

Minutes

Council Meeting

23rd February 2011



Present:

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
J E Abbott	Yes	E R Lynch	Yes
M J Banthorpe	Yes	M Lynch	Yes
Miss L Barlow	Yes	D Mann	Yes
J Baugh	Yes	T McArdle	Yes
Mrs J C Beavis	Yes	N G McCrea	Yes
D L Bebb	Yes	J McKee	Apologies
E Bishop	Apologies	H J Messenger	Yes
R J Bolton	Yes	A M Meyer	Apologies
G Butland	Yes	R G S Mitchell	Apologies
G Cohen	Yes	Mrs J M Money	Yes
J C Collar	Apologies	Lady Newton	Yes
M Dunn	Yes	Mrs A Olumbori	Yes
Mrs E Edey	Apologies	J P O'Reilly-Cicconi	Apologies
J G J Elliott	Yes	Mrs J A Pell	Yes
R Elliston	Yes	R Ramage	Yes
Dr R L Evans	Yes	D M Reid	Yes
A V E Everard	Apologies	D E A Rice	Yes
J H G Finbow	Yes	Mrs C Sandbrook	Yes
Ms L B Flint (Vice Chairman)	Yes	Mrs W D Scattergood	Yes
T J W Foster	Yes	Mrs J W Schmitt	Yes(until 8.50pm)
Mrs B A Gage	Yes	A F Shelton (Chairman)	Yes
M G Gage	Yes	Mrs L Shepherd	Yes
Mrs M E Galione	Yes	C Siddall	Yes
J E B Gyford	Yes	Mrs J A Smith	Yes
N R H O Harley	Yes	Mrs G A Spray	Yes
Mrs S A Howell	Yes	F Swallow	Apologies
P J Hughes	Yes	Miss M Thorogood	Apologies
D L Hume	Apologies	S M Walsh	Yes
M C M Lager	Yes	R G Walters	Yes
S J Lambourne	Yes	T S Wilkinson	Yes

The Chairman welcomed all Councillors to the meeting and extended a warm welcome to public and press present at the meeting, and those viewing the meeting on the webcast. A special welcome and congratulations was extended to Councillor Mrs Olumbori, who was returning to meetings after having a baby in December 2010.

52 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman referred to the following issues:-

Visit from the new Bishop of Chelmsford. The new Bishop of Chelmsford had visited the Council, attended a service at St Andrews Church, Halstead and had been visiting various organisations around the Diocese.

Visits to 100 year old residents. The Chairman reported on visits to residents across the District, who had celebrated their 100th birthday or Diamond Wedding anniversary.

Engagements of Chairman and Vice Chairman – The list of engagements attended by the Chairman and the Vice Chairman between 6th December 2010 and 23rd February 2011 was noted.

During this item the Chairman was pleased to be involved in the following presentations:-

Children from Notley Green Primary School. Two girls from Notley Green Primary School, with their Head Teacher attended the Council meeting to express the schools thanks to the Council, for £2,000 funding from the Local Committee Green Heart Award towards a Memorial Fund at the school. The girls reported on progress and a planned design of the Memorial based in the Year 6 garden, and advised that for years to come pupils will be able to stand at the Memorial to pay their respects for all those who had fought in all wars. It was noted that residents of Meadow Park, Braintree are to join with the school to plant flowers at the Memorial.

The Chairman thanked the pupils for coming to Council, and spoke of the importance of generations working together.

Presentation to Jenny Sorrell for 50 years service. The Chairman expressed his pleasure in making a presentation to Jenny Sorrell who is retiring after 50 years service to Braintree District Council. Jenny had commenced work as a Junior Clerk straight from school in 1961 and has culminated her career by achieving Administration Manager position at Millennium Towers. During this time, Jenny's dedication to her role has been exemplary and has proven an inspiration to numerous staff, including 250 trade apprentices. Through consistent loyalty and commitment by Jenny the backbone of the support service in relation to refuse, recycling, parks and gardens has been sustained, and the crucial role of customer care has been provided with diplomacy and tact. Numerous Long Service awards had been presented over this period and, in 2008, Jenny enjoyed the experience of attending a Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace.

The Chairman, and all Members and staff wished Jenny a long, happy and healthy retirement. A citation marking her 50-year achievement, a gift and flowers was presented to Jenny.

Jenny Sorrell thanked everyone for their kind words and wishes, and continued to refer to the numerous friends during her career – with some, sadly, no longer with us. At present, Jenny expressed her mixed feelings on retirement, but looked towards more leisure time with family and friends. A special thank you was given to Paul, and to all colleagues, past and present, for their friendship in making her career so enjoyable.

