

CABINET held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on TUESDAY, 16 DECEMBER 2025 at 7.00 pm

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

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), B Burton (Interim Director of Property), P Evans (Head of Contract, Performance and Risk), S Lewin (Economic Development Manager), L Porteous (Director of Finance, Revenues and Benefits), J Procter (Democratic Services Officer), Nicola Roberts (Director of Business Performance and People), S Russell (Strategic Director of Housing, Environment and Communities) and A Webb (Strategic Director of Finance, Commercialisation and Corporate Services)

Also in attendance: R Gooding (Conservative Group Leader), N Gregory (Chair of the Scrutiny Committee) and G Sell (Liberal Democrat Group Leader)

CAB51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillor Pavitt.

Councillor Evans declared an interest regarding Item 14, the Mulberry Homes S106 site, St Edmunds Lane/Braintree Road, Gt Dunmow report, in that he had received hospitality at a sandwiches reception hosted by the developer, Mulberry Homes. He had declared this with the Monitoring Officer and had been advised he was able to participate in the debate and vote.

There were no further declarations of interest.

CAB52 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 October 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

CAB53 QUESTIONS OR STATEMENTS FROM NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (STANDING ITEM)

There were no questions or statements from non-executive members.

CAB54 **CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES (STANDING ITEM)**

Councillor Gregory presented his report. He said Item 16, the HRA Repairs Update, had been discussed at Scrutiny Committee. Regarding this item he raised the following points: -

- He said the debate was detailed and robust and had resulted in a unanimous recommendation of the report to Cabinet.
- He thanked the Portfolio Holder for Housing, the Strategic Director of Housing, Environment and Communities and the Interim Director of Property for their input.
- There had been some appropriate questioning as to whether the item should have been in part 2, however he had no doubt that the item was correctly treated as part 2 under the relevant act.

He raised the following additional points: -

- Scrutiny Committee had considered the Corporate Plan and raised some minor points with officers relating to output indicators and requested to be informed of when matters had been completed.
- The Economic Development Plan had also been considered, and minor points were raised; in terms of output indicators, the Scrutiny Committee continued to express scepticism of subscriptions intended to facilitate cross-council economic growth and development.
- Action points had been raised and pursued with the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP), but progress had been limited.
- The Final Operational Resilience Report had been considered and points of failure within the Council had been examined in detail. This had been turned to an advantage as it assisted with future-proofing the Council against these failures. Other councils had looked to this report as a model for advice and guidance.
- He identified the outstanding matter of the Community Safety Partnership Policing briefing which had been due to take place in September 2025 but had been postponed. He would be taking a question to Full Council on 18 December 2025 regarding this matter.

CAB55 **REPORT OF DELEGATED DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET MEMBERS (STANDING ITEM)**

Cabinet noted one delegated decision since the previous Cabinet meeting:

- Achieving Outcomes In Partnership With The Voluntary Sector – One-Off Grants – taken by the Leader of the Council on 17 October 2025.

CAB56 **CCI QUARTER 2 2025/26**

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

- There was more available data utilised in the report than previous quarters.
- Long term sickness was an area of potential concern but was addressed in the report.
- The housing and compliance indicators had been completed retrospectively.
- The planned maintenance and Alexia Parkside indicators were listed as n/a as no works had been completed in Q2, but an update would be provided in the Q3 report.

Councillor Sell congratulated Councillor Coote that CCI 32, the Decent Homes Standard, was almost at 100%, but expressed concerns that most of the indicators at red level concerned housing.

The report was noted.

The Head of Contract, Performance and Risk and the Director of Business Performance and People left the meeting at 7.12 pm.

CAB57 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT 2025/26 MID YEAR UPDATE

Councillor Hargreaves presented the Economic Development mid-year report. He said: -

- There had been a focus on supporting small rural businesses e.g. pubs and the tourism economy e.g. the Discover Uttlesford website.
- Officers were preparing for the Uttlesford Business Awards in February 2026 to take place in Saffron Hall.
- Since the report had been to Scrutiny Committee the Government had produced a report revealing the spending and outcomes of the Shared and Rural Prosperity Funds of selected councils across England and Wales. Uttlesford was rated highly and was noted for being run by only two officers.

In response to questions from Members, Councillor Hargreaves said: -

- Evidence of the Government Budget having a negative effect on the hospitality industry in Uttlesford was limited. He suggested Uttlesford was a resilient area in this respect.
- The main benefits of the Uttlesford Business Awards were that it was a positive event which provided networking opportunities as opposed to leading to measurable benefits to award winners. However, Members cited examples of businesses that had seen direct benefit following awards and suggested the healthy competition for awards led to further improvements.

