

COUNCIL held at COUNCIL CHAMBER - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, CB11 4ER, on THURSDAY, 18 DECEMBER 2025 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillor C Criscione (Chair)
Councillors M Ahmed, A Armstrong, H Asker, S Barker, N Church, A Coote, B Donald, G Driscoll, J Evans, C Fiddy, M Foley, R Freeman, R Gooding, N Gregory, N Hargreaves, R Haynes, P Lees, M Lemon, T Loveday, D McBirnie, J Moran, A Reeve, N Reeve, B Regan, G Sell, R Silcock, M Sutton and M Tayler

Officers in attendance: P Holt (Chief Executive), R Auty (Deputy Monitoring Officer and Director of Corporate Services) and B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager)

Also in attendance: S Dale (Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel) and B Dyson (Member of the Independent Remuneration Panel).

C48 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bagnall, Coletta, Davey, Dean, Emanuel, Loughlin, Luck, Martin, Oliver and Pavitt.

There were no declarations of interest.

C49 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 October 2025 were approved as a correct record.

C50 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman provided an update on his activity since the previous meeting and said he had been busy attending Christmas Carol services across the County. He said he was very pleased with the UDC service, which had raised funds for the local Cadet organisations, and thanked members for their contributions.

He also praised the Co-Chairs and members of the Planning Committee for their hard-work, diligence and conduct at a recent meeting. He said this had showed UDC in the best possible light.

C51 REPORTS FROM THE LEADER AND MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE

The Chairman invited the Leader to address Council on any matters of report not included on the agenda.

The Leader commended the Planning Committee for their conduct at the meeting on Wednesday and said she had heard a number of outstanding contributions to the debate. Furthermore, she had attended the Uttlesford Community Awards and it had been an honour to recognise the hard working volunteers in the district. She reminded local councils that they could put forward nominations for community volunteers in future.

The Chairman invited questions on the written reports.

With reference to Councillor Hargreaves report and North Essex Parking Partnership's (NEPP) requirement for 75% support from residents to justify new parking schemes, Councillors Sell and Gooding referenced parking problems in Stansted and both agreed that the unmet threshold did not demonstrate the reality of support for a new scheme on the ground.

C52

QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER, MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS (UP TO 30 MINUTES)

The Chairman invited each member who had submitted a written question whether they had a question of clarification.

In response to a clarification question from Councillor Sell, Councillor Lees said she had nothing further to add to her response regarding the Princess Alexandra Hospital question.

In response to a clarification question from Councillor Sell regarding future changes to the road network due to the Local Plan, Councillor Evans said infrastructure had been taken into account for the larger allocations in the Local Plan and that the cost of such infrastructure was referenced in published viability studies.

In response to a clarification question from Councillor Moran, Councillor Coote confirmed that members of UDC and Ashdon Parish Council would be kept informed of any news regarding developing council housing on the site in All Saints, Ashdon.

In response to a clarification question from Councillor Regan regarding the weekly meetings with the maintenance contractor, Axis, Councillor Coote said the weekly meetings were taking place.

In response to a clarification question from Councillor Gooding regarding developments at Manor Road, Councillor Coote said residents would be updated in the New Year.

C53

MATTERS RECEIVED ABOUT JOINT ARRANGEMENTS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

No matters were received about joint arrangements or external organisations.

C54 **MEMBERS SCHEME OF ALLOWANCES 2026/27**

Mr Dale, Chair of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP), presented the report regarding the Member Scheme of Allowances for 2026/27.

He said the proposal to increase the Basic Allowance and all Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) by 3.2% had been taken in consideration of balancing the financial constraints faced by the Council, with the need to offer fair recompense to members that encouraged a diverse range of residents to serve as Councillors. He said a number of factors had contributed to the recommendation, and highlighted the staff pay award of 3.2% for 2025-26, the Consumer Price Index (CPI), noting an average increase of 3.3% over the last 12 months and comparison with benchmarked councils. Furthermore, he noted that the change to the Chair of Planning Committee SRA had been recommended in order to bring the calculation in line with the Co-Chairs SRA. He urged members to adopt the proposal outlined in the report.

The Leader thanked the IRP and formally proposed approval of the recommendation to adopt the Scheme. She reminded members that if they did not want an increase to their allowance, they were able to forgo the remuneration by writing to Democratic Services.

Councillor Alex Reeve seconded the proposal.

Members discussed the Members' Scheme of Allowances and requests were made to consider both the Planning Committee and Licensing and Environmental Health Committee members SRAs during next year's review.

The recommendation was approved unanimously. The Chairman thanked the IRP members Mr Steve Dale, Mrs Brigid Dyson and James Dodson for their diligent work.

RESOLVED that the Council:

- I. Agrees to a rise of 3.2% to the current level of basic allowance for the Members' Scheme of Allowances 2026/27.
- II. Adopts the change to the Planning Chair allowance and other individual SRAs as set out in Appendix A and detailed in the report, for the municipal year 2026/27.

C55 **CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2026/27**

Council noted the calendar of meetings for the municipal year 2026/27.