53 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interests were declared:-

- Councillor M C M Lager declared a personal interest in
(i) Agenda Item 7 – Budget Proposals as (a) a Witham Town Councillor who are a precepting authority, and (b) as a Member of Essex County Council Local Government Pensions Scheme and Investment Steering Committee, and

- (ii) Agenda Item 10 – Policy Recommendation from Cabinet – as a Member of Witham Town Council who had commented on the proposals.
- Councillor Mrs J C Beavis declared a personal interest in
 - (i) Agenda Item 5 - Question Time – as she is known by Mrs Falconer, who is speaking on the walks, and
 - (ii) Agenda Item 7 – Budget Proposals as a Parish Councillor for Sible Hedingham, who are a precepting authority.
- Councillors M J Banthorpe, D Mann and A F Shelton all declared a personal interest as Board Members of Greenfields Community Housing in Agenda Item 10(ii) – Reference from Cabinet on Affordable Housing Development.
- Councillor J E B Gyford declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7 – Budget Proposals and the Health Walks programme.
- Councillor J E Abbott declared a personal interest as Chairman of Rivenhall Parish Council in Agenda Item 7 – Budget Proposals as the Parish Council are a precepting authority, and they had given views on support to the Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE)
- Councillor S M Walsh declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7 – Budget Proposals as (i) a Member of Great Bardfield Parish Council who had made representations, and (ii) as a Member of Essex County Council Pension Board.
- Councillor Mrs W D Scattergood declared a personal and prejudicial interest to the Icelandic Banks issue – if it were discussed. Reference and discussion was held on the Icelandic Banks during Item 7 – Budget Proposals and Item 12(i)(f) Report from the Efficiency & Resources Portfolio and, in accordance with the Code of Conduct, Councillor Mrs Scattergood withdrew from the meeting whilst the discussion was taking place.
- The following all declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 7 – Budget Proposals as Members of their respective Town or Parish Council:-
 - (i) Councillor Miss L Barlow – Witham Town Council
 - (ii) Councillor G Butland – Great Notley Parish Council
 - (iii) Councillor P J Hughes – Silver End Parish Council
 - (iv) Councillor Mrs J M Money – Witham Town Council
 - (v) Councillor Mrs J A Pell – Halstead Town Council
 - (vi) Councillor Mrs C Sandbrook – Great Notley Parish Council
 - (vii) Councillor R G Walters – Great Notley Parish Council

In accordance with the Code of Conduct all Members remained in the meeting for these items, unless stated otherwise, and took part in the debate and decision thereon.

54 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 6th December 2010 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

55 **QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were three statements made, a summary of which is contained in the Appendix to these minutes.

COUNCIL BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX 2011/12 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2011/12 TO 2014/15 – RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFERENCES – CABINET 14TH FEBRUARY 2011

Councillor Lager, Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources, formally moved the recommendations from the Cabinet meeting of 14th February 2011 and those from the Cabinet meeting of 7th December 2010, and this was seconded by Councillor Butland.

Councillor Dr Evans moved an amendment to Recommendation 2 as follows:-

to add 'with the exception of proposals 6 (Reductions in Cemeteries grounds maintenance); 13 (Closure of cashiering facilities) and 15 (Stopping benefit surgeries) in Appendix D'.

This was seconded by Councillor Gyford.

Councillor Dr Evans welcomed revisions in Appendix D of the Budget Report regarding the chapels and toilet facilities at cemeteries to remain open, the walking programme to continue, and the withdrawal of funding to the RCCE being postponed. On speaking to the amendment the vulnerable in the community was referred to, and the scope in balances to cover the budget implications.

Councillor Butland, the Leader of the Council, rejected the amendments and stated that budget consultation had commenced in June 2010, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had held three budget sessions and, taking into account the public response, some of the proposals are amended. A response was made to the proposed amendment and the importance emphasised of minimal cuts and to keep low tax cuts for residents.

On being put to the vote, the amendment motion was declared **LOST**

Councillor Abbott moved an amendment to reduce Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA's) – further to that proposed at Page 12, Appendix E of the Budget report:-

That a further proposal for savings be added and adjustments made to tables and accompanying text:

'No. 5 Seek agreement with Essex County Council that starting in 2012/13, the maximum aggregated allowances (basic plus SRA but not including expenses) that any Member of both authorities can claim is set at £27,000, this being (approximately) the median annual full time salary for a male employee in the South East (Office for National Statistics). This cap should be subject to annual adjustment in line with ONS figures and the savings would accrue to the District Council.

