

# Minutes

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

30<sup>th</sup> January 2013



Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
P R Barlow	Yes	F Ricci	Yes
C A Cadman	Yes	W J Rose	Apologies
Dr R L Evans (Chairman)	Yes	A F Shelton	Yes
P Horner	Yes	J S Sutton	Yes
S A Howell	Yes	J R Swift	Apologies
R P Ramage	Yes		

The following Cabinet members were also in attendance for item 5, Scrutiny of the Council Budget and Council Tax 2013-14 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2013-14 to 2016-17:

Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council;  
Councillor Bebb, Cabinet Member, Performance and Efficiency;  
Councillor Lady Newton, Cabinet Member, Planning and Property;  
Councillor Schmitt, Cabinet Member, Place;  
Councillor Siddall, Cabinet Member, Prosperity and Growth.

The following members were also present: Councillors Abbott, Banthorpe, Baugh, Bishop, Canning, Cunningham, Everard, Finbow, Galione, Gibson, Johnson, Mitchell, Money, Parker, O'Reilly-Cicconi, Shepherd, Spray, Tattersley, L Walters, and Wright. Apologies were received from Councillors Fincken, Mann, McKee and Reid.

### 30. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**INFORMATION:** The following interests were declared:

- Councillor Barlow declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda item 5, Scrutiny of the Council Budget and Council Tax 2013/14 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2013-14 to 2016-17, and item 6(b), Task and Finish Group – Braintree, Halstead And Witham Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency (BDVSA) as a Trustee of the Braintree, Halstead and Witham CAB;
- Councillor Cadman declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda item 6(b), Task and Finish Group – Braintree, Halstead And Witham Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency (BDVSA) as Chairman of the Board of Suffolk West CAB;

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, all councillors remained in the meeting for all items and took part in the debate and decision thereon.

31. **QUESTION TIME**

**INFORMATION:** There were no questions asked or statements made.

32. **MINUTES**

**DECISION:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33. **SCRUTINY OF THE COUNCIL BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2013-14 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2013-14 TO 2016-17**

**INFORMATION:** Members received a presentation from Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council, on the Council Budget and Council Tax 2013-14 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2013-14 to 2016-17. The Council's priorities remained as Councillor Butland had presented to the Committee at its meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2012. Councillor Butland outlined key positive changes in income and savings and areas of investments. He also highlighted several key messages in relation to the budget.

Cabinet members and officers provided the following information in response to questions raised by Committee members and other members present:

- it was agreed that current thinking on the Community and Housing Investment Partnership would be shared with the Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group once Greenfields Community Housing had completed discussions with its tenants;
- the Council has ambitious plans for the Springwood Industrial Estate, Braintree, and the take up of units at the site is proceeding well. The Council is also working to develop Ignite into a sustainable business without the support of the Council. It is hoped that in time, good practices learned at Springwood can be rolled out in other industrial areas in the district;
- the funding for tree maintenance related to trees under the control of the Council only;
- the Council has earmarked £5.8 million under the New Homes Bonus for infrastructure improvements. The Council is prepared to invest in the district and to discuss possible projects with other organisations;
- investment in play areas relates to those under the control of the Council only. Parish and Town Councils could develop play areas under their control if they wished to do so and raised the necessary funds;
- a very small charge of 10p after 3pm under car parking initiative is made in order to obtain evidence of the impact of the scheme rather than have no charge;

- the Council has ISK42.9million (around £213k) invested in Icelandic Banks which currently can not be repatriated due to currency controls. The LGA is working on behalf of councils and is looking into opportunities of repatriating the money before the controls are relaxed. One benefit is that the funds are earning a better rate of interest than UK banks at around 3.5 – 4.0 %;
- loans taken out by the Council totalling £6m with an interest rate of 4.7% have a penalty premium for early repayment, currently estimated at £2.29 million making exiting the loan uneconomic. However, there may be an opportunity to exit in the future should interest rates rise and the lender choose to increase the interest rate;
- a recent court judgement relating to the action brought to determine the date for the application of a conversion rate for funds invested in Icelandic banks is not expected to have a significant impact on the funds to be returned to the Council;
- Cofunds, the new tenant in Mayland House, Witham will be bringing around 600 good quality new jobs to the district. The company was moving from its Chelmsford site and it is hoped that through time, more jobs will be filled by local people living in the Witham area. The arrival of Cofunds would also bring benefits to the local economy in Witham. Cofunds will also be investing around £9 million in refurbishing Mayland House;
- the funds being made available to Town and Parish Councils related to delivering the localism agenda and would be for those councils to decide how the money is spent;
- the Council is in discussions with the new Braintree Museum Trustees with the aim of refurbishing the Museum and removing the £210k currently provided to the Museum each year;
- the £50k of additional funding to the CAB would be subject to certain conditions. Individuals using CAB facilities outside of the district is a matter for those individuals. The Council can only provide support for CAB facilities located in the district;
- the additional funds are for CAB only. There are no additional funds for BDVSA. Members noted that a Task and Finish Group report on the CAB and BDVSA is expected around May 2013 and that it might contain some matters for consideration;
- Village Agents will continue to be funded by Essex County Council.

#### 34. **TASK AND FINISH GROUP – AFFORDABLE HOUSING -BRIEF UPDATE**

**INFORMATION:** Councillor Barlow, Chairman of the Task and Finish Group added to the report that the Group was hoping to come forward with a number of options to increase the number and quality of affordable housing. This included possible help to enable people to gain a foothold on the house purchasing ladder.

**DECISION:** That the progress of the Affordable and Social Housing Task and Finish Group be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To monitor progress of the work of the Affordable and Social Housing Task and Finish Group.

35. **TASK AND FINISH GROUP – BRAINTREE, HALSTEAD AND WITHAM CITIZENS  
ADVICE BUREAU AND BRAINTREE DISTRICT VOLUNTARY SUPPORT AGENCY**

**INFORMATION:** Councillor Howell reported that the Group had met on 28<sup>th</sup> January and hoped to submit a report to the Committee's meeting in May.

**DECISION:** That the progress of the CAB and BDVSA Task and Finish Group be noted.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To monitor progress of the work of the CAB and BDVSA Task and Finish Group

36. **DECISION PLANNER**

**DECISION:** That the Decision Planner for the period 1<sup>st</sup> February 2013 to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2013 be received and noted.

37. **CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE.**

**INFORMATION:** The Chairman reported that the day of member development on 25<sup>th</sup> January provided by INLOGOV, University of Birmingham, had been attended by 10 members and had been well received.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.20pm.

Dr R L Evans  
Chairman