Councillor Evans said that as Stansted Airport was applying to expand its passenger numbers it may be beneficial to consider reaching out to outer London Boroughs to discuss their approach to tourism promotion.

Members commended the report.

The report was noted.

The Economic Development Manager left the meeting at 7.26 pm.

CAB58 AIR QUALITY STRATEGY

Councillor Reeve presented the report. He said an action plan had been developed following the consultation results. The action plan deliverables would be dependent on the work of the Essex Air Quality Consortium and would have no direct financial implications.

Councillor Reeve proposed the recommendation;

This was seconded by Councillor Coote

RESOLVED to:

- I. Agree to adopt and formally publish the Essex Air Quality Strategy, the action plan and Supporting Information Document, as appended to the report and;
- II. Note that the action plan deliverables will be dependent on the work of the Essex Air Quality Consortium and will have no direct financial implications.

Councillor Reeve thanked all officers, the Essex Air Quality Consortium and the other councils involved in drafting the strategy.

CAB59 LONDON ROAD OFFICES DECARBONISATION PROJECT

Councillor Reeve presented the report. He said:-

- The subject had been extensively discussed by Cabinet Members.
- Cabinet was committed to the Corporate Plan, which included commitments to protect and enhance our environment. A detailed heat decarbonisation plan was developed for our primary office building in Saffron Walden. A substantial Government grant had been secured to replace the fossil fuel gas heating system at the London Road Council Offices with low-carbon air source heat pumps. The project would reduce the Council's carbon emissions by around 2,000 equivalent tonnes over the installation's 20 year lifetime, and 91 tonnes per year. This project represented the second most impactful action that could be taken to reduce the Council's carbon emissions. The project would also deliver a demonstrator example for residents, business and communities and was expected to realise a small saving in energy costs.
- He would have preferred the report to have been subject to pre-scrutiny; however, this was not feasible due to the timelines involved as the contract needed to be awarded by the end of January 2026 to enable

delivery to be mobilised in line with the funding allocations set out in the Government grant.

- He was disappointed that the recent tender process for the project had revealed the costing figure to be much higher, however the design, the updated budget and the procurement remained robust.
- Three courses of action had been identified following notification of the increased costs:
 - To cancel the project – This was not recommended as it would detrimentally impact the Council's ability to deliver on its climate commitments.
 - To amend the scope and design of the project and retender – This was not recommended as it would not result in substantially reduced costs and would limit the Council's ability to use Government grant funding.
 - To continue with the project for installation by Winter 2026 – This was recommended in order to meet the Council's climate commitments.
- The Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) had made a report detailing actions the council could take to reduce its carbon footprint. These actions included the London Road Decarbonisation Project. The first project recommended had been the implementation of Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil (HVO) as fuel for the Council's waste fleet, which was expected to be implemented early in the new year.
- The Council had a duty under the Climate Change Act of 2008 to contribute to delivery of national targets and to make climate positive decisions.
- The grant was subject to conditions that meant the project needed to follow the originally proposed details; the amount and profiling of the grant funding could not be renegotiated with the Government. It was also the last grant of this kind expected to be granted by the Government.
- The existing fossil fuel equipment on the site would be backed out and used elsewhere.

In response to questions from Members, Councillor Reeve said: -

- The implementation of solar panels did not qualify as decarbonisation as they created additional green energy as opposed to actively reducing carbon emissions.
- The Government grant could only be used for scope one and two buildings i.e. Council assets such as the London Road or the Little Canfield and Newport Depots. It could not be used on buildings such as the Council's housing stock. The selected building was also required to have fossil fuelled boilers which were more than ten years old. The London Road Offices had been selected as this was the most efficient option.
- It was unknown how the project would affect the value of the building.

- Potential disruption to tenants had been considered by the project management team and factored into the plan. The facilities team would work closely with council users and tenants of the building to minimise disruption and impact on their business operations.
- A fixed price for the works had been agreed with the tenderer, which he was confident would be secured if the work was awarded within the time frame.

Members discussed the report and the following points were raised: -

- While decarbonisation was favourable, the price increase was substantial.
- It was unfortunate the decision had not been to pre-Scrutiny, although the time constraints were apparent.
- The Government grant would be lost if the project did not go ahead.
- The use of the London Road Offices following LGR was unknown.
- The decarbonisation of Council housing stock was being considered in separate projects.
- The project was a direct approach to decarbonisation, as opposed to mitigation measures.
- The heat pump system and solar panels would likely lead to a small saving in energy costs, which should be balanced against the cost of delivery.
- The HVO project would have a positive impact on the Council's emissions.
- Decarbonisation was not only important in terms of climate change, but in terms of health.