Based on current figures, the savings to taxpayers in Braintree District in 2012/13 could potentially be up to £50,000 per annum'.

This was seconded by Councillor Hughes.

Councillor Abbott, on speaking to the amendment advised that the 'radical' move would seek agreement by Essex County Council, and provide protection to the future of the Walks Programme and funding to the RCCE.

Councillor Butland, the Leader of the Council, rejected the amendment and stated that difficulties would arise on savings being accrued to the District Council, and that the

County Council would benefit overall. There would also be additional problems with Members who sit on more than two authorities but also at Fire Authority or NHS level as well, and this would not attract the most suitable person for the role.

Councillor M Gage, Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, considered that any savings that accrue would not be for the District or County Council – they are to do with the public and, of the 95% responders to the survey, preference was shown for allowances to be cut. However, the amendment has appeal and could be a discussion for the future, and taken to the County Council in partnership.

Councillor Abbott requested that the vote on the amendment be recorded. This was seconded by Councillors Hughes and E Lynch.

The results of the recorded vote were as follows:-

For the Motion

Councillors: Abbott, Ms Barlow, Dr Evans, Mrs Gage, M Gage, Gyford, Hughes, E Lynch, M Lynch, Mann, Messenger, Mrs Pell, and Rice **(13)**

Against the Motion

Councillors: Banthorpe, Baugh, Mrs Beavis, Bebb, Bolton, Butland, Cohen, Elliott, Elliston, Finbow, Foster, Mrs Galione, Harley, Mrs Howell, Lager, Lambourne, McArdle, McCreagh, Mrs Money, Lady Newton, Mrs Olumbori, Ramage, Reid, Mrs Sandbrook, Mrs Schmitt, Mrs Shepherd, Siddall, Mrs Spray, Walsh, Walters and Wilkinson **(31)**

Abstained

Councillors: Dunn, Ms Flint, Mrs Scattergood, Shelton and Mrs Smith **(5)**

Absent

Councillors: Bishop, Collar, Mrs Edey, Everard, Hume, McKee, Meyer, Mitchell, O'Reilly-Cicconi, Swallow and Ms Thorogood **(11)**

The amendment motion was declared **LOST**

Councillor Lager, Cabinet Member for Efficiency & Resources, presented

(i) the recommendations from Cabinet held on 7th December 2010 – Minute 57, for the transfer of £750,000 from the General Fund to meet redundancy and early retirement costs, and for the Council to exercise its 'Option to Tax' Causeway House, and

(ii) the recommendations from Cabinet held on 14th February 2011 – Minute 65 on the Council Budget and Council Tax 2011/12 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2011/12 to 2014/15, and the revised Appendix N affecting Decision No. 11.

Councillor Lager referred to the Government Grant being reduced over the next four years, and proposals to work with other authorities by merging services and through partnerships. The Government's Big Society focuses on giving power back to the people through pro-active neighbourhoods and own responsibilities, e.g. planning and development arrangements. It is identified that the three Local Committees had not delivered the Corporate Priorities and improved ways of joint working with County, Parish, and Voluntary partners will be developed to give a local voice. Reference was made to the Community Enterprise Fund, comprising of £250,000 funding to encourage local groups to provide services; the public consultation process and changes to ways services

are delivered, to freeze the majority of fees and charges; and the confirmed delivery of the new Witham Pool.

During the discussion the following issues were raised:-

- To 'celebrate' the Big Society, and then propose the abolition of the Local Committees without any alternative ready to be in their place
- it was considered that within the Big Society, the decisions should lie with local communities and this is not proven for North Witham and Rivenhall where residents views were disregarded on the Local Development Framework process
- the costs relating to Mayland House, Witham and the loss of tax payers money that could have been used to restore some of the budget proposals and the impact of the Icelandic Banks situation
- Members were reminded that the budget proposals are for the people of Braintree, and should not be influenced by any National factors, and the proposed budget contains a zero increase in Council Tax that benefits the whole community
- the enhanced role in the scrutiny process that had proved beneficial and provided transparency on how the budget was formed
- the commitment to economic development, the town centres projects, and the merger between Business Development Services(BDS) and the Business Enterprise Acorn Units(BEAU) for business start-ups and support.
- to consult with, and listen to, the 52 Parish Councils in the District on ways to achieve local representation and create a method of three-tier working (ECC, BDC and parishes) , i.e. possibly through Parish Clusters. This will commence in March 2011.
- For the District Council to act as a facilitator and encourage communities to provide and support services.

