamic approach to any levy increases

In response to a question from a member, the Leader said the Council had initiated the process of working with pubs in the district to broaden and diversify their range of services. The Director of Business Performance and People added that the Council had been talking to pub owners to explore how they could add value to their business plans, e.g. setting up coffee mornings and community shops. There had been positive responses to this.

The Leader asked members to ensure they checked the Council website regularly to keep up to date with Council initiatives.

Members discussed the differences between larger town and parish councils e.g. Saffron Walden, Stansted Mountfitchet and Great Dunmow and smaller third-tier authorities: -

- They noted that they faced different issues and therefore required different approaches when it came to supporting local businesses and community spaces
- They suggested smaller authorities may struggle to attract members compared to larger authorities with existing community engagement functions and events
- They suggested third tier authorities be consulted on issues before solutions were offered by the Council

Councillor Reeve commended the Economic Development Team who were to implement the fund and said the Council would be able to build on the experience of the first UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Councillor Hargreaves proposed the recommendation and was seconded by Councillor Reeve.

RESOLVED to approve the investment priorities for expenditure as set out in paragraph 19 for UK Shared Prosperity Fund and paragraph 21 for the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

CAB112 INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY 2025-28, PLAN 2025-26 AND INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER

The Leader commended the report and noted that the Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) had replaced the previous standards for internal audits at local authorities. She noted GIAS had codified areas where internal audit teams had previously had flexibility.

The Internal Audit Manager said that the Internal Audit Strategy had been presented to the Audit and Standards Committee earlier in the week where the Internal Audit Charter and the Internal Audit Plan were approved by members.

The report was noted.

CAB113 PEER REVIEW REPORT

The Leader spoke to the Corporate Peer Review Challenge report and highlighted positive comments made by the reviewers regarding the administration of the Council. She felt the feedback had improved levels of scrutiny at the Council.

She reported that the reviewers had praised the Council's member training programme in respect of allowing for repeat sessions with variations to time, date and location.

Councillor Gregory expressed thanks to the leaders of the opposition groups for their approach to their roles in Scrutiny.

In response to a question from a member, the Chief Executive said the Corporate Peer Challenge Report would not go to Full Council but would be considered by Scrutiny. He added that in his view the review was fair and accurate, to which the Leader agreed.

Members thanked staff for their work and hoped the recommendations could be taken forward and included in the new authority that would follow from local government reorganisation.

The recommendation was proposed by the Leader and was seconded by Councillor Evans.

RESOLVED to note the report at Appendix A and approve the actions contained in Appendix B.

The meeting was closed at 8.35pm.