Councillor Gregory said his chief concern was not regarding the principles behind the project but whether it was good value for money. He appreciated the time constraints but would have expected more detail outlining the costs within the report considering the significant budget variation. He also would have preferred to have seen an appraisal that included other available courses of action and showed how the recommendation was the best option.

Cabinet Members agreed that further details included in the report might have been beneficial, however this was limited by the time constraint involved in the decision.

Councillor Reeve proposed the recommendation.

This was seconded by Councillor Coote.

RESOLVED to:

- I. Confirm the London Road Decarbonisation Project is to continue, and;
- II. Instructs Officers to build an additional £650,692 into the 26/27 capital programme.

The Director of Environmental Services left the meeting at 8.16 pm.

CAB60 **DRAFT 2026/27 BUDGET**

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report. He said: -

- The Budget was set provisionally on what was known to officers at the time of the meeting but may be subject to amendments following the publication of the Draft Local Government Financial Settlement for 2025.
- Fair Funding Reform (FFR) had announced significant changes that would be disadvantageous to rural authorities like Uttlesford.
- The budget consultation did not yet include the HRA which would also come forward for approval by Council in February 2026.

In response to questions from Members, officers said they were confident the projected savings from Blueprint would be achieved in the next financial year.

The Leader noted that the HRA rent increase had been considered by the Housing Board and Tenant Leaseholder Panel.

The report was noted.

CAB61 **LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SCHEME PROPOSAL**

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report. He said: -

- The recommendation was to keep the current qualifying Council Taxpayer's Contribution Rate at the current percentage.
- A consultation was carried out with an increase in responses from the previous year, to which most of the responses were positive.
- The Council had considered implementing a system for the scheme that was easier to run, but following the announcement of LGR this would not be feasible.

Councillor Hargreaves proposed the recommendation;

This was seconded by the Leader.

RESOLVED to recommend the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2026/27 to Council as follows:

- I. The current qualifying Council Taxpayer's Contribution Rate continues at 12.5% for 2026/27.
- II. The Council continues with current policy to protect Pensioners, Vulnerable and Disabled Residents and their Carer's on a low income. i.e. their contribution would remain at 0%.

The Director of Finance, Revenues and Benefits left the meeting at 8.27 pm.

CAB62 HOUSING POLICIES

Councillor Coote presented the report. He commended the quality of the policies.

Councillor Coote proposed the recommendations;

This was seconded by Councillor Reeve.

RESOLVED to approve the policies set-out in paragraph 2 and appended to the report, as follows:

[Repairs and Maintenance Policy](#), [Disrepair Policy](#), [Recharges Policy](#), [Dampness, Mould and Condensation Policy](#), [Void Management Policy](#) and the [Succession Policy](#).

CAB63 MULBERRY HOMES S106 SITE, ST EDMUNDS LANE/BRAINTREE ROAD, GT DUNMOW

Councillor Coote presented the report and said he was delighted by the recommendation that the Council acquire more affordable homes.

Councillor Evans said he was concerned that registered providers within the District did not seem to be supporting these types of schemes. He cited a similar site in Felsted which provided five affordable homes which he said providers were unwilling to take up due to the small number of houses.

The Leader said the affordable homes were purchased at 57.9% market value and were therefore good value for money to the Council.

Councillor Coote proposed the recommendation;

This was seconded by Councillor Evans.

RESOLVED for UDC to acquire the Affordable Rented homes upon the Mulberry Homes site in Gt Dunmow to prevent the loss of these Affordable Rented homes to the district.

CAB64 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

The Leader proposed the meeting move into Part 2 as the last item on the agenda, the HRA Repairs Update, contained restricted information on the financial or business affairs of the Council;

This was seconded by Councillor Sutton.

RESOLVED to exclude the public and press due to consideration of reports containing exempt information within the meaning of section 100I and paragraph 3 of part 1 of Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972.

The meeting was adjourned between 8.35 pm and 8.45 pm.

CAB65 HRA REPAIRS UPDATE

Councillor Gregory said that the report had been discussed robustly and in depth at the Extraordinary Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 December 2025 with detailed input from the Strategic Director of Housing, Environment and Communities and the Interim Director of Property.

Members discussed the report, including the housing repair arrangements of other authorities.

Councillor Coote commended the pre-scrutiny process. There was further discussion over scrutiny processes.

Councillor Coote proposed the recommendation;

This was seconded by Councillor Reeve.

RESOLVED to agree service improvements as recommended in the report.

The meeting ended at 9.05 pm.