Councillor Lady Newton, Cabinet Member for Housing & Well-Being, thanked the speakers in Question Time for their comments on the Walking for Well-Being and Heart & Sole walk programmes, and the importance of all volunteers that make this happen. During the coming year alternative models will be explored to ensure the continuation of the walks programme. Reference was made to the Big Society style already in local villages, which produce wholesome communities where caring people provide services.

Councillor Butland, the Leader of the Council, referred to the consensus at Council for support to the main budget proposals comprising of:-

- leisure facilities in Witham
- a fund of £250,000 for community groups, local organisations and Parish/Town Councils to work jointly with BDC in running of assets, provision of services
- town centres regeneration
- clean and green/Green Heart initiatives
- affordable housing
- to continue the freeze of Councillors allowances and reduce SRA's
- no increase to car parking charges until 2012
- nil percentage increase in Council Tax for 2011/12 and 2012/13

Councillor Lager responded to the issues raised, including the reiteration that the Council are already in consultation with residents and parishes for the way ahead; the rental value and capital value of Mayland House, Witham; the Termed deposits the Council held with the Icelandic Banks and the lessons learnt; and on the help and support provided to staff affected by the budget. The Budget proposals were commended to Council.

Councillor E R Lynch requested that the vote on the Budget Recommendations be recorded. This was seconded by Councillors Dr Evans and Gyford.

The results of the recorded vote were as follows:-

For the Motion

Councillors: Banthorpe, Baugh, Mrs Beavis, Bebb, Bolton, Butland, Cohen, Dunn, Elliott, Elliston, Finbow, Ms Flint, Foster, Mrs B Gage, M Gage, Mrs Galione, Harley, Mrs Howell, Lager, Lambourne, McArdle, McCreagh, Mrs Money, Lady Newton, Mrs Olumbori, Ramage, Reid, Mrs Sandbrook, Mrs Scattergood, Shelton, Mrs Shepherd, Siddall, Mrs Smith, Mrs Spray, Walsh, Walters and Wilkinson **(37)**

Against the Motion

Councillors: Abbott, Ms Barlow, Dr Evans, Gyford, Hughes, E Lynch, M Lynch, Mann, and Rice **(9)**

Abstained

Councillors: Messenger and Mrs Pell **(2)**

Absent

Councillors: Bishop, Collar, Mrs Edey, Everard, Hume, McKee, Meyer, Mitchell, O'Reilly-Cicconi, Mrs Schmitt, Swallow and Ms Thorogood **(12)**

The motion was declared **CARRIED**

DECISION:

From Cabinet 7th December 2010

1. That the transfer of £750,000 from the General Fund balance to a reserve to meet the cost of redundancy and early retirement in 2011/12 be approved.
2. That the Council exercise its 'Option to Tax' Causeway House in order to limit its liability of unrecoverable VAT on the proportion of refurbishment costs to accommodate Essex County Council.

From Cabinet 14th February 2011

That the following be approved:-

General Fund

1. The budget variations to the current base budget for: inflation (section 5.2 in the report), pension fund (Section 5.4), investment income (section 8.1) and reduction in specific grants (section 9);
2. The changes to service provision and associated implementation plans, as detailed in Appendices D and E;
3. The Service Demands detailed in Appendix C;
4. The savings from the renewal of the ICT and Leisure Management contracts and from the proposed shared Regulatory services, as detailed in Appendix H;
5. The possible efficiency savings from shared services, market testing, etc. as detailed in Appendix H, be excluded from the financial profile but are retained as efficiency

targets over the MTFS period;

6. The corporate savings involving proposed changes to employee's terms and conditions, as detailed in Appendix I, are agreed to be taken forward to formal consultation with the Council's recognised trade unions;
7. The introduction of charges for the provision of advice on "householder" proposals and for Listed Building advice with effect from 1st April 2011: details of the charges are contained in Appendix E;
8. The proposed reduction in discretionary redundancy pay from the current scheme maximum of 66 weeks actual pay to a maximum of 45 weeks actual pay, to take effect from May 2011 following all staff being given 90 days notice of the change;
9. The Council Tax Freeze grant receivable from the Government over the next four years, subject to the council tax for 2011/12 not being increased, be used to support the General Fund revenue account;
10. The anticipated New Homes Bonus receivable from 2011/12 be partly used to fund the costs of concluding the Local Development Framework in 2011/12 and 2012/13 with the remainder added to the Council's capital resources;
11. The shortfalls in funding in 2012/13 and 2013/14 are funded from balances, i.e. £240,704 and £92,002 respectively;

