

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES,
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 6 MARCH
2025 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor N Gregory (Chair)
Councillors G Bagnall, B Donald, R Haynes, J Moran, A Reeve
and G Sell

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Director of Corporate Services), C Edwards (Democratic
Services Officer) and D Hermitage (Strategic Director of
Planning).

Also in attendance: Councillor J Evans (Portfolio Holder for Planning).

SC44 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ahmed, Criscione and Luck.

There were no declarations of interest.

SC45 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 4th February 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

SC46 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Cabinet forward plan was noted.

Councillor Haynes asked again about the absence of anything in the Corporate Plan regarding the historic environment. He asked when this would be reconsidered.

The Director of Corporate Services said that this had not been forgotten and would be incorporated into the Corporate Plan when the item returned to Scrutiny in July.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning said that additional work about the historic environment could also be considered in other areas. He said that there was heritage evidence within the Local Plan and in Neighbourhood planning across the district.

In response to Members' questions the following comments were made:-

The Hatfield Forest item was delayed but the intention was for the report to go to Cabinet and Scrutiny in June.

The report related to governance arrangements for the forest due to the impact of visitors.

The delay was due to the need for agreement between four Councils (including Uttlesford), whose residents were the main visitors to the site.

A request to look into the future of leisure centres and their contracts was made as they were a valuable resource for physical and mental health for residents within the district.

The Director of Corporate Services suggested that Members read the report when it was published for Cabinet in May and then decide what matters to explore further and the best way to do that at Scrutiny.

SC47 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of Corporate Services said that the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2025/26 had been populated with regular items, such as the budget and the Corporate Plan. He said that he was aware of two additional items, the Community Safety Partnership and Operational Resilience, they would be added to the June or July schedule.

Councillor Sell said that there was a workshop planned regarding the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) but he still thought that this should be looked at in more detail. He suggested other workstreams could include street cleansing and the health of Uttlesford's rivers and streams.

Other Members agreed with Councillor Sell's suggestions and it was agreed that these would be added to the work programme.

There was some discussion about the ability of Scrutiny to continue in the same way due to the Local Government reorganisation and the pressure on Officer's time. The Chair said it was a matter of balance and that Scrutiny Committee still had an important role for the next three years. He said that Members also had valuable expertise and knowledge that could be utilised.

SC48 CORPORATE PLAN PROGRESS REPORT

The Director of Corporate Services presented the report. He said that in the report there were 9 green and 4 amber items. The amber items were:-

- The Asset Management Strategy which would be completed in June 2025.
- The Uttlesford Rural Summit that had been delayed due to Local Government reorganisation.
- Savings that related to the sale of Chesterford Research Park which had not been realised as bids were not finalised.

- Artificial Intelligence projects had been stopped until more was known about the Local Government reorganisation.

Members made the following comments:-

The Uttlesford Rural Summit should go ahead. There were concerns amongst Members that a new Unitary Council might shift the focus away from rural areas. It was agreed that it would be an opportunity to decide what the priorities of a rural district were and to ensure the needs of residents were protected and advanced.

In response to questions from Members the following comments were made:-

- There were discussions with landowners to create farm clusters to bring together areas of land to be used as offset sites for biodiversity net gains (BNG).
- There were policies about offsetting of BNG and there was an on-site first approach, the further away offsetting took place the more was required.
- The land used for solar farms would be minimised in terms of biodiversity, although operators did some work to use the land between and under panels this was not effective and the land was sterilised from both an agricultural and wildlife perspective.
- There was a need for Government to provide proper guidance on solar farms.
- There was a launch on 9th April for Sustainable Uttlesford which would include representatives from farm clusters.

SC49 **COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY REPORT (CIL)**

The Portfolio Holder for Planning presented the report. He said that the report was detailed and thorough and he welcomed the input of the committee.

He said:-

- Essex County Council (ECC) would act as the Council's agent, undertaking detailed research before preparing for a public consultation.
- ECC would recover their costs from future CIL funds.
- A tariff for CIL had not yet been set.
- The report would go to Cabinet later in March.

The Strategic Director of Planning said that he could not say how much money would be raised from the CIL scheme as that would be dependent on the viability work to establish the rate per square metre.

In response to questions from Members the following comments were made:-

- The charge to the developer should come from their profit.
- The viability assessment would look at the land and build costs as well as the sale value in order to come to the amount of CIL charged. It was unlikely that the charge would be passed on within the sale price as it would make the price less competitive.
- The funds raised were for infrastructure projects.
- Water and sewage were outside of CIL.

- The viability assessment established the highest amount charged, without making the development unviable. It would not be enough to cover all the infrastructure needs within the district.
- The Parish and Town Councils would receive 15% of the total annual CIL funds or 25% if they had a neighbourhood plan. This money would be spent within their Parish or Town Council. The rest of the funds would be put into a general fund and could be spent anywhere in the district.
- Social Housing and certain charitable development would not be included.
- The CIL charge was a straightforward amount of money payable by the square metre. The developer had to pay it and it was non-negotiable. It was easier to manage than the S106 payments.
- A grant agreement had been set up with ECC whereby they contribute funds of up to £20k cash and up to £40k of officer resource. They had recent and relevant experience and because they were a Local Authority a procurement process was not required.
- S106 agreements and CIL could work in tandem and provide funding for the same projects.
- After five years, if Parishes had not used the money there was the ability to reclaim it into the general fund.
- A guide for Parishes would be produced.
- The governance of CIL funds coming into the Council had not been considered yet.
- There would be an annual infrastructure funding statement published. It would include what had been collected and spent and what funding had been given to parishes.

Councillor Gregory left the meeting at 8.00pm, Councillor Bagnall took over as Chair.

SC50

UPDATE REPORT FROM THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP ON ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE

Councillor Donald presented the report. She said that the Task and Finish Group with the support of the Chief Executive had identified potential areas of weakness and put in measures to mitigate the risk. She said that there was an ongoing process through the appraisal system to ensure that each department was aware of and considered the risks on a regular basis, therefore providing ongoing resilience.

She said that the business critical functions register, the corporate and service level risk registers and the corporate and service level business continuity plans collectively made up the risk management policy.

In response to questions from Members the following comments were made:

- There were established procedures to cover long term sick and maternity leave and for training to be given accordingly.
- Areas of low resilience in terms of cover in the event of sickness and holiday had been identified.

- The risk analysis did not just note risks, it provided measures to mitigate the identified risk and was an ongoing process through departmental meetings and appraisals.
- Feedback had been provided within the review from a Senior Officer from another Council (see paragraph 9). The Peer Review which was conducted by visiting Senior Officers also looked at all Council processes.

After discussion, the Chair asked that the Task and Finish Group considered the impact of homeworking in the update due to come to Scrutiny Committee in June or July.

The meeting ended at 8.25pm