

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES,
LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 3 JUNE
2025 at 7.00 pm**

Present: Councillor C Criscione (Chair)

Councillors M Ahmed, B Donald, R Haynes, S Luck, J Moran,
A Reeve and G Sell

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Director of Corporate Services), B Brown (Director of Environmental Services), C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer) D Hermitage (Strategic Director of Planning), A Knight (Director of Business Performance and People) and S Lewin (Economic Development Manager).

Also in attendance: Councillor J Evans (Portfolio Holder for Planning), Councillor Hargreaves (Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Economy) and Councillor N Reeve (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change).

SC1 ELECTION OF THE CHAIR

In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, Councillor Criscione was elected as Chair for the meeting.

SC2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bagnall, Gregory and Gooding.

Councillor Criscione declared an interest in agenda item 9 Local Plan Examination Update due to his work.

SC3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th March 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

SC4 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Cabinet forward plan was noted.

SC5 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Work Programme was noted.

Councillor Sell said that despite attending the workshop regarding the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) he still had questions that had not been answered and asked for this to be added as an item onto the agenda.

Members agreed that this would be a useful item as long as there was a clearly defined scope and specific measurable questions on how to improve the current situation.

Councillor Sell said that he would draw up a framework and add any suggestions that Members passed on.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Economy said that he had not received any specific comments about NEPP and said that anyone was welcome to attend the meeting and speak. He said that the Council was only a participant and could not make any procedural changes.

It was agreed that this would be added to the agenda for the September meeting as long as there were specific questions and scope.

SC6

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT AND ACTION PLAN PRESENTATION - RECOMMENDED TO BE DEFERRED TO A LATER DATE

This item was deferred. Councillor Moran asked when it would be brought back to the Committee. The Director of Corporate Services said that there was no specific date yet but if necessary a meeting date would be moved in order to accommodate the availability of Roger Hirst the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

SC7

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT END OF YEAR REVIEW

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Economy presented the report. He made the following comments:-

- The report detailed the monies that had already been spent in 2024/25 on the two government funds.
- The funds were obtained through a complex bidding process and had a total spend of £1.8 million.
- As well as administering the funds and car parking, the Economic Development team also contributed to the North Essex Economic Board (NEEB).
- There were two main streams for NEEB, one being young entrepreneurs and the other investment into the area (the latter would move to the Mayors remit in the future).

In response to questions from Members the Economic Development Manger made the following comments:-

- The inward investment proposition was currently a website and an advertising platform, there were no current plans to offer financial incentives.
- There had been a good uptake by youngsters across North Essex including Uttlesford for the Earniversity programme and the Economic Development Manager agreed to circulate figures.
- Broadband and mobile connectivity were a concern for many businesses. There was a current project with the Digital Innovation Zone to investigate mobile connectivity specifically. There was also a plan to undertake a capacity study as the rollout of 5G was sporadic across the district.
- There were only occasional comments received about difficulty finding business accommodation. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Economy said that a number of awards for the prosperity funds related to the improvement or extension of accommodation.
- Recruitment was an issue especially in the hospitality sector and there was focused work being carried out with that sector. There was also funded training to upskill current workers as there were issues recruiting middle management.
- The drop in at Stansted Mount-Fitchet was supported and advertised by the Parish Council but in future they would ensure that District Councillors were also contacted.
- Competition concerns were considered when funding was given to businesses.
- The funding for Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ) and the UK Innovation Corridor would be looked at to make sure that the investment was still providing value for money. The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change said that he thought DIZ was still providing value for money and gave an example of the extensive study work they were doing around the 5G blackspots. He said that there was an upcoming strategy session with DIZ to discuss future projects.

A slight error made in Appendix C was pointed out by Councillor Moran, the grant received was for Parish Rooms and not the Village Hall.

Members said that this was an excellent report that was supporting so many different projects.

SC8

WASTE FLEET PROPOSAL TO MOVE TO HYDROGENATED VEGETABLE OIL

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change presented the report and highlighted the following:-

- The report was going to Cabinet next week and Scrutiny Committee were asked for comments and advice to pass onto Cabinet.
- The waste fleet was using diesel and was responsible for 34% of the Council's emissions. This was a target area to move towards net zero.
- This was for the temporary use of Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (HVO) until other solutions became viable.
- Other councils had already started to use HVO and therefore data and experience was available to be more confident in making the switch.

- The fuel can be swapped between HVO and diesel if necessary.
- The fuel would be procured from responsible sources.

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

- The costs were already in the budget for next year, so there would be no need to cut services to finance the change.
- The high point of expenditure was not known, but if the figures became unrealistic then the Council could change back to diesel. The excise duty on HVO was currently similar to diesel.
- There was no maintenance impact in swapping between the fuels. However the recommendation from the supplier was that the fuel bunker was cleaned before the swap, this was a relatively small cost.
- The marker for Hydrogen powered collection vehicles is in its infancy.
- HVO had a similar performance to diesel.
- Each vehicle would be monitored and fuel consumption measured as part of the emissions plan.

Councillor Donald said it was an important change from a Health and Safety point of view. The workforce was currently exposed to diesel emissions as well as residents so this was a small price to pay for better health for our workers and improved air quality.

The Chair, Councillor Criscione left the meeting at 8.18pm.

SC9 **LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION UPDATE**

Councillor Sell was elected as Chair for this item.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning presented the report. He thanked the Officers and the Director of Planning for their work on the Local Plan. He made the following comments:-

- He suggested that Members looked at the webpage on the Local Plan Uttlesford site which contained all the up-to-date information and the programme for the Local Plan examination in public which was set by the two inspectors.
- The meetings would be broadcast as well as being open to the public.

The Chair and the Committee added their thanks to all Officers involved.

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

- The risk factors in the report were judgements made by the Director of Planning in close consultation with all those involved in the process, including officers, specialist consultants, the Kings Counsel and barristers.
- There was always risk involved with the Local Plan process, the main focus now was to ensure that there were answers to all matters raised by interested parties in response to questions from the Inspectors, to ensure that these did not trigger delays to the Local Plan timetable.
- Interested parties included a number of different bodies which included Essex County Council.

- 136 responses to questions from the Inspectors had been received from interested parties to date.
- There would be relevant specialist consultants at each stage of the Local Plan Examination who would be available to answer questions along with the relevant Officer.
- There was confidence in the Local Plan, however, it would be a major challenge with competing voices arguing for their viewpoint. There was meticulous planning behind the scenes to finesse answers to every conceivable argument, but it was hard to predict what would be brought up in the hearing.
- There were no outstanding responses, all had been passed onto the Inspectors.
- The importance of getting the Local Plan adopted before Government deadlines and the changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) came into force.
- There was no set criteria for the 5% or 20% buffer for the housing land supply. The current housing headroom was 11-12% and the Inspector needed to have confidence that the Council would hit the housing target even if some sites did not proceed within the timescale.

The Chair said that the report had been considered. He thanked the Local Plan Officers and wished them well with the Local Plan Examination process.

The meeting ended at 8.42pm