Housing Revenue Account

12. The Council's housing rents are increased by 5.1% for 2011/12;
13. The current 'Cooker and Fridge' service charge at Craig House, Braintree is replaced with a service charge for 'Furnishings' and is set at £7.97 per week;
14. The other housing service charges are increased by 5.1% for 2011/12, as detailed in Appendix R;
15. The proposed Housing Revenue Account budget for 2011/12, as detailed in Appendix Q;

Capital

16. The General Fund Capital bids for 2010/11 and 2011/12 listed in Appendix S;

Treasury Management

17. The Prudential Indicators and limits set out in Appendix U;
18. The Policy on Minimum Revenue Provision as recommended in Appendix U;
19. The Treasury Management Strategy, including annual investment strategy, for 2011/12;

Council Tax

20. The proposed estimates (producing a budget requirement for council tax purposes of £16,519,579) as detailed in Appendix N and the Council Tax for 2011/12 of £162.81 for a Band D property, having taking into consideration:
- The consultation feedback received;
 - The Equalities Impact Assessments and
 - The Section 151 Officer's report on the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of balances (Appendix V to the report).

That the following be noted:

21. The management efficiency proposals and associated implementation plans and the decisions on savings already agreed at previous meetings, as detailed in appendices F and G;
22. The corporate savings proposed by management, detailed in Appendix I;
23. The Council's existing Fees and Charges will not be increased for 2011/12, unless there is a statutory or contractual requirement;
24. The current position regarding recovery of the investments at risk in Icelandic Banks, as outlined in section 8.2 of the report, and receipt of the approval from the Secretary of State of permission to capitalise in 2010/11 up to £1,997,590 of the potential losses on the investments at risk.

57 COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION 2011/12

Councillor Lager, Cabinet Member for Efficiency and Resources, presented the Council Tax Resolution 2011/12 and moved the recommendations.

DECISION:

1. To approve the Council's General Fund budget of £16,519,579 and the total Budget Requirement (inclusive of the aggregate amount local precepts) of £18,232,522 for 2011/12.
2. To set the level of Council Tax for 2011/12, in accordance with the attached resolution:-
 1. Under delegated powers the Corporate Director agreed the amount of Council Tax Base for the whole district for 2011/12 as 53,589 Band D equivalents. He also agreed that the amounts calculated and set out in Column 2 of Schedule A, should be the Council Tax Base for dwellings in those parts of the District listed in Column 1 of that schedule.
 2. The Council agrees a budget for 2011/12 of £16,519,579, which after taking account of Government Formula Grant and the Council's share of the estimated Collection Fund balance, results in a charge on council taxpayers of £8,724,825. This equates to a Band D tax rate of £162.81, which is the same as the current year.
 3. The following amounts are calculated by the Council for the year 2011/12, in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992:-
 - a) £80,577,393 being the expenditure the Council estimates it will incur in the year in performing its functions and which will be charged to a revenue

account. This amount includes contingencies, estimated transfers to financial reserves, and local precepts issued to the Council.

- b) £62,344,871, being receipts estimated by the Council which will be credited to a revenue account. This amount includes specific government grants and estimated transfers from financial reserves, but excludes Formula Grant and the Council's share of the estimated Collection Fund balance.
- c) £18,232,522, being the budget requirement for the year calculated as the difference between gross expenditure and income as set out at (a) and (b) above, and includes the total of local precepts received.
- d) £7,727,473, being the amount which is payable for Formula Grant into the General Fund in respect of revenue support grant and redistributed business rates.
- e) £67,280, being the amount that has been calculated as at 17th January 2011 as the Council's share of the estimated Collection Fund balance at 31st March 2011, and which will be transferred to the General Fund revenue account in 2011/12.
- f) £10,437,769, being the Council Tax requirement for the Council including the amount to be raised on behalf of town and parish councils.
- g) £194.77, being the basic amount of council tax for the year including the average local precept tax rate, calculated by dividing (f) by the district tax base.
- h) £1,712,943, being the total of all local precepts received from town and parish councils and taken into account in making the calculation of the budget requirement at (c) above, and shown in Column 3 of Schedule A.
- i) £162.81, being the basic amount of council tax for dwellings in those parts of the District where there are no town and parish council precepts, i.e. this is the District Council's share of the total council tax rate and is charged across property bands as follows:

Property Band	Band as proportion of Band D	Council Tax Rate
A	6/9	108.54
B	7/9	126.63
C	8/9	144.72
D	9/9	162.81
E	11/9	198.99
F	13/9	235.17
G	15/9	271.35
H	18/9	325.62

4. The amounts shown in Column 5 of Schedule A, calculated by adding to the amount at (i) above, the precept amount relating to each parish or town council area, divided by the tax base for that area. This represents the basic amount of council tax for each parish or town council area. The charge for each property band is also shown in Schedule A.