C56 **FULL COUNCIL, 26 FEBRUARY 2026: CHANGE OF DATE**

The Council noted the request to change the Council meeting on 26 February 2026 to 24 February 2026.

The Chairman said members would receive an updated calendar invitation in the coming days.

C57 MATTERS REFERRED FROM THE EXECUTIVE AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES

The Chairman said Cabinet had recommended the Local Council Tax Support Scheme report to Council for approval.

C58 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SCHEME PROPOSAL

Councillor Hargreaves presented the report regarding the LCTS Scheme for 2026/27, which stated that there was a requirement to annually review the LCTS Scheme and propose changes to the scheme for the following financial year. He said the LCTS Scheme was the lowest in Essex and represented a continuation of policy from previous years. Furthermore, a consultation was carried out during the Autumn of 2025 to set a LCTS qualifying Council Taxpayer Contribution Rate and continue to protect Vulnerable and Disabled residents and Carers on a low income. The consultation received 55 responses, providing a 62% increase on the number of responses received in 2024. He said the results demonstrated that most respondents supported the proposed scheme. He added that there had been a downward trend in the number of people claiming this support. He proposed approval of the recommendation set-out in the report.

Councillor Alex Reeve seconded the proposal.

In response to a question from Councillor Barker regarding the future of the LCTS scheme in light of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), Councillor Hargreaves said operation of the Scheme would fall to the new authority and the shadow council to be elected in 2027 would ultimately make decisions on how the scheme would be administered post LGR.

The proposal was approved unanimously.

RESOLVED to approve the Local Council Tax Support Scheme for 2026/27 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%.

C59 MEMBER MOTION: SHORT-TERM BORROWING RISK

Councillor Gooding spoke to his motion regarding the risks surrounding Short-term borrowing. He said the Council had previously benefitted from historic low interest rates but now was the time to review the balance between short and long-term borrowing as the current approach amounted to “robbing Peter to pay Paul” and represented a risk to residents. Furthermore, he said LGR would have an impact and questioned whether other councils would be happy to take on the Council’s borrowing commitments. He proposed approval of the motion.

Councillor Regan seconded the proposal.

The Chairman opened the motion to debate.

Councillor Sell said he had some sympathy with the motion but was worried about the wording; he said the Council had to be pragmatic and should not sell assets if equity would be lost. He would not be supporting the motion.

Councillor Fiddy said this was not a civil approach to addressing a concern but rather political posturing; she said the members behind the proposal would have been better placed in addressing their concerns with leading members or officers before tabling a motion. She referenced the external auditor’s report which stated that the Commercial Strategy was based on sound procedures and did not represent an immediate risk.

Councillor Gregory said the motion was a demonstration of sub-standard opposition and many of the claims were incorrect or were not in the best interests of the electorate. He said the current approach to balancing long and short-term borrowing was good treasury management and he dismissed the claim that this approach was an immediate risk to residents.

Councillor McBirnie said there were a number of incorrect statements in the motion and highlighted the Commercial Strategy’s stipulation that it was necessary to generate revenue to underpin core services and that the investment portfolio was not there for capital gains. He said he had looked at the figures cited in the motion, as a member of the Investment Board, and the numbers referenced were incorrect and had been inflated. He said the balance between long and short-term borrowing was good practice and it made no sense to sell an asset based on the balance of borrowing. In conclusion he said that the real risk would be losing the revenue from the investments, the portfolio was in positive equity and there was no risk in terms of the balance of borrowing.

The Leader said she agreed with previous speakers and that political conflict was more rewarding rather than quiet co-operation in the interests of residents. She said the outcome of LGR was still unknown but treasury management would not be an issue for any new authority.

Councillor Hargreaves said the motion had to be rejected as it contained falsehoods regarding information that was readily available in Investment Board papers. He said if the resolutions were followed, it would cost the Council millions. He highlighted falling interest rates and the Government’s guidance on borrowing to refute the motion’s claims. He said there was no “urgent need” to

resolve the alleged risk, as demonstrated by the external auditor's report. He urged members to vote against the motion.

Councillor Alex Reeve said the motion was ill informed and that the Investment Board provided "enlightened conservatism" to treasury management matters. He said the Council cared about scrutiny and transparency; however, the motion was designed to induce fear in the electorate for political purposes.

Councillor Asker said she was disappointed that a fellow member of the Investment Board had brought this motion to Council without consulting members of the Board beforehand.

Councillor Regan was invited to speak as seconder. He said the purpose of the motion was to provide good housekeeping and to ensure the level of borrowing was kept under close review. The market was fluctuating and "robbing Peter to pay Paul" was not good accountancy.

Councillor Gooding said the intention of the motion was to challenge and provide scrutiny to the Administration on investments and borrowing. He said he had previously asked questions on the matter at Investment Board and requested that the balance of short- and long-term borrowing be reviewed in future.

The Chairman took the motion to a vote; the motion was defeated with 7 votes in favour, 21 against and 1 abstention.

The meeting was closed at 8.15pm.