That it be noted that the following precepts will be issued to the Council for 2011/12:

- Essex County Council £58,237,846
- Essex Police £ 7,080,179
- Essex Fire & Rescue £ 3,559,381

Expressed as a tax rate for dwellings in the following property bands:

Property Band	Essex County Council	Essex Police	Essex Fire & Rescue
A	724.50	88.08	44.28
B	845.25	102.76	51.66
C	966.00	117.44	59.04
D	1086.75	132.12	66.42
E	1328.25	161.48	81.18
F	1569.75	190.84	95.94
G	1811.25	220.20	110.70
H	2173.50	264.24	132.84

5. That having calculated the aggregate of the amounts stated under (i), (j), and 4 above for each area within the District, the Council hereby sets the amounts shown in Schedule B as the total amount of Council Tax for each of the property bands.
6. The Council resolves that any expenses incurred by it in performing in part of its area a function that is performed elsewhere in its area by a parish or town council, or a Chairman of a parish meeting, shall not be treated as Special Expenses for the purposes of Section 35 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

58 **REGULATION OF LAP DANCING AND OTHER SEXUAL ENTERTAINMENT VENUES**

Councillor Banthorpe, Chairman of the Licensing Committee, referred to the decision at Council on 28th June 2010 for the adoption of the amendment to Schedule 3 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provision) Act 1982, and the licensing control of sex establishments. The Council has to specify a date when the adoption is to be implemented, and ensure full compliance of the Act.

DECISION: That the amendment to Schedule 3 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provision) Act 1982 be adopted by Braintree District Council on 4th April 2011.

59 **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFERENCES (PUBLIC SESSION)**

- (i) Cabinet – 7th December 2010 – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2011/12 to 2014/15

INFORMATION: This reference was taken with the Budget proposals under Minute 56.

- (ii) Cabinet – 14th February 2011 – Affordable Housing Development

Councillor Lady Newton, Cabinet Member for Housing & Well-Being, presented a proposal to dispose of an area of Council-owned land to facilitate affordable housing at land to the rear of 19-21 Bocking End, Braintree. Consideration was also given to the Tabor Avenue garage site in Braintree and delegated authority to two Cabinet Members in relation to the future affordable housing programme.

DECISION:

- (1) That land at the rear of 19-21 Bocking End, Braintree is transferred to a housing association at no cost for provision of a scheme of supported/affordable housing.
- (2) That the Council removes the requirement for Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) funding to be secured before the transfer of land at the Tabor Avenue garage site in Braintree and that the Council underwrites the scheme for the provision of affordable housing.
- (3) That authority is delegated to the Cabinet Members for Housing & Well-Being and Efficiency & Resources to agree acquisitions and funding commitments within the overall affordable housing budget in order to allow timely decisions to be taken and prevent opportunities being lost.

60 **STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS (PUBLIC SESSION)**

INFORMATION: No statements were made.

61 **QUESTION TIME (PUBLIC SESSION)**

(i) **Reports from the Leader and Cabinet Members**

INFORMATION: Consideration was given to the written reports of the Leader and Cabinet Members.

Councillor Butland, Leader of the Council

Councillor Butland had no further additions to his report.

Councillor Gyford referred to the possibility of **merging senior management resources** with Colchester Borough Council and the significance of the proposals in relation to the capacity of the Ward Member and for Political Groups. Concern was expressed to the interests of Members both individually and collectively, and Councillor Gyford requested an undertaking to the future role of Members.

In response, the Leader of the Council stated no decisions will be made until the new administration is in place after the May elections, when all Members can be involved to explore opportunities and relationships between the two authorities. It was clarified that this was not a Political Party issue.

Councillor Mrs Schmitt, Clean, Green and Safe

Councillor Siddall, Deputy Cabinet Member for Clean, Green and Safe provided an update to the report (as Councillor Mrs Schmitt had left the meeting earlier).

Councillor Siddall reported that a late submission had been received against the closure of the **Senior Citizens' Centre in Halstead**. K Leach, of Trinity Road in Halstead had submitted a letter containing numerous signatures, and this was formally received. It was noted that the Centre will continue until July 2012 whilst an alternative facility or new centre is progressed. A report is to be received at Cabinet on 28th March 2011.

Councillor Abbott, referred to his suggestion to Cabinet on 29th March 2010 to **mark fast food packaging** at the outlets at Galleys Corner, Braintree. Further reference was made to the response of a Written Question submitted by Councillor Abbott in early January 2011, on the same issue, when operational problems with the scheme had

been advised. Councillor Abbott questioned whether these problems had been overcome, and why Members had not been informed. Councillor Siddall stated a response will be provided to Councillor Abbott and all Council Members.

Councillor Walters, Environment and Sustainability

Councillor Walters had no further additions to his report.

Councillor Hughes queried when the contract would be signed for the installation of **Solar PV panels on the roof of Causeway House**, Braintree as a review of the tariff is expected. It was also questioned, if the solar panels at Causeway House are successful, whether panels would be installed on other Council buildings, i.e. Silver End Village Hall.

Councillor Walters advised that the Council are mindful that the tariff could change, and that the complex agreement has not been signed. When this is achieved all Councillors will be informed. It was noted that the Council are looking at all suitable roofs on Council premises in relation to Solar PV panel provision.

Councillor Harley, Enterprise and Culture

Councillor Harley provided an update to his main report and supplemental report. It was advised that the period of consultation on the **Braintree Town Centre project** had been extended to 15th March 2011, with a **Members Evening** taking place on 21st March 2011 on the proposals for Braintree Town Centre, Witham and Halstead.

Councillor Mrs Pell referred to **Land East of the High Street in Halstead**, and to previous responses advising an announcement was imminent. The local Ward Members had not received any information due to confidentiality matters, and an update was requested. Responding, Councillor Harley stated that the Ward Members would be advised first, when information becomes available.

Councillor E R Lynch had noted the consultation period had been extended for the **Braintree Bus Park development**, and queried if it was possible for the final decision by Council could be after the elections in May 2011. In response, Councillor Harley reported there is a timetable to the project, an Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) contract process to adhere to, and an Evaluation Panel to take place on 23rd March 2011. It was also noted that the project will have three options, to support either Design One or Design Two; or to consider both as unacceptable. Councillor Lynch stated the third option was not mentioned in the consultation papers.

Councillor Mrs Beavis, Customers and Community Support

Councillor Mrs Beavis had no further additions to her report.

Councillor Dr Evans submitted questions on 'Have Your Say' as follows:-

- Would the Cabinet Member agree that 'Have your Say' was the key method for Council in **consulting to the proposed cuts** and seeking public views?
- Would the Cabinet Member agree that most of the questions set out in the documents exaggerate the savings that may be made?
- Would the Cabinet Member consider the following four examples had significant exaggeration and should be removed – on reducing bureaucracy and allowances for Councillors; on closing cashiers; stopping benefits surgeries and on planning services.

Councillor Mrs Beavis stated the consultation was a good response and incorporated

the views of the People's Panel and through the 'Contact' magazine, and advised she would provide a written response to Councillor Dr Evans and all Councillors.

Councillor Abbott referred to **Local Governance Arrangements** item and concern that Local Committees are to be abolished with no alternative being in place, and on decentralisation of localism and community initiatives. In answer, Councillor Mrs Beavis advised that an options paper will be received at the Local Government Reform Sub Group in April 2011, when a model for local governance across the three tiers of local government will be considered. Councillor Mrs Beavis advised she visits many villages across the District.

Councillor Mrs Pell queried if **Concessionary Travel Tokens** had a time limit to be used by, as this had been raised by her constituents.

In response, Councillor Mrs Beavis reported that they have a time limit of six months, and may also be returned to the Council for some reimbursement. It was reaffirmed that the £10,000 savings on withdrawal of the Tokens, is to be invested in Community Transport.

Councillor Ramage, as the Chairman of a recent Task and Finish Group on Services for the Elderly emphasised the importance of Community Transport to the elderly, and the volunteers who run the service.

Councillor Lager, Efficiency and Resources

Councillor Lager had no further additions to his report.

Councillor Gyford made reference to the **Icelandic Banks issue** and a possible veto by the Icelandic President, and the holding of a referendum with Icelandic citizens' to whether the issue had been, and continues to be handled correctly. Councillor Lager confirmed that nothing had been heard to this, and if this does proceed Members will be updated. It was noted that a regular report is received to the Icelandic banks situation, and the claims submitted with other authorities and any appeal by preferential creditors.

Councillor Lady Newton, Housing and Well-Being

Councillor Lady Newton reassured Members that progress on the **Witham Leisure Centre project** is 'on track'.

Councillor E R Lynch stated full support for the work of all volunteers on the **Heart & Sole and Walking for Well-Being walks** and reiterated their request for the walks programmes to be under the auspices of the Council.

Councillor Lady Newton advised that, at present, no reassurance can be given by the Council as time is needed to look at other models and to be open to whatever approach to take.

Councillor Banthorpe questioned the how many **public attend the walks programmes**, as the 50 Walk Leaders has been frequently reported. Councillor Lady Newton agreed to provide to Councillor Banthorpe and all Councillors the statistics of users for the past year, and the results of the Walks Programmes Questionnaire that is utilised to monitor the outcomes on the Heart & Sole walks.

(ii) Oral Questions

INFORMATION: Members were invited to ask any questions of the Leader on non-operational matters. No further issues were raised.

(iii) **Chairmen's Statements**

INFORMATION: No statements were made.

(iv) **Meetings in Public Session**

INFORMATION: Members were invited to raise any matters arising from meetings that had been held in public session since the last Council meeting on 6th December 2010. No issues were raised.

62 **BUSINESS OF EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**

INFORMATION: There were no reports received from Council representatives on external organisations.

As there were no items in private session, the Chairman closed the meeting.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 9.50pm.

Councillor A F Shelton
(Chairman)

APPENDIX

COUNCIL MEETING

23rd FEBRUARY 2010

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Summary of Questions Asked / Statements Made During Question Time

1. Statement by Mr Lawrence Duncan, 310 Cressing Road, Braintree
Agenda Item 7 – Budget Recommendations – Health Walks Programme

Mr Duncan referred to the revised budget proposal to phase out the Health Walks programmes by 31st March 2012, and the great opposition from the walking community with 45 emails, 23 letters, and a 342 signature petition submitted to the Council. Over 40 walkers, with six speakers making statements, had attended Cabinet on 14th February 2011 to display the strength of feeling on the proposal. The response received was considered unsatisfactory as the implementation plan still phases out direct support beyond March 2012.

The Walk Leaders believe a partnership under the BDC umbrella is the way forward, optimising the role and expertise of Walk Leaders with Council officers and definitely not a separate organisation, with lots of overheads. Mr Duncan continued to propose how a partnership would operate with Community Services (BDC), Walking for Well-Being and Heart & Sole participants, as defined previously at Cabinet.

Mr Duncan commended this approach to Council and how Councillor Butland had instanced the u-turn as a means of reflecting the views of the community, and not as something to be avoided. Therefore the question was put to Council – ‘Are you prepared to listen to the community response to this (budget) proposal and continue the walking programmes under a BDC umbrella beyond March 2012 along the lines proposed?’

In conclusion, Councillors were reminded of the very valuable and well appreciated asset of the walking community, where 50 people are working for free and it was requested not to ‘kill it off’, but to nurture it, work with it, and the Council will receive repayment through community goodwill.

2. Statement by Mrs Frances Falconer, Oakleigh, The Green, Wethersfield
Agenda Item 7 – Budget Recommendations – Health Walks Programme

Mrs Falconer thanked the Council for ‘giving back her life’ as, four years previously, ill health had caused her to stop work, and she had become very depressed and had no social life. Many visits to Doctors and the hospital followed until at the local Doctor’s Surgery she noticed the Heart & Sole Walking group in Finchingfield. On the first walk, Mrs Falconer stated, the professionalism of the walks was demonstrated and the warm and friendly atmosphere encouraged people to come again. Other walks were attended and eventually Mrs Falconer was receiving less medication, had returned to work, lost weight and, generally, improved in confidence. In October 2010, Mrs Falconer became a Walk Leader to ‘give back what was given to me’ and, even though she walks at the back of the group, the process brings ‘joy’

as how people change from walking is realised. It was considered that the walks have a 'sense of purpose' and should continue.

3. Statement by Mr Fred Sheldrake, 11 Oakley Road, Braintree
Agenda Item 7 – Budget Recommendations – Health Walks Programme

Mr Sheldrake spoke as an experienced Walk Leader, and his three walks held at Hatfield Forest. It was explained that to hold this walk usually takes four journeys to the site as walking and car parking suitability has to be ascertained and a Risk Assessment undertaken – all provided 'free of charge'. Mr Sheldrake advised that he was 'happy' with the Council taking the credit for the success of Walking for Well Being, and referred to the Governments vision of services being run by volunteers. The Walkers basically need four items – a venue to hold meetings, to stay within the umbrella of the Council, moderate printing costs and first aid renewal every three years. An invitation was extended to Councillors to attend a walk, to see the service that is provided and to understand the impact that a small cut in the budget can make. Finally, Mr Sheldrake stated walking is a non-party activity and requested that Members vote with